

The Psychedelic Church Movement

Introduction

The religious use of drugs is found across cultures, and can be traced back to humanity's ancient past. Developed during the second half of the twentieth century, the psychedelic ideology, or "psychedelicism," corresponds to an enchanted theory of the mind and its capacity to expand to higher levels of awareness. For the last seven decades, the psychedelicist ideology has inspired the formation of hundreds of religions predominately located in the United States, most famously the League of Spiritual Discovery, the Neo-American Church, the Brotherhood of Eternal Love, the Discordian Society, and the Church of the SubGenius. As this list makes clear, many of these fellowships organized themselves as "churches," and likewise adopted a sacramental approach to psychedelic drugs. Yet, until recently, scholars tended to discount the spiritual dimension of the psychedelic experience, dismissing the movement of psychedelicist churches as, variously, an excuse for taking illegal drugs, an inauthentic or "invented" mode of religiosity, or a purely oppositional "counter-culture." Such designations ultimately obscure the beliefs, customs, and history of the alliance of psychedelicist religions that have emerged over the last half of the twentieth century.

Psychedelicism refers to an enchanted theory of naturalism that associates the brain with the mind, and likewise posits that the mind can be "expanded" to perceive higher knowledge through the use of psychedelic drugs, principally lysergic acid diethylamide ("LSD" or "acid"), psilocybin ("magic mushrooms"), peyote, and dimethyltryptamine ("DMT"). As a tradition of esoteric knowledge, psychedelicism encompasses a variety of interpretive frameworks that inform how psychedelics are used, their capacity to occasion mystical experiences, and their significance in the history of human evolution. Cannabis ("marijuana") is an exceptionally popular drug among psychedelicists, though its status as a psychedelic is contested by scholars and users alike. Though there are many different schools of psychedelicism today, its

foundational elements were initially formulated in *The Doors of Perception* (1954), Aldous Huxley's autobiographical essay of the visionary experience occasioned by mescaline. At the essay's core was the claim that psychedelics had the power to reveal the perennial truth underlying all religious traditions. In his subsequent writings, Huxley contextualized psychedelics as integral to the evolution of human consciousness, juxtaposing their potential to lead humanity into a new era of spiritual illumination with the apocalyptic threat posed by the invention of nuclear weapons. This messianic perspective animated the movement of psychedelicist churches, which has taken on a variety of institutional forms, including rural communes, secret brotherhoods, criminal syndicates, revolutionary cadres, sex clubs, biker gangs, experimental performance groups, therapy centers, and academic research associations. To be sure, membership in these groups encompassed people from all strata of class, gender, and race. While psychedelics are most commonly used for recreational purposes, psychedelicist ideologies have nonetheless exerted a profound effect on how these recreational experiences are constructed and understood by the public, as is evident in the long-lasting cultural impact of psychedelicism on music, art, fashion, and the larger culture industry of modern capitalism.

The development of the psychedelicist church movement has been shaped by its longstanding persecution by police departments and intelligence agencies on every level of the U.S. government. Despite such repression, psychedelicist churches nevertheless attempted to use the legal system as a means of protecting their use of drugs, which they construe as a religious right. Citing the legal precedent handed down in *The People vs. Woody* ruling of 1964 that protected the Native American Church's right to use peyote ceremonially, numerous psychedelicist churches filed court cases on the local, state, and federal judiciary in an attempt to fight the prohibition against psychedelics. None succeeded in securing a ruling in their favor. The persecution of psychedelicists was accelerated and intensified by President Richard Nixon's declaration of a "War on Drugs" in 1971. This international program of law enforcement drove the movement of psychedelicist religions underground where they remain to the present, though there are some notable exceptions.

I. Pre-History of Psychedelicism (1938-1961)

The psychedelicist church movement was preceded by decades of experimentation with LSD by scientists, intellectuals, bohemians, and covert government agencies. The first experiment with the drug occurred in 1943, when its inventor, the Swiss chemist Albert Hofmann (1906-2008), accidentally dosed himself while conducting research in his laboratory at Sandoz Pharmaceuticals. Soon thereafter, he shared what he termed his "medicine for the soul" with a small circle of conservative intellectuals. The principal ideologue of this fellowship was Ernst Jünger (1885-1998), a German war hero from WWI, reactionary ideologue, and acclaimed author of *Stahlgewittern* (*Storm of Steel*, 1920). The conservative ideology of Hoffman's circle is a clear indication that consciousness expansion does not inherently predispose people to a liberal political viewpoint.

An entirely different, and unconnected, precursor to the psychedelicist church movement was the Native American Church, which honors peyote as its sacrament. Though the ceremonial practices that would become the core of the church emerged in the late nineteenth century, the Native American Church itself was founded in 1918 in the Oklahoma territory, and its teachings spread outwards to other tribal communities as a new form of Christianity. The Bureau of Indian Affairs attempted to halt the growth of the Native American Church by intimidating its membership with jail time; however, instead of harming the church, the Bureau's condemnation of the "peyote cult" attracted the interest of scholars and bohemians alike, who proved eager to use peyote in a ritual setting. The reverence and dignity that defined the peyote rite celebrated in the Native American Church stands in stark contrast to peyote parties hosted by the Church of the Living Swing. This hipsters church was founded in the early 1950s by Lord Richard Buckley (1906-1960), a nightclub entertainer, recording artist, and proto-hipster jazz enthusiast. Established in Topanga Canyon, California, his church hosted semi-public ceremonies in which exotic dancers distributed peyote while Buckley delivered impromptu sermons on the unity of all life. In its combination of psychedelic ceremonialism and joviality, the

Church of the Living Swing represents a direct forerunner to the movement of psychedelic churches that emerged in the 1960s.

The term "psychedelic" was coined in 1956 within the epistolary correspondence between Huxley and the psychiatrist Humphry Osmond (1917-2004), who had administered Huxley's first dose of mescaline two years before. This neologism translates to "soul revealing" (*psychē dēloun*); yet the phrase "mind-expanding" has supplanted this meaning. This terminological nuance is significant. The focus on mind, and its capacity to "expand," indicates Huxley's intellectual debt to the enchanted theory of naturalism promoted by psychical researchers in the 1930s and 1940s. According to figures like C.D. Broad (1887-1971), individual minds were akin to radio receivers that channeled consciousness, broadcasted from a universal Mind. Huxley interpreted psychedelic drugs as expanding the capacity of the individual mind to channel the universal Mind. He put this belief into practice before his discovery of psychedelics as a founding member of the Brotherhood of the Common Life, a little-known faction of militant psychical researchers formed in the fashionable Bloomsbury district of London in the 1930s. Working alongside his mentor Gerald Heard (1889-1971), the Brotherhood of the Common Life led the Anglo-American pacifist movement, which recruited over a hundred thousand members in the lead-up to World War II. Following Britain's declaration of war on the Axis powers in 1939, the Brothers expatriated to Los Angeles, California, where they discovered psychoactive drugs and immediately reformulated their psychical ideology into psychedelicism.

As mentioned above, Huxley's *The Doors of Perception* established the two fundamental principles for psychedelicism. First, humanity would engineer its evolutionary jump into godhood through a synthesis of science and religion, and second, consciousness expanding drugs were the "sacraments" of this synthesis. Huxley's argument was reformulated by other members of the Brotherhood of the Common Life, whose works are now largely forgotten. Richard Ward's *Drug-Takers Notes* (1957) and Robert de Ropp's *Drugs and the Mind* (1957) and *The Master Game* (1968) elaborated on Huxley's soteriological vision of esoteric evolutionism by drawing from a range of esoteric sources, including the work of G.I. Gurdjieff (1866-

1949). It bears mention that recent discoveries have complicated the scholarly efforts to determine which member of the Brotherhood first publicized psychedelic consciousness expansion. The artist, magician, and alleged reincarnation of the Thelemite goddess Babalon, Marjorie Cameron (1922-1995), left behind written accounts that suggests that the first public advocate of psychedelicism was Gerald Heard and not Huxley. According to Cameron's diary, Heard delivered a series of public lectures on psychedelic consciousness expansion in Los Angeles's famed Coronet Theatre roughly a year before *The Doors of Perception* was published.¹ The veracity of this claim will only be revealed by further archival research.

Though members of the Brotherhood of the Common Life supplied the theory of psychedelicism, the practice was devised by Captain Alfred Hubbard (1901-1982), a self-made millionaire, covert operative for Naval Intelligence, and self-styled "acid messiah". Hubbard obtained a mail-order Ph.D. in psychiatry in the early 1950s, and after stock-piling an enormous reserve of LSD from Sandoz Pharmaceuticals, secretly initiated the elite of North American and Europe, as well as Catholic clergy and high ranking members of the FBI and CIA. Alongside his evangelical mission, he also occupied an informal residency at Weyburn Hospital in Saskatchewan, Canada, where he instructed Humphry Osmond in the treatment of terminal alcoholics with LSD. His approach focused on instilling a relaxed mindset in the volunteer, creating a setting suitable for the intensification of their religious imagination, and then guiding them through a maximalist dosage of LSD (>200 µg). To better suit his purposes, he constructed a "Hubbard Room", a specially prepared chamber furnished with a small altar, devotional candles, and full-color reproductions of Renaissance paintings hanging on the walls. His research thus laid the groundwork for the procedural axiom of psychedelicism, often abbreviated to the slogan "set and setting". Use of these techniques, as well as the Hubbard Room, became the default operating procedure for the psychedelic therapy clinics that opened in the greater Los Angeles region

¹ Kansa, Spencer. (2011). *Wormwood Star: The Magickal Life of Marjorie Cameron*. Oxford: Mandrake Press, 88-89.

during the latter half of the 1950s. Moreover, Hubbard also conducted psychedelic research with William "Bill" Wilson (1895- 1971), who later developed his own model for addiction therapy, Alcoholics Anonymous.

The first psychedelicist church was the Wayfarers, centered in Hollywood, California. Led by Gerald Heard, the Wayfarers were an ultra-conservative Protestant fellowship comprised of wealthy industrialists, high-ranking clergy, and Hollywood elites. Its membership was drawn from the inner circle of Spiritual Mobilization, a mass media apparatus consisting of newspapers, magazines, and radio stations that amalgamated evangelical Christianity and free-market capitalism in its staunchly anti-communist programming. Heard acted as the titular head of the Wayfarers from 1955-1959, during which time he organized intensive retreats termed "Explorations" where he guided initiates through group psychedelic sessions using Hubbard's method. At this same time, Hubbard opened his own center for psychedelicist research, the Commission for the Study of Creative Imagination (CSCI) in Palo Alto, California. Unlike the dozens of research hospitals across North America and Western Europe that were similarly pursuing research into the value of LSD (as a "psychotomimetic"), the CSCI focused on the development of extra-sensory powers, thereby blurring the lines between pharmacologically-assisted psychotherapy and psychical research. With Osmond, Huxley and Heard on its executive committee, the CSCI was, in reality, an institutional front for a private society for psychical scientists to explore psychedelics. Hubbard also served on the executive board of the International Foundation of Advanced Studies (IFAS), a for-profit psychedelic organization that offered guided trips to businessmen interested in stimulating their creative impulses.

The greater Los Angeles area was the site of over six hundred psychedelic therapy centers by 1960. Much of the interest was driven by psychiatrists and psychologists, who promoted LSD as a miracle drug capable of treating everything from schizophrenia to writer's block. Another driving force in the first wave of LSD enthusiasm was photo-journalism magazines, particularly those published by the print-tycoon Henry Luce (1889-1967), who had become a disciple of Heard. Luce's magazine, *Life*, published what is arguably the most influential article on psychedelics

in 1957, "Seeking the Magic Mushroom" by the Wall Street banker Gordon Wasson (1889-1986). The curiosity stirred by this report was intensified after *Look Magazine* published actor Cary Grant's declaration that LSD had cured his alcohol addiction and revitalized his libido. The number of psychedelic therapy centers continued to expand until 1963, when the government pressured Sandoz into curtailing its production and distribution of LSD.

II. The Golden Age of Psychedelicism (1961-1967)

Psychedelicism became a mass phenomenon as a result of two highly-publicized "miracles" performed between 1961-1963 in the greater Boston metropolitan area. The group that performed them, the Harvard Psilocybin Project, was founded in 1961 by two psychology professors, Timothy Leary (1920-1996) and Richard Alpert (1931-2019). The group's unofficial director was Huxley, who had accepted a professorship at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology after leaving Hollywood in the late 1950s. Under his aegis, the group recruited Heard, his disciple and popular scholar of religion →Huston Smith (1919-2016), and Alan Watts (1915-1973), an Anglican priest turned Zen pundit. During his stay at Harvard in March 1962, Watts furthered his experimentation with LSD and soon completed the second major work of psychedelicism, *The Joyous Cosmology* (1962).

Guided by former members of the Brotherhood, the Harvard team abandoned the objective scientific model of patient observation in lieu of using psychedelics to advance human evolution. They renamed their research association the Harvard Psychedelic Project in order to reflect their investment in Huxley and Heard's vision, and founded a private esoteric fellowship called the Love Engineers to carry it out. After collectively relocating to two houses in the Boston suburb of Newton Center, the Love Engineers intensified their evangelization efforts by enlisting the help of Beat poet Allen Ginsberg (1926-1997). Ginsberg had just returned from the Amazon basin where he had conducted a series of experiments with ayahuasca, following in the footsteps of his companion, the Beat littérateur William S. Burroughs (1914-1997). Ginsberg went on to share the Love Engineer's ideology with other members of the Beat Generation (including Burroughs, Jack Kerouac [1922-1969]

and Gregory Corso [1930-2001]), as well as jazz musicians including Thelonious Monk (1917-1982) and numerous other members of the hip cognoscenti.

Love Engineer communes became the center of a minor "great awakening" of religious enthusiasm that burnt over Boston's liberal religious establishments and divinity schools. This awakening culminated with the "miracle" that launched the psychedelicist church movement. The "Good Friday Experiment", also heralded in the media as the "Miracle at Marsh Chapel", occurred in April 1962. Eager to prove that psychedelic drugs placed individuals in direct contact with the sacred, a Ph.D. student at Harvard Divinity School and Love Engineer, Walter N. Pahnke (1931-1971), organized a double-blind experiment conducted on Good Friday at Marsh Chapel, the Methodist church located on Boston University's campus. Guided by the Love Engineers, ten of Pahnke's fellow seminarians were administered psilocybin, whereas the other half were given a placebo. The beatific experiences reported by the psilocybin group were reprinted in newspapers across the country as evidence that mystical illumination could be induced by a strange new class of drugs, variously termed "mind-expanders", "hallucinogens" and "psychedelics". The media craze over mind-expanding drugs was reignited, and now headlines emphasized their capacity to stimulate religious experiences.

The second "miracle" was performed at Concord State Prison, where the Love Engineers conducted psychedelicist therapy sessions for thirty-two prisoners over the course of a few months. According to their reports, the Harvard psychedelicists reduced the average rate of recidivism by roughly half, and the astonishing results only further enflamed their messianic beliefs. Though not credited in the sensational media reports, the founder of the Parapsychology Foundation, Eileen Garret (1893-1970), played an essential role in this experiment, and the formation of psychedelicism in general. Her involvement in psychedelic culture began during the psychedelicist therapy boom of the mid-1950s, when, together with Huxley, Hubbard, and Heard, she co-organized a fashionable salon in the Hollywood Hills where guests experimented with LSD and extra sensory perception, as well as other "Psi" phenomena, such as past-life regression, channeling, spiritualist séances, and out of body experiences. In addition to submitting her salon's findings to psychical research

journals, Garret also organized the first two international conferences on psychedelics, which occurred in New York City in 1958 and France's Riviera in 1959. When Huxley and Heard shifted the axis of psychedelicism to Harvard, Garret followed along, and ultimately bankrolled Leary's famed "Concord Prison Experiment". Her generosity became all the more necessary after 1963, when the Harvard administration refused to renew Leary's teaching contract, and likewise fired Alpert over allegations that he had given psilocybin to an undergraduate student.

Before their expulsion from the academy, the Love Engineers established a public institution, the International Federation for Internal Freedom (IFIF). A nonprofit organization based in Harvard Square, IFIF published the group's in-house journal, *The Psychedelic Review*, operated an emergency hotline for psychological emergencies, and maintained a small shrine room for psychedelicist exploration. The storefront was managed by Lisa Bieberman (1941-), who went on to publish her own bimonthly newsletter, *Psychedelic Information Center Bulletin*, as well as the LSD session manual, *Session Games People Play: A Manual for the Use of LSD* (1967). The IFIF, though, was of secondary importance compared to "Hotel Nirvana", the beachside intentional community that the Love Engineers opened in the Mexican village of Zihuatanejo. Promoted as the world center for spiritual training in the "yoga of psychedelics", this center only managed to host one seminar of roughly forty people before the Mexican authorities shut it down and deported everyone involved.

The Love Engineers were deported from two subsequent Caribbean islands, where they attempted to establish new psychedelic centers. The group was rescued from dissolution by the heiress of the Mellon-Hitchcock fortune, Margaret "Peggy" Hitchcock (1901-1998), who gifted them free use of Millbrook, the Mellon estate in Dutchess County, New York. Serving as the Mecca of psychedelicism, this expansive piece of real estate is located on 2 300 acres of land, and includes a gigantic Victorian mansion, private bowling alley, gatehouse, and luxurious garden. In addition to the members of IFIF (later renamed the Castalia Foundation and then the League of Spiritual Discovery), the Millbrook estate housed Arthur Kleps' Neo-American Church, as well as Bill Haines' Sri Ram Ashram. Alongside these permanent residents, the estate attracted thousands of pilgrims, including Beat poets,

religious dignitaries, and celebrities, as well as emissaries from other psychedelicist religions, including →Peter Lamborn Wilson (1945-2022) from the Moorish Orthodox Church of America, and the →Discordian Society's →Robert Anton Wilson (1932-2007). Attracted by the concentration of religious activity, federal intelligence agencies and local law enforcement placed the community under constant surveillance, routinely harassed its guests, and arrested its inhabitants during late-night raids. The patriarchs of the psychedelicist church movement finally disbanded their lysergic seminary at Millbrook in 1968. Before the closure of Millbrook, however, Leary and his fellowship adapted their ideology into a theater production, which they performed for packed audiences around the United States. Staged by the pioneering light company USCO, which drew heavily from the media theorist Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980), these public celebrations were equal parts showbusiness and religious revival.

Due to its proximity to Millbrook, the earliest psychedelicist enclave on the East Coast developed on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, in New York City. Storefront temples seemed to open on a nightly basis in this hip neighborhood after the first wave of black-market LSD hit the streets in 1964. The Moorish Orthodox Church of America operated The Crypt, a reading room and psychedelicist shrine; similarly, the League of Spiritual Discovery ran an information center not too far from the offices of *Innerspace*, the psychedelicist church movement's own newspaper, published by Linn House, a prominent Neo-American cleric. Illustrating the interface between cultural activism and psychedelicism, Michael Itkin, the gay activist and Bishop in the Liberal Catholic Church, founded the Psychedelic Peace Fellowship, which held weekly religious services for the city's hipsters. There were also groups that worked as volunteers to support the burgeoning psychedelicist colony, such as the Provos and True Light Beavers, which served free food to the masses in public parks each week. Moreover, hip shops such as Ed Sanders' Peace Eye bookstore, the Psychedelicatessen, and Barron Bruchlos's Dollar Sign served as free dormitories (or "mattress meadows") after business hours. In addition to the social services they offered to psychedelicists, these shops also sold literature banned as "obscene" by the government, such as Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* (1934) and William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* (1959), and were also surveilled by the FBI and frequently raided by the

police as a result. An army of street-level LSD evangelists stationed themselves on the front lines of the psychedelicist movement, both in the East Village and beyond. In an epistle published in *The East Village Other*, Leary praised these drug missionaries as "righteous dealers" because they were not motivated by profit (as in the case of the narcotrafficker), but by their belief in the salvific power of LSD. According to Lewis Yablonsky's anthropological monograph, *The Hippie Trip* (1968), righteous dealers were bound by an ethical code, which included dealing in high-quality product, offering fair prices, and even volunteering to act as guides for novices. The most zealous evangelists belonged to The Brotherhood of Eternal Love, an international gang of psychedelic adventurers registered as a church in Orange County, California. Honoring Leary as the prophet of a new age, this fellowship smuggled enormous amounts of cannabis into the United States and became the world's leading manufacturer and distributor of LSD in the late 1960s.² Characterized in the mainstream media as the "Hippie Mafia", they also broke Leary out of federal prison and abetted his flight to Algeria in 1970.

In addition to the righteous dealers, psychedelicism produced its own class of clerics or "guides." The duties of this position were introduced in *The Psychedelic Experience* (1964), the psychedelicist adaptation of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* produced by Leary, Alpert, and psychologist Ralph Metzner. According to this text, the guide was responsible for imposing an initiatic framework on the otherwise unstructured practice of drug-induced consciousness expansion. As part of their duties, the guide was to read *The Psychedelic Experience* aloud at certain intervals of the trip so as to lead the party through a processual journey across the nine stages, or "bardos", that climaxed in death and rebirth of the ego. Leary supplemented this guide with *Psychedelic Prayers after the Tao te Ching* (1966), a common book of prayers for the hip masses, and *Start Your Own Religion* (1968), an instruction manual offering practical advice on how psychedelicist churches could incorporate as religious non-profit organizations. Many heeded Leary's call.

² Schou, Nicholas. (2010). *Orange Sunshine: The Brotherhood of Eternal Love and Its Quest to Spread Peace, Love, and Acid to the World*. New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 8.

Two types of psychedelicist churches emerged out of the 1960s. There were a number of older, hipster religious organizations, such as Buckley's Church of the Living Swing, which absorbed various psychedelicist doctrines into their teachings. The most influential hipster religion was Kerista, a free love church with a special focus on interracial orgies, which simply added Leary's doctrines to their own sacramental approach to cannabis and mescaline. Led by Brother Jud (b. Jacob Luvich), the Keristians were a visible presence in the East Village (and later, the Haight Ashbury district of San Francisco) on account of the apartment buildings they converted into crashpads. The majority of churches, however, were founded as a result of psychedelic revelations.

There were hundreds of psychedelicist churches active in the late 1960s. Some of the most recognizable institutions included the Psychedelic Venus Fellowship, Wavy Gravy's Hog Farm, the Church of All Worlds, the Church of the Tree of Life, and the Lyman Family (led by the self-styled messiah, Mel Lyman). Though pacifism was a hallmark of psychedelicist churches, there were important exceptions, such as Up Against the Wall Motherfuckers/International Werewolf Brigade (UAW/MF). The UAW/MF was an anarchist collective that provided social services such as housing, food, and medical care to the psychedelicist city-state that emerged in the East Village. They garnered far more attention, though, on account of their violent demonstrations against the cultural establishment. The UAW/MF is most readily remembered for destroyed the fencing surrounding Woodstock, the epochal concert hosted in 1969 at Max Yasgur's dairy farm in Bethel, New York, thereby allowing thousands access to the concert for free. For all of their militancy, though, the scope of UAW/MF was limited to New York. The same cannot be said of the Youth International Party (or "Yippies!").

Born of out a shared opposition to the Vietnam War, this group of self-styled "psychedelic Bolsheviks" was founded in Paul Krassner's Manhattan apartment on New Year's Eve in 1967. The brainchild of Jerry Rubin (1938-1994), Nancy Kurshan (1944-), Abbie Hoffman (1936-1989), Ed Sanders (1939-), Allen Ginsberg (1926-1997), Anita Hoffman (1942-1998), and Bob Fass (1933-), the Yippie leaders were determined to orchestrated a new media narrative, which would replace the popular stereotype of the "hippie" with the image of the militant acid-head, or

"Yippie". Yippie founders popularized this myth by manipulating the corporate media with large-scale pranks. Denouncing the war-profiteering of American capitalism, they titillated a small band of reporters by scattering stacks of money over the balcony onto the floor of the New York Stock Exchange. Other pranks included mailing hundreds of cannabis cigarettes to addresses randomly selected from the phone book, and the alleged dosing of New York City's water supply with LSD. A particularly important demonstration took place on Halloween 1967, when the Yippies! led thousands of anti-war demonstrators clad as witches, warlocks, and wizards in ritually exorcising the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. Though the Yippies! were not a psychedelicist church, its figureheads encouraged members to purchase ordination certifications from the Universal Life Church, a mail-order seminary located in Modesto, California. In theory, their ordination would protect them from legal reprisal related to smoking cannabis, which the Yippies! declared to be the sacrament of their religion.

Though the Northeastern region of the US hosted a formidable psychedelicist scene, California, and particularly San Francisco, was the uncontested center of psychedelicism in the United States. The region's most influential psychedelic fellowship was Ken Kesey's Merry Pranksters. After completing their cross-country pilgrimage to Millbrook (celebrated in Tom Wolfe's novel *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* [1968]), the Merry Pranksters returned to San Francisco to host a series of extravagant, multimedia festivals in which guests were offered "electric kool-aid", a sugary beverage laced with LSD. Thousands of people attended these "acid tests", which the Pranksters hosted from 1965 to 1967. These events inspired similar festivals in San Francisco, including the Love Pageant Rally (1966), staged in protest of the criminalization of LSD in the state of California, and the Human-Be In (1967), also known as the Gathering of the Tribes. The Human-Be In/ Gathering of the Tribes inaugurated a new mode of religious holiday, the psychedelic festival, which has subsequently become a landmark in America's religious landscape.

The Human-Be In/ Gathering of the Tribes was orchestrated by Michael Bowen (1937-2009), working in close collaboration with Jerry Rubin and the editors of *The Oracle*, San Francisco's psychedelicist newspaper. This event was an attempt to unify the psychedelicist community concentrated in the Haight Ashbury neighborhood of

San Francisco with the New Left activists from Berkeley across the Bay – or at least that was what the organizers reported to the media. Secretly, Bowen was acting on the orders of the Psychedelic Rangers, an esoteric organization in Cuernavaca, Mexico led by the apostate Scientologist John Starr Cooke (1920-1976). Far exceeding the organizers' expectation for attendance, the event made headlines across the world by attracting 25 000 people to Golden Gate Park. In imitation of the shamanic rituals of Shugendo yamabushi, the Beat poet Gary Snyder (1930-) opened the event with a blast from a conch-shell, and the elder statesmen of psychedelicism, many of whom were outfitted as holy men from the East, followed with their own orations. Here, Leary debuted his commandment for psychedelicism, "Turn On, Tune in, Drop Out", Ginsberg bellowed mantras that he had learned during his recent trip to India, and the standard-bearers of psychedelic rock, including the Grateful Dead, Jefferson Airplane, and Big Brother and the Holding Company, played mind-bending sets. In addition, Augustus Owsley Stanley III (1935-2011), America's most renowned psychedelicist chemist, was on hand distributing capsules of LSD by the thousands. The Human Be-In/ Gathering of the Tribes spawned similar events, variously termed "Be-Ins" and "Love-Ins," across the country.

The mainstream media accelerated the mass migration to the Haight Ashbury district by proclaiming 1967 as the "Summer of Love". The Haight was hit especially hard by the subsequent mass migration of thrill-seekers, run-away children, draft dodgers and college drop-outs. Along with the Keristans (mentioned above), the Diggers, a militant theatre group that broke away from the San Francisco Mime Troupe in 1966, provided some measure of relief by operating a network of free stores, dormitory crashpads, and soup kitchens that dispensed food daily in Golden Gate park. Nearby, Jeffrey "Fuck" Poland's Shiva Fellowship held open-air orgies, in which sacramental cannabis was ritually consumed. At San Francisco State College, thousands attended the Monday Night Class, Steven Gaskin's weekly sermons on the psychical powers unlocked by psychedelics. The size of his congregation reached critical capacity in 1970, prompting Gaskin to lead a caravan of sixty vehicles to rural Tennessee where they established The Farm, an intentional community still active today.

Scholarly accounts of the psychedelic Sixties tend to focus exclusively on the East and West coast scenes. However, vibrant cultures fueled by lysergic experimentation blossomed in numerous American cities, including Boston (MA), Atlanta (GA), Austin (TX), Chicago (IL) and Milwaukee (WI). Moreover, rural America became the site for numerous experiments in utopian sociality. Speaking directly to the messianic aspirations projected onto LSD, Leary's slogan "Turn on; Tune in; Drop out" inspired many to do just that. The great age of psychedelicist communalism entailed tens of thousands of urbanites abandoning the daily grind in the city for rural adventures in social collectivity. These spiritual seekers believed that psychedelics deconditioned the corrupted customs, mores, and values inculcated by mainstream society, thereby allowing individuals to reinvent themselves according to high spiritual principles. Within this utopian imagination, Native Americans and their cultures were often idolized as paragons of such principles.

Inspired by the peyote ceremonialism of the Native American Church, a subtradition of psychedelicist fellowships developed in the American Southwest, combining Protestantism and the peyotism of the Native American Church. The most visible of these fellowships was the Church of the Awakening, founded in 1958 by the husband-and-wife team of John and Louisa Aiken, which paired sacramental use of peyote with a perennialist ideology of syncretistic beliefs. Serving a community of roughly a hundred followers for more than a decade, the Church of the Awakening filed a lawsuit (*Kennedy v. Bureau of Narcotics & Dangerous Drugs* [1972]) against the federal government, challenging the race-based exemption that permitted peyote use within the Native American Church. The failure of this suit forced this church to go underground, where it continued servicing its congregation.

An especially influential wing of the psychedelicist church movement took root in the Midwest, and Michigan in particular. Detroit was a hothouse for psychedelicism due in large part to John Sinclair (1941-), a Beat poet, journalist, and communitarian organizer. After police raids forced him to close his poetry collective, the Detroit Artists Workshop, he resettled his group in adjoining houses just outside the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. Collectively known as Trans-Love Energies, these utopian communes achieved instant notoriety by publishing their own

underground newspaper, staging Be-Ins, and organizing the Psychedelic Rangers, a psychedelicist youth group unrelated to Cooke's outfit. They came to national attention through the MC5, the communes' house band, which Sinclair carefully molded into the country's foremost cadre of psychedelicist rockers. They cultivated a following by staging weekly dances for free in public parks, events that occasionally tipped over into riots. While the MC5's high-energy music was certainly a factor in these disturbances, the crowd was primed by the fiery sermons delivered by the high priests of Zenta, Brother J.C. (b. Jesse Crawford, dates unknown) and Panther White (b. David White, dates unknown). Zenta was a structureless psychedelicist fellowship developed by the Trans-Love Energies communes over the course of weekly acid sessions that took place between 1966-1968. What Zenta lacked in doctrines, it made up for in dynamism, as illustrated in the MC5's best-selling debut album, *Live at the Grande Ballroom* (1968). Much like psychedelicist centers on the coasts, the seat of Zenta was subject to constant harassment by federal, state, and local police.

III. Psychedelic Revolution (1968-1974)

The first phase of mass psychedelicism (1961-1967) was a period of overweening optimism, based on the supposed redemptive power of LSD. Spokesmen such as Leary and Kesey boldly proclaimed that their lysergic groups had guided the country into a new age of spiritual enlightenment, which they would soon impart to the entire world. However, revolution soon replaced renaissance as the byword of psychedelicism. The turning point occurred with an event organized by the Yippies! in Chicago in December of 1968.

Yippie leaders spent the greater part of 1968 promoting the first national psychedelicist gathering, the Festival of Life. With help from Franklin and Penelope Rosemont's Chicago Surrealist Group, the Yippies! marshalled the full force of the underground press to spread the word about the festival, scheduled to take place in Grant Park, Chicago, as a counter-demonstration to the Democratic National Convention, dubbed the "Convention of Death". The elder statesmen of psychedelicism, Leary, as well as the superstars of acid rock, were all scheduled to perform; however, they all withdrew at the last minute due to the looming

threat of state violence. The only exception was Sinclair's MC5, which only managed to play a short set before the Chicago police, with assistance from the National Guard, tear-gassed and assaulted the crowds that had gathered in Grant Park. Hundreds of protestors were also hospitalized after the police invaded the Yippies' temporary village in Grant Park, an event which the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders later condemned as a "police riot". Captured by a swarm of media broadcasters, this horrifying paroxysm of state violence became the decisive factor in the militant turn in psychedelicism, which had suffered years of police brutality. In the aftermath of the police riot, media outlets reported rumors that the government was constructing concentration camps for psychedelicists. (As the passage of the McCarran Act demonstrates, these rumors were not totally unfounded).

The election of President Nixon in 1969 marked a watershed in the persecution of the psychedelicist movement. His inauguration was quickly followed by other ill portents, such as the "Bloody Sunday" assault by police on Berkeley's People's Park (May 1969), the federal incarceration of Timothy Leary and John Sinclair (1970), the Kent State massacre (May 1970), and the U.S. invasion of Cambodia (April-July 1970). Nixon's crackdown on psychedelicism reached an apex with his declaration of "war" on drugs, which he punctuated with his public proclamation that Leary was "the most dangerous man in America".³ Hip militants responded with calls for "Armed Love" and "Freak Power", ideologies that celebrated violence against oppression as a necessary element of spiritual liberation. Alongside this rhetorical turn, psychedelicists' own self-image shifted so that they no longer conceptualized themselves as archetypal embodiments of America's pioneering spirit (or "Neo-Americans"), but rather as a colonized minority. By the early 1970s, psychedelicists referred to themselves collectively as the "Woodstock Nation" as a means of honoring the Native American nations, as well as their own Woodstock festival.

The turn towards militancy inspired psychedelicists to create a new media myth: the Zeitgeist International Party, or "Zippies". Taking center stage at the next Democratic

³ Minutaglio, Bill & Davis, Steven. (2018). *The Most Dangerous Man in America: Timothy Leary, Richard Nixon, and the Hunt for the Fugitive King of LSD*. New York: Twelve Books, 9.

National Convention, hosted in Miami in 1972, the Zippies transformed the streets of Miami into a warzone. Here, police suffered more injuries than demonstrators, leading the underground press to declare victory at the convention, which they celebrated as the "Battle of Miami Beach". Violence aside, this event signaled another major innovation in psychedelicist ideology. According to the Zippie leader, Thomas "King" Forçade (b. Gary Goodson, 1945-1978), the principal focus of psychedelicist militancy was not actually violence, but chaos. A cannabis smuggler, John Sinclair's protégé, and founder of *High Times* magazine, Forçade defined chaos as a metaphysical principle; that is, as a state of being defined by pure potential, not unlike the Dao of Daoism. One final aspect of the Zippie movement deserves mention. Deployed as a myth to challenge the disparaging media caricature of the "hippie", the Zippies did not maintain permanent offices or have a phone number. In the aftermath of Miami, this organizational vacuum was filled by the White Panther Party (WPP).

John Sinclair, Pun Plamondon (1946-), Leni Sinclair (1940-) and Genie Parker (dates unknown) co-founded the WPP in response to an interview with the co-founder of the Black Panther Party, Huey P. Newton (1942-1989). Answering Newton's call for white people to form their own revolutionary cells, they transformed Trans-Love Energy into the White Panther Party (WPP) in 1968. In their view, the government persecution of psychedelicists and the oppression of black people were part of the same struggle. The White Panthers opened branches across the United States (and England). So as to halt the unification of black militants and acidheads, the Nixon administration escalated COINTELPRO, a secret government program that blackmailed and even assassinated high profile activists. Ensnared in this operation, the WPP hierarchy in Ann Arbor were subjected to an intensive campaign of wire-tapping, infiltration, and harassment. In response to being falsely accused of bombing a CIA office, Plamondon fled underground, while Sinclair (who had also been accused of the bombing), was ultimately sentenced to a ten-year prison sentence for the possession of two cannabis cigarettes, which he had gifted to an undercover police officer. Sinclair's disproportional sentencing became the *cause célèbre* for militant psychedelicists, whose continuous protesting culminated in the third and final "miracle" of the psychedelicist movement. On December 10, 1971, 15 000 people

gathered in Ann Arbor for the John Sinclair Freedom Rally, a large carnivalesque assembly that featured performances by Allen Ginsberg, the pianist Stevie Wonder, and the former Beatle, John Lennon, and Yoko Ono. Three days after the event, John was freed from prison. Subsequently, his release from prison has been celebrated in Ann Arbor each year as the Hash Bash, a regional psychedelic holiday.

IV. Psychedelicism Reborn (1975-2018)

In the mid-1970s, the millenarian dreams of the psychedelic movement dissolved into an array of religious, cultural, and political subcultures, as well as mainstream culture itself. The media play a significant role in this dissolution, especially after the "Manson Murders" of 1969. This tragic series of events centered around the Manson Family, the psychedelic sect led by Charles Manson (1934-2017), which ultimately murdered nine people, including Hollywood actress Sharon Tate (1943-1969) and heiress to the Folger's fortune, Abigail Folger (1943-1969). Conservative ideologues joined liberal commentators in condemning the Manson Murders as a direct result of the hippie "counterculture", portrayed in the mainstream media as unwashed, unethical, and potentially violent. Another decisive force in the transformation of psychedelicism was the War on Drugs, which transformed into a vast government bureaucracy after President Nixon established the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs in 1968, and the Office of Drug Abuse Law Enforcement in 1972. Drug-related arrests and convictions exceeded any other type of crime by the 1980s, and the American criminal justice system soon came to depend on the fifty-eight billion dollars generated annually by this domestic "war".

Yet another contributing factor in the decline of the psychedelic mass movement was the result of commercialism. In his landmark study, *The Conquest of Cool* (1997), Thomas Frank argued that the decline of the drug culture corresponded with the commodification of its hip ideals by fashion designers, record companies, film studios, and advertisers. By way of the culture industry, psychedelicism dissolved into a new paradigm of hyper-consumption, in which self-expression, spontaneity, and rebellion were valorized as the hallmarks of authenticity. Ultimately, the hip ethos of psychedelicism led to a revolution within bourgeois values, instead of a movement against them. Recently, scholars have traced this shift to the rise of New Age culture

in the 1980s. There is solid evidence suggesting that the New Age movement was grounded in a covert culture of psychedelicism, despite its most popular representatives, such as Richard Alpert (later known as "Ram Dass"), publicly repudiating the use of drugs in favor of meditation, macrobiotic diets, encounter groups, and gurus.⁴

The chaos strain of psychedelicist militancy popularized by the Zippies was reinvigorated with the publication *Illuminatus!* (1975), a trilogy of novels authored by two former editors of the Playboy forum, Robert Anton Wilson and Robert Shea (1933-1994). The text's exploration of conspiracy theory, secret societies, and revolutionary anarchism appealed directly to the psychedelicist imagination, as well as the paranoid atmosphere created by the War on Drugs. Though never reviewed in any mainstream publication, *Illuminatus!* eventually sold over 100 000 copies, and, more importantly, disclosed the existence of the Discordian Society, a psychedelicist counter-intelligence agency that had concealed its existence since the late 1950s. Premised on Zen humor, surrealist activism, and veneration of Eris, Goddess of chaos, Discordianism took shape within an alternative communication microcosm based on the participatory and decentralized exchange of homemade artworks, publications, music, and literature. This vast information network was termed the "zine scene", because its central medium was the uncommercial, nonprofessional, and small-distribution magazine, or "fanzine". Decentralization is a central tenet of Discordian belief, and therefore Discordians insinuated themselves into alternative subcultures, such as science fiction fandom, conspiracy milieus, industrial culture, and the anarchist movement- each of which flourished in fanzine culture. Discordian ideas also played a formative role in the formation of →chaos magick, as well as Thee Temple ov Psychick Youth. That said, the highest concentration of Discordians gathered together under the auspice of another psychedelicist organization, the Church of the SubGenius. Founded in 1979, the SubGenius Church organized its membership into an epistolary network, which emerged at the fore of the expansive literary microcosm of fanzine exchange. In fact, the most influential zine of the 1980s and 90s, *Factsheet Five*, developed within the SubGenius Church's internal postal exchange.

⁴ Hanegraaff, Wouter, (2012). "Entheogenic Esotericism." In Egil Asprem and Kennet Granholm (Eds.), *Contemporary Esotericism*. London: Taylor & Francis, 392-409.

Created by the Discordian Mike Gunderloy (1959-), *Factsheet Five* served as the central directory for all fanzine publishing, as well as the launching ground for the next wave of psychedelicists. Led by the SubGenius Church, the Discordian Society, and the resurrected Moorish Orthodox Church of America, the intellectual vanguard of the zine scene collectively updated the chaos strain of militancy for the digital era. Driven by the utopian potential of what was then termed "cyberspace", these psychedelicist sects were awash with enthusiasm for computer networking, and ultimately led the migration of fanzine creators away from epistolary exchange towards online communication.

Fueled by newly synthesized psychedelics (such as 2C-B), experimental electronic music, and a flurry of prophecies concerning the oncoming millennium, the psychedelicists of the 1990s came to be known as "ravers". Their spokesperson was Terence McKenna (1941- 2000), an anti-guru with a refined sense of humor, a genius for extemporaneous public speaking, and an apocalyptic sensibility. McKenna followed a relentless schedule of lecturing around the world, including residencies at the Esalen Institute outside of San Francisco and London's Megatripolis, Fraser Clark's Church of Raving (and home to the Zippies, a band of techno-psychedelicists unconnected to the Forçade's group). By the mid-1990s, McKenna was widely recognized as the prophet of rave culture, which derived its name from late-night drug-parties, or "raves". These psychedelicist celebrations reinvented the psychedelicist holiday, the Human Be-In, for the 1980s and 1990s. Due in large part to the work of zine scene luminary and chief propagandist of Moorish Orthodoxy, Hakim Bey (b. Peter Lamborn Wilson), raves were politically coded as anarchist demonstrations, or "temporary autonomous zones".

Despite the overblown claims of the psychedelicist techno-optimists who aligned themselves with the "cyberpunks", no utopia awaited humanity in cyberspace. As the computer age developed, the 1990s generation of psychedelicists ultimately lost ground to the culture industry, which remained ever-eager to commercialize their "temporary autonomous zones". In this respect, the shifting demographics of the annual Burning Man event represents an instructive case study, insofar as this heterotopia is now dominated by technologists and entrepreneurs from Silicon Valley,

despite its founders and earliest adopters being cultural outsiders, freaks, and bohemians.

V. Psychedelicism Today

Today, psychedelics are the source of intensive media fanfare. On one hand, ayahuasca shamanism is becoming an international phenomenon, as the global New Age milieu both merges and appropriates South American ayahuasca religions (including Santo Daime, Barquinha, and União do Vegetal). As more New Age communities absorb ayahuasca shamanism into their intellectual matrix, indigenous teachings concerning these sacred medicines have becoming saturated with psychedelicist ideas. An even more significant development concerns the renewed interest in psychedelic substances on the part of mainstream scientific researchers and the wellness industry.

Collectively termed the "Psychedelic Renaissance," dozens of scientific research trials and experimental therapy programs are now attempting to demonstrate the palliative effects of psychedelics. Fueling a media bonanza, the outcomes of these trials suggest that there is a direct correlation between psychedelics and positive outcomes for alleviating the pain associated with treatment-resistant depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and addiction. The term "renaissance" is significant, as it illustrates the enormous outpouring of enthusiasm surrounding psychedelics, as well as the tacit assumption that the last seventy five years of vernacular psychedelicism represents a "dark ages". Leaving aside this bias, there is no indication that the psychedelicist religions that flourished in the postwar era will return; rather, it seems far more likely that former psychedelicist ideas and ideals will be adapted to suit the scientific, spiritual, and commercial demands of today's marketplace.

J. Christian GREER

Literature

Davis, Erik. 2019. *High Weirdness: Drugs, Esoterica and Visionary Experience in the Seventies*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Greer, J. Christian. 2019. "Religion Can't be a Joke, Right?" in Peter Forshaw, Wouter Hanegraaff, and Marco Pasi (eds.), *Hermes Explains: Thirty Questions about Western Esotericism*, pp. 127-136. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Partridge, Christopher. 2018. *High Culture. Drugs, Mysticism, and the Pursuit of Transcendence in the Modern World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Stevens, Jay. 1987. *Storming Heaven: LSD and the American Dream*. New York City: Grove Press.

St John, Graham. 2020. "Ephemeropolis: Burning Man, Transformation, and Heterotopia". *Journal of Festive Studies* 2 (1): 289-322.

Miller, Timothy. 1991. *The 60's Communes: Hippies and Beyond*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.

Yablonsky, Lewis. 1968. *The Hippie Trip*. New York City: Pegasus.