



A THIRTEENTH ANTHOLOGY OF  
WRITINGS ABOUT PSYCHEDELICS

XX

Edited by Raymond Soulard, Jr. & Cassandra Soulard

*Many Worlds,  
Many Doors:  
A Thirteenth Anthology  
of Writings About  
Psychedelics*

edited by Raymond Soulard, Jr.  
& Cassandra Soulard



Number Seventy-Eight

**Many Worlds, Many Doors:  
A Thirteenth Anthology of Writings About Psychedelics**

Burning Man Books is  
an imprint of  
Scriptor Press New England  
[scriptorpress.com](http://scriptorpress.com)  
[editor@scriptorpress.com](mailto:editor@scriptorpress.com)

This volume was composed  
in the Adobe Garamond font  
in InDesign CS5 on the  
MacBook Pro computer.

*“I tell you, there are more worlds,  
and more doors to them,  
than you will think of in many years!”*

—George MacDonald, *Lilith*, 1895.

## **Session Games People Play: A Manual for the Use of LSD**

Published online at:

[luminist.org/archives/session.htm](http://luminist.org/archives/session.htm)

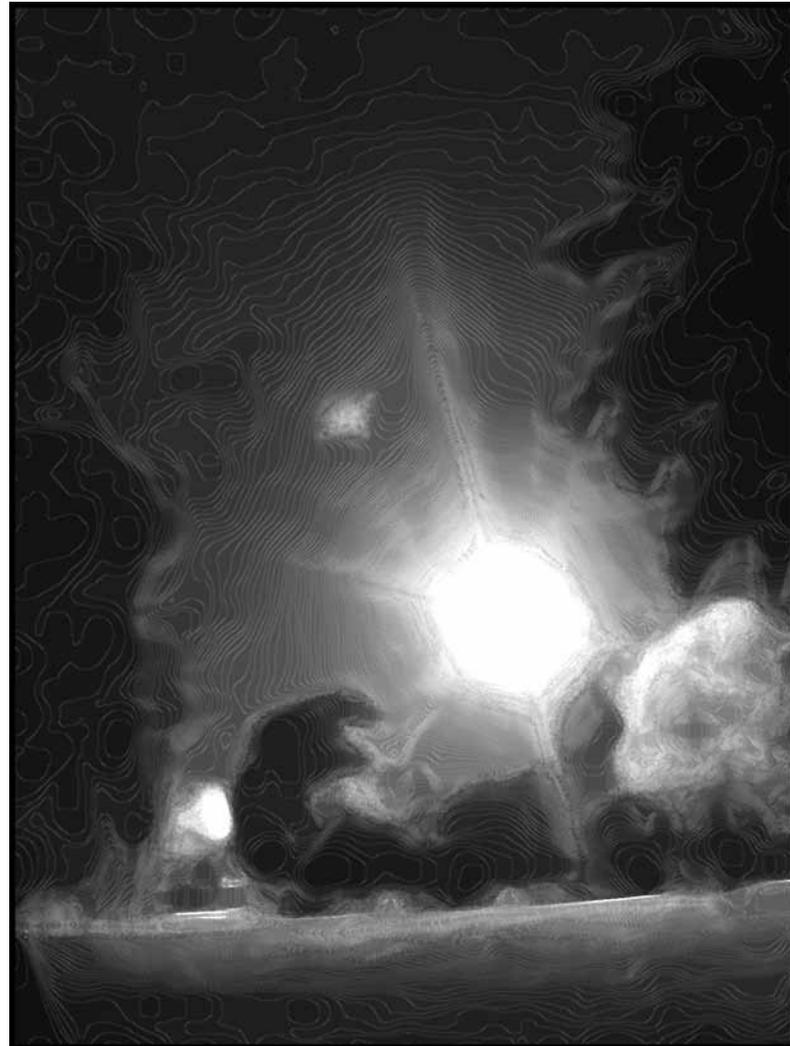
*This document was first published as a pamphlet in 1967, shortly after LSD was made “illegal” in the USA, by the Psychedelic Information Center, 26 Boylston Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts. It is a guide for first-time experimenters with LSD. It reflects the healthy attitudes that still existed at the time of publication, lingering from the open innocence of the pre-prohibition era. The author, Lisa Bierberman, was eulogized by Timothy Leary in his essay “The Mad Virgin of Psychedelia,” which is included as chapter 19 of his 1968 collection, The Politics of Ecstasy.*

### **Introduction**

The need for a practical manual for the use of LSD has become increasingly apparent to those concerned with psychedelic issues over the past four years. With more and more laymen taking LSD and similar drugs, and with the supposed experts having nothing more instructive to say than “don’t,” the beginning user often has nowhere to turn for the most fundamental information. Miserable sessions are often the result of not knowing basic rules, even so prosaic a fact as how long a session lasts.

What limited literature there is on the conduct of LSD sessions is usually directed to the professional guide, experimenter, or therapist. This manual is directed to the consumer himself. Just at present, advising the user to “find a qualified guide” is rather fatuous. Competent guides, available to run sessions for other than close friends, do not exist. I can’t think of anyone, anywhere, to whom I could send the stranger at my door to be guided in an LSD session. And it is the rare person who is willing to wait on the faith that one can eventually be found.

It is to be hoped that this state of affairs will not long continue



but, with no change immediately in view, we must deal with the problem as it exists today. In future years, when we can hope there will be psychedelic centers, staffed by experienced guides, a manual such as this will still be useful, because the LSD experience, personal and subjective as it is, is affected more by the individual's attitudes and behavior than by anything another can do for him.

The remaining literature available to the layman dwells heavily on poetic descriptions of the LSD state, or interpretations of it in terms of Oriental mysticism. I have been struck by the number of people who take LSD after reading these books and then get trapped in some ugly little situation that anyone with three sessions behind him could have warned them about.

This book, then, is no tourist's guide through Paradise, but a down-to-earth discussion of the sorts of things that can go wrong in an LSD session and how to prevent them. For those who want a loftier view I recommend Alan Watts' *The Joyous Cosmology* and Dr. Timothy Leary's *Psychedelic Prayers from the Tao Te Ching*.

I apologize to my hippie readers for the old-fashioned (1963 vintage) word *session*, realizing that the current term is *trip*. I learned to call them *sessions* under Dr. Leary and Dr. Richard Alpert at Harvard, and never have gotten used to thinking of the LSD event as a *trip*, which suggests going away, whereas for me LSD means an intensified being Here and Now.

Simultaneously I must apologize to my non-hippie readers for the occasional use of such slang terms as *high*, *turn on*, *bringdown*, and *hung up* in places where more conventional language would be stilted. I trust the meanings will be apparent in context, and have tried not to overdo it. *High* is a somewhat misleading word for being under the influence of LSD, but I use it for brevity.

\* \* \*

### **So You're Going to Take LSD**

So you're going to take LSD. You've got some, hopefully from a reliable source. You've heard a variety of reports about it, some of which must have attracted you. You have an idea of the kind of experience you're looking for, but you're apprehensive lest you have a *bum trip*.

What you may not realize is that the kind of session you

have depends very much on you. Perhaps you have a friend who is experienced with LSD to guide you. This is good but, nevertheless, no matter how good a guide your friend is, you will have to do most of the work yourself.

*Work? Can getting high be work?* Yes, a psychedelic session is very hard work, although you may do it sitting quite still and quiet. You may have to do an overhaul of your whole philosophy of life, including areas that you haven't examined for years, if ever. You may be faced with choices or decisions that will be difficult to make. Your way of life, your habits, your relationships with others will all come under scrutiny. By the time the session is through, you will be very tired.

*Is LSD, then, no fun? Is it not enjoyable?* You have heard that it is an ecstatic experience. So it is, or can be. But this is a very different kind of fun from any that you know about, from ordinary recreation, or other sorts of drugs. Going into an LSD session with the idea that it will all be a lark, a carefree *high*, is a mistake that leads to some bad session games.

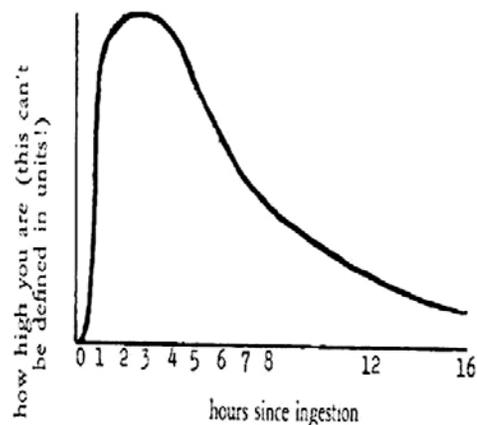
*Should you take LSD at all?* This book does not answer that question, not knowing the answer, and suspecting that you have your mind made up anyhow. There is no physical or mental condition known to be a definite contraindication to LSD in all circumstances. I would not want to turn on (1) a person under 18 or (2) a person with a history of psychosis—but I would not dogmatically say that such a person could not have a good session under guidance.

I do believe that a healthy adult can have a safe and beneficial psychedelic experience, provided he knows what to do, and his expectations are not unrealistic. Some of the common unrealistic expectations are: (1) that LSD will cure something; (2) that LSD will give you psychic powers; (3) that you can have a super sex experience on it; (4) that your LSD experience will be like your friend Joe's, or like some experience you have read about; (5) that it will be like marijuana, only more so; (6) that if you don't like it you can always take a tranquilizer and shut it off; and (7) that LSD will improve your memory or I.Q.

If you are approaching an LSD experience with any of these notions as baggage, get rid of them now. *LSD is not magic*. It will not make you smarter, or give you any special powers. Your experience will be your own, and not like any you have heard of. LSD gives you a new perspective on your life for several hours, and since it is your

life you will be looking at, it will not be like anybody else's session. LSD is not much like marijuana at all, potheads' boasts to the contrary notwithstanding. The session may or may not help *cure* some of your psychological problems, but you can't count on it.

In fact, it's best to set aside all expectations as much as possible. LSD will almost certainly be different from anything you might expect, so why not go into it acknowledging that it is unknown territory? This may have the advantage of rescuing you from the self-defeating game of *How High Am I?* Like the proverbial watched pot that never boils, some people manage to hold themselves down by continually looking for symptoms and trying to see whether they are high yet. Since you don't know what the LSD state is like, there is no point in trying to figure out whether you have gotten there. Assuming it is genuine LSD, and you have taken enough of it, it will do its part. If you must know how high you are, look at the clock. The time schedule of an LSD session goes something like this:



Before you take LSD, make a graph like this, putting your starting time in place of 0, and the subsequent hours in place of 1, 2, 3, etc. Then if you ever want to know how high you are, just check your graph with the clock. This may seem like a quaint idea, but it can actually be very useful. It can keep a session from breaking up too soon (the game of *Let's Call It a Day*). It can also save you from spiritual one-up-man's-ship games, in which people worry about whether they have achieved as high a *level* as their friends.

I have known people to take too much LSD because they feel that they have not yet achieved an *ego death* or a *first bardo*. Forget all about *levels*. They are pretty meaningless. You will learn what the LSD state is for you, after several sessions. Don't worry if it isn't like somebody else's description. You cannot compare how high you are with how high Joe is. So go by the clock. If nothing remarkable has happened after an hour and a half, you got gypped.

One hears a lot about *preparation* for the LSD experience. You may wonder what sort of preparation you should undergo. Actually, you have been preparing all your life, and those many years of preparation will outweigh anything you can do in a short time before the session. Being told to prepare for a session is a little like being told to *prepare to meet your Maker* a few hours before you are going to be shot.

If there is any last-minute preparation for the LSD experience, it would be in the nature of refreshing in your mind the things that are dearest and most sacred to you. Don't plunge into Oriental philosophy, unless you are already a lover of it. The psychedelic state is no more Eastern than Western. Think about the things you care about, the people you love, the things you hope to do with your life. Try to clear your mind of negative emotions—resentments, jealousies. Say something nice to your mother-in-law, or whoever fills that place in your world. A good conscience is the best preparation you can have.

On the technical side, preparation consists in making sure that the physical and social conditions of the session are as they should be. Decide well in advance who is going to participate in the session. You should all know, like, and trust one another.

The more you have shared of life in common with your session-mates, the better. Until you are very experienced, you should avoid taking LSD alone, and also avoid two-person sessions. This is especially true for unmarried couples, no matter what their sexual relationship. A two-person session is very difficult, because it puts the whole burden of social interaction on the two people.

Talk is difficult on LSD. This is no problem in a group, since the group can sit quietly and nobody will be embarrassed. But in a two-person group a silence becomes awkward. Unhealthy hang-ups on what the other person is thinking, and games of *Mind Reader* result. A relationship can be badly strained when two inexperienced people take LSD together. For your first several sessions, stick to three- or four-member groups. Groups larger than five are to be avoided as too

distracting.

If none of you are experienced it is a good idea to have a friend along who does not take any LSD.

Throughout this book there is frequent mention of being *experienced* in the use of psychedelics. When are you experienced enough to take LSD alone, or to do the other things beginners are warned against? This is a function of responsibility and maturity as well as the number of sessions. You should have had at least four, and have satisfied yourself that you can get through a session—all 16 hours of it—without panicking, becoming confused or unduly depressed, or becoming burdensome to others. You should be aware of what is going on at all points in a session, and be able to act on your knowledge as rationally and efficiently as if you were not high. You should be able to carry out the plans made at the start of the session. You should be able to carry on a normal conversation should the need arise. In other words you should be at home in the psychedelic state.

All participants in a session should get together beforehand and agree on the time and place, and composition of the group. All should agree to stay together for at least ten hours. All should have enough knowledge about LSD to be able to avoid bad session games, and should agree not to play them.

The place chosen for the session should preferably be someone's home, if possible a place that is familiar to the members of the group. Make sure you can stay there undisturbed for at least 16 hours. It should be clean, attractive, and comfortable. Clutter and mess should be cleaned up. It is a good idea to have mattresses and cushions enough for everybody to have a place to lie down if he wants to (though sitting up is best for most of a session). Blankets and Kleenex should be provided.

There is no need to import objects of art, or special things to look at, unless they are particularly meaningful to one of the participants. Otherwise, the simpler the better. If music is wanted, it should be quiet, melodic music, nothing loud or weird, and it should not be played during the second through fourth hours.

*Privacy is essential.* If the home is one at which visitors are accustomed to drop in, a *Do Not Disturb* sign on the door or something of the sort is called for. Nobody should be allowed to come in or go out during the session. It should be possible to go to the bathroom without venturing into public territory. Telephones should be disconnected

to prevent both incoming and outgoing calls. A country or suburban setting is best, where you can see something green out of the window and get some fresh air when you open it. If you live in New York City, you asked for it.

Do not hold a session on a beach, in a field or woods unless, again, you are very experienced. There is too much opportunity for disorientation, fear occasioned by meeting strangers, physical discomfort, and games of *Where's Harry?* By staying in a familiar room you have the physical environment taken care of, and you don't have to concern yourself with it. Confusion and distraction are minimized.

You should arrange to have both the session day and the day after it free.

\* \* \*

### Session Games

In addition to providing a suitable setting for the session, and approaching it in a tranquil state of mind, you should know how to avoid certain pitfalls. These are such that one might not be aware of them without knowing something about what sessions are like. Almost everyone sooner or later slips into one of these traps, but if you have been told about them in advance you can get out quicker. I have called these things-to-be-avoided *Session Games* (with apologies to Szasz, Berne, Leary, and others whose specific definitions of *game* I have not bothered to adhere to).

This, then, is a primarily negative manual, in that it tells you what not to do. Given good preparation, and a knowledge of what not to do, what to do should not be a problem.

When told what not to do in a session, many people ask, "Why? Is it dangerous?" Most of these games, with the possible exception of *Get Me Out of This*, are not likely to be dangerous. I advise not playing them, not because they will hurt you, but because the session will probably be pleasanter and more rewarding if they are avoided.

Some people will probably feel this manual is too negative. They will say that by discussing all the things that can go wrong in a session I am giving people a lot of things to worry about. That is not my intention, so let me state clearly: it is altogether possible that you will not be tempted to play any of the games this book warns against. It

is altogether possible that your session will be a delight clear through. I hope that it is so. In that case you will not need a manual, but it won't do you any harm to have read this one.

\* \* \*

### Get Me Out of This

is the worst of all session games. In its most severe form, it can turn a session into a nightmare for everyone involved. But you don't have to play it, if you make up your mind not to.

It is very common that sometime during the onset of a session, between 1/2 hour and 1 1/2 hours after ingestion (that sharp rise on the graph), you may feel scared, uncomfortable, or confused. This may not happen, but if it does, it doesn't mean that something's wrong—it's just part of the process of getting high for a great many people, especially inexperienced ones. Just why this is so is not easy to explain, because it is a peculiar subjective feeling. It may take the form of a feeling of losing control, of not being able to keep track of your thoughts, or the idea that something is going on that you don't understand.

The sense of losing control is in part illusory: you are actually in complete control of your body, if you had to use it, which you usually don't, since you only have to sit there. You may not be quite in control of your thoughts. Actually, of course, you never are, even when you're not on a drug, but on LSD you seem to have more thoughts, going faster and less logically. Your thoughts easily go off on a tangent, so that you may lose the sense of continuity, and moment seems to follow moment without the usual thread of sense connecting them. This can be bewildering, but it is not bad or dangerous, and can actually be quite fun if you don't fight it.

The reason you can control your body while your thoughts are racing on this way is that your body moves so much more slowly than your mind. For instance, if you were to get up to go to the bathroom, you would think of a great many unrelated things while crossing the room but, when you came to take each next step, you would remember what you were doing and take it. To you, it would seem as if you were taking an incredibly long time to cross the room, but to an observer you would be moving at about your normal speed. It's important to

remember that the sense of incompetency is an illusion, and if you do have to do something, to go ahead and do it, without worrying about the excessively long time that it seems to be taking.

But to get back to the game of *Get Me Out Of This*—there may come the time, early in the session, when you feel uncomfortable. At this point you may think: *Why did I ever get into this? I was happy enough the way I was. I don't want to get high! I want to come down!*

Now the one thing you must not do is holler, "Get me out of this!" Because the more you fight it, the harder it is to shift gears and go with it. Furthermore, by trying to enlist other people in the fight, you make the problem much stickier. You see, anything you do that affects the world outside your head is a lot harder to undo than the things you only think. (Like many other aspects of the LSD experience, this is an intensification of what is true in *ordinary* life.) If you think "Get me out of this!" you can quickly remember that this is the wrong way to go, and correct yourself. But if you yell, "Get me out of this!" you'll upset all your companions, and have them solicitously buzzing around you—and you don't want that, believe me.

If you persist in this game, it can snowball. You'll feel worse and worse, want even more to get out of it, provoke more anxiety in your companions, causing you to feel even more confused and helpless, and so on. This can end in screaming scenes and frantic calling of doctors. That's what's called a *freak-out*. You may hear *freak-outs* talked about as though they were something that just happened, but actually they can be prevented—and the person who can do the most to prevent them is *you*, by not playing the wrong games.

You see they can't get you *off* LSD before it runs its natural course. Asking your friends to bring you down is as practical as asking your fellow passengers on a transatlantic jet to stop the plane and let you off in mid-flight. I don't advise stocking so-called *antidotes*. These are hardly ever effective when taken by mouth. To terminate a session prematurely requires massive doses of a sedative given by injection, and amateurs are not in a position to provide this.

Taking a tranquilizer or sedative orally can do more harm than good, by pinning your hopes on being brought down—hopes which are not fulfilled, and which keep you in your bind of fighting the experience. Once you have started an LSD session, you have got to go all the way through it, come hell or high water. If you can't make up your mind to do this beforehand, *don't start*.

What should you do then, when you start to feel scared or unhappy? Well, what would you do in a non-drug situation that was scary and unavoidable? You'd try to be as brave and cheerful as you could be, and to keep up your companions' spirits as well as your own. The same approach can work wonders in the LSD session. Holding hands around the circle is a good way of communicating courage and support.

In the LSD state you can change your mood very quickly. Here, as with physical action, there may be an illusion of incompetency. You may think you're so frightened or so depressed that you couldn't possibly smile, or get to like the experience. But just try for a moment to take your mind off your own anxiety and think of your friends around you, and you'll be amazed how quickly you'll feel much better. This sounds like a platitude from Sunday school, but somehow those Sunday school truths are truer on LSD than just about anywhere.

If you're simply not up to being brave, the other thing you can do is *collapse*. Just put your head in your lap, and abandon yourself to whatever-it-is. You can't go wrong that way—and you'll soon find out that whatever-it-is isn't going to hurt you at all.

\* \* \*

At this point, it may be useful to debunk some of the ideas that make people think there is something to fear. Probably the fear itself is caused by something deeper than misinformation, but the rational mind has a way of fastening onto certain bugaboos, and making of them reasons to go on being afraid.

The commonest fear is of not being able to come down. As I have pointed out, it is true that you can't come down for several hours, but some newspapers and magazines have done a great disservice by circulating the belief that some people who go on an LSD trip *never come back*. This nonsense is responsible for much unnecessary terror. Of course you come back. This is just common sense. LSD, like other drugs, has a time-schedule of action. There is no more chance of you still being high on LSD a week after taking it than there is of your still being under the influence of alcohol, caffeine, or Benzedrine a week after a single dose of one of those drugs. The typical duration of an LSD session is 12 to 18 hours, plus four to eight hours to sleep it off—perhaps a little longer if an excessively large dose is taken. Even people

who freak out come down on schedule, feeling like fools for having made such a fuss.

People having their first session are especially susceptible to the belief that they will not come down—this goes for those who are having ecstatic experiences as well as for those who are scared. Probably this is because they have not learned to take into account their altered sense of time. This is part of the reason why a clock is a useful thing to have in the room.

Another common fear is of dying. There are various reasons why people get the idea that they are dying during a session, but you need not get hung up on this if you just remember that nobody has ever been known to die of LSD—and it's been around for more than twenty years and has been taken by hundreds of thousands. No lethal dose for humans has been found, even though people have taken as much as ten times the usual full dose.

Some people worry about losing their control and doing something wrong or crazy. This is an illusion. The actuality is just the opposite—that it takes a certain amount of will power to do anything at all. You don't have to worry about what you'll do. The easiest thing is just to sit there and, in most cases, that's exactly what you should do.

Since LSD has been heralded in the press as a producer of temporary insanity, we will probably be seeing criminals use it as an excuse for their crimes. The jury may buy it, but this is just nonsense. LSD doesn't take away your knowledge of right and wrong, or your control over your actions.

As long as LSD is an illegal or semi-illegal drug in some states, users will worry about being arrested. This shouldn't be a problem if you keep the following things in mind: (1) you should not let anyone in who is not a part of the original group; (2) if, despite plans, you do come into contact with an outsider, he will not know you're high. It's not obvious to him the way it is to you—you don't have to make explanations; (3) even if he suspects you're high, he can't prove it; & (4) simply being high is not grounds for arrest. If it will make you feel safer, make sure there are no drugs in the house.

A fifth thing people worry about in sessions is whether their companions are playing some sort of trick on them. These are the *paranoid* feelings you hear about; you may think your friends are looking at you strangely, or that their words have hidden meanings. The knowledge that you have chosen your session-mates from among

people that you trust, and that the paranoid feelings are a common occurrence on LSD, should be enough to keep you from getting too embroiled in these fantasies. Think of something nice about your friend and he will look nicer and less menacing.

What it comes down to is that there is really nothing to be afraid of in the session. This will be clearer if you analyze the situation as follows: Suppose you didn't take LSD, but just decided to get together with a few friends, and sit and think for 16 hours, with occasional conversation. You might get bored, but you'd be in no special danger.

Now in the LSD session, the external situation is just the same as the one described. The only difference is in what's going on in your nervous system. Your body chemistry has been changed in such a way that for 16 hours you will experience and think very differently from the way you usually do. But that can't hurt you. The next morning you will wake up pretty much your old self except that a very unusual 16 hours will have been added to your store of life experience.

So you don't need to get out of it. And if you refrain from trying to do so, you will have averted the worst thing that can go wrong.

If one of your session-mates is playing *Get Me Out of This* do not tell him you will bring him down, and do not offer to get him a doctor or an antidote. Do remind him that the experience is transient if that's what he's worried about, and do assure him of your support. But don't make a fuss or try to be a psychoanalyst. It's usually useless to ask what's wrong, as he probably can't explain. Given your trust and confidence, he can work through his own fears.

I have been discussing the game of *Get Me Out of This* as it occurs early in a session. Occasionally it is also played around the seventh hour, during the *re-entry* period. Here the problem is less likely to be fear than to be physical discomfort, tiredness, depression, or disappointment at coming down. These problems are seldom severe if you've done what you should during the earlier hours, and if you stay where you are and don't play *Let's Call It a Day*. The rule is the same: *don't try to get out of it*. This phase too must proceed at its own pace. If your muscles are tight, a little Librium or marijuana can help relax you. Alcohol and heavy eating are to be avoided.

\* \* \*

## **This One Doesn't Count**

is a game played whenever you take a psychedelic for any trivial or un-earnest purpose.

The commonest instance is when taking a drug whose potency you are uncertain of. So you try a little to see if it works. And it does. And then you discover that you are going to have to go through the whole thing, and you really hadn't planned on it.

Then there are sessions entered into for the purpose of testing some impersonal scientific hypothesis about the effects of the drug. Let's take some LSD and see how fast we can memorize nonsense syllables or how big our pupils get.

There is nothing wrong with testing scientific hypotheses under LSD, but this is best left until you are sufficiently experienced to do these things without losing your grip on the spiritual nature of the experience.

An LSD session will always be an intense encounter with reality. Every session counts. If you remember this foremost when going into a session, you will be able to keep other purposes in their place.

## **Evasion Games**

The games that follow overlap to some extent, and have at their common root an attempt to evade responsibility in the session. Probably we all play various games to avoid responsibility in our daily lives, some of which LSD tends to cut through and expose to us. Some people, in an effort to avoid the discomfort of being exposed to themselves, plunge into a number of distracting games which seem to be attempts to prove that they are really drugged, irresponsible, and don't know what they are doing. Or they may try to become completely dependent on someone else, like a child.

Alcohol parties are the prototype for this kind of game in our culture. Because alcohol, in large doses, really does cloud consciousness and impair functionality, there is some truth in the claim that a drunken person is not fully responsible. This gives the game players tremendous latitude to make fools of themselves, excusing it later on the grounds that they were drunk.

On LSD there is no such excuse. Consciousness is heightened,

not clouded, and there is no particular impairment of muscular coordination beyond, perhaps, some initial dizziness. If you get into any of the following games you'll know it's your own fault, whatever you may let others think.

\* \* \*

### **Baby**

A young man I know who has just passed his first birthday has a standard procedure whenever he sees something interesting or pretty. He grabs it and gleefully pulls it to pieces. Some people in sessions are almost like this. They go about digging their fingers into things, crushing things, and dropping them any old where. They throw soap-suds or Kleenex around the floor. Now ordinary objects can be very fascinating when you're high, holding some of the newness and wonder that they must hold for a small child. But do be gentle. Don't destroy what you appreciate. Otherwise you will have a gruesome re-entry, as you come down to a room that is a complete mess. And you'll have to clean it up—or you'll never find your shoes.

Another variant of *Baby* is where a session participant acts helpless and expects others to look after him. He communicates only in monosyllables or meaningless noises, wants others to pay attention to him, and fetch him food and water.

I suppose Freudians would call this *regression to the oral stage*, but I call it playing *Baby*, as a reminder that it doesn't just happen to a person, but is within his control. If you play *Baby*, you will miss the joy of sharing the experience with your friends. Besides, you will feel like a fool later, and nobody is likely to want to turn on with you again.

\* \* \*

### **Couch**

is a game where you decide the session was made for your personal psychoanalysis and start telling whoever will listen all about your childhood traumas and current neuroses.

Now a degree of self-exposure in a session is good. As you see through some of your phobias and hang-ups, you feel elated and

want to tell somebody, and you often find that your friends have been hung up on the same petty thing that you have, and you laugh over it together and enjoy the feeling of relief.

Playing *Couch* is another matter. Pouring forth your entire stream of consciousness out loud is not honesty—it's an attempt to monopolize attention, and it also tends to keep your mind in a rut, shutting out new ways of looking at your problems.

People who play *Couch* are terrible bores. Of course it's different if you are turning on with a psychoanalyst, and that's what he wants you to do. I can't imagine wanting to turn on with a headshrinker, but there's no accounting for tastes.

\* \* \*

### **Drunk**

The person who plays *Drunk* tries to avoid any existential encounter in the session by reducing it all to silliness. He knows that anything he may be experiencing is *only the drug* so he's not about to let it move him. He giggles and snickers incessantly, moves with exaggerated clumsiness, and generally acts the buffoon.

Like *Baby* and *Couch*, this is a case of carrying to extremes something that is a normal element of the session. There is an aspect of absurdity and humorousness to ordinarily serious things that is one of the delights of the LSD experience. It would be a strange session in which nobody laughed.

The trouble with the guy who plays *Drunk* is that he won't leave room for anything else. Nothing can be sacred to him. He can't say anything sincere without immediately qualifying it with a nonsensical or cynical remark. Often he shows that he thinks of his *indulgence* in LSD as a dissipated or naughty thing to do. In other words, he does everything he can to shield his little ego from the impact of LSD by pretending that he is just on a drunk. He cheats himself and brings his companions down.

\* \* \*

## Let's Have an Orgy

is like *Drunk*, only worse. In one of my first morning glory sessions, there was a boy who kept stamping the floor nervously and insisting, "Let's put on some records and have a fuck'n party"—somewhat to the confusion of others who, just feeling their way into this new state of consciousness, were not at all in the mood for a party, but wondered whether they were being party-poopers for not going along with these demands.

Some people, faced with the strange and disquieting initial effects of LSD, respond by flinging themselves into a frantic pursuit of sensual pleasure. It is a kind of way of playing *Get Me Out of This* without the screaming. And, like *Baby* and *Drunk*, it draws on the cultural association of drugs with irresponsibility and wild behavior. To help convince himself, the player usually tries to draw his companions into the game. The forced nature of this behavior is obvious when you realize that LSD actually decreases, at its peak virtually eliminates, physical cravings. Loud music, food, sex games, jumping around, can do little to comfort the person whose real problem is that he wants to drown out his thoughts.

If one of your session-mates is playing this game, do not feel that you have to play it with him in order to be a good sport. Sit quietly and encourage him to do the same. The real pleasures of the session, including the sensory, come without seeking them, without straining, without doing anything.

\* \* \*

## Where's Harry?

is a game most often played around the fifth hour of a session, though it can crop up any time.

You think you'd like to wander off from the group and go do such-and-such (eat supper, see what Harvard Square looks like when you're high, visit Joe, etc.). If you slip out on a pretext of going to the john, nobody will notice for a while. You feel confident that you'll be OK. *After all, it's your session, don't you owe it to yourself to see all the things you can while you have a chance?*

You do not. In the first place, it's very inconsiderate. Your

companions will notice your absence very soon. Time passes slowly for them—even a ten-minute absence can seem like an hour. You are in a state where you are easily distracted. Once you wander off, there's no telling when you'll get back. And all the while your companions can think of little else than *Where's Harry? Is he all right? Shouldn't we send somebody to look for him and make sure?*

You may feel that *of course you're all right and it's silly for them to worry*. Nevertheless they will, and this is quite natural. There is still a certain amount of distance between you and the un-be-drugged world. Your friends aren't sure but that you could get into some kind of trouble. It seems as though you've been gone for an awfully long time.

In the second place, you are confusing categories if you think that seeing as much as possible during a session means wandering around and seeing as many physical places and things as possible. The trip is internal. Moving around and seeking a large variety of external stimuli is only a distraction.

A third reason is that people who are going through a session together form a small community. Staying together helps keep everybody turned on, by mutual reinforcement. You would find that people outside are not so easy to communicate with, not having been through this very intense experience with you and your friends. Your friends need you to help maintain the group feeling, and you need them. So stay together. This doesn't mean you should shut yourself off from your non-psychedelic friends—but there will be time enough to see them when you're not high.

If another member of the group pulls a *Where's Harry?* on you, do not send a person who's high after him, as this will just change the game into one of *Where's Harry and Bill?* If there is someone there who hasn't had any LSD, you can send him to find Harry and try to persuade him to come back, or at least make sure he's OK.

\* \* \*

## Mind Reader

The feeling that you know just what is going on in somebody else's mind, or that they are thinking the same thing you are thinking, often occurs in sessions. Sometimes you're right and sometimes not. The question whether actual telepathy takes place during sessions (or

at any other time) is a controversial one. But one thing is certain: at least sometimes when you think you know what your companion is thinking, you are definitely mistaken.

Verbal attempts to establish whether your effort at mind reading has been successful are most unsatisfactory when conducted during a session. This is because verbal exchanges under LSD consist of about one-tenth words and nine-tenths innuendo. Unfortunately, the innuendo that the speaker intends to communicate, or things he has communicated, is often very different from what the listener thinks he meant. The result ranges from hilarious confusion to paranoid suspiciousness and annoyance.

Facial expressions are not an adequate indicator of thoughts either, because you can see them distorted, and can project your own feelings onto them.

An unfortunate byproduct of the game of *Mind Reader* is that the player may feel let down and betrayed when his companion fails to act on the understanding which the *Mind Reader* erroneously thinks has been reached. Or the *Mind Reader* may become paranoid when he thinks he perceives hostile thoughts in his companions. Also, he may confuse his companions if he adopts an *I know what you're thinking* or *You know what I mean* attitude. The companion wonders desperately how to respond in this situation where he is in the impossible position of not knowing what his friend thinks he knows his friend thinks.

The rules to follow in order to avoid these hang-ups are:

1. Don't assume that you know what your companions are thinking, even if it feels that way;
2. Don't assume that they know what you are thinking;
3. Avoid extended conversation during the peak of the session. Do not try too hard to make sure that you understand what one another are saying; if this effort becomes too involved, give it up, and have a period of silence;
4. When you do speak, speak literally rather than figuratively, in brief concrete sentences; and
5. If asked a question, give a literal, straightforward answer.

If you wish to experiment with ESP during a session, this should be agreed upon by the members beforehand. Like other scientific tests, this is best postponed until you have had several experiences with LSD.

\* \* \*

## I Have All the Answers

Novices in LSD sessions sometimes become convinced that they know the answers to all the mysteries of life and the universe. The very people who are most dogmatic about this are often the most confused and perplexed around hour seven when they are returning to ordinary consciousness.

Go lightly. There are valid insights to be had in the psychedelic state, but their value lies in their applicability to daily life. Remember that you are in a transient state, and think of how you can put your insights to work to help you lead a better, richer life in your ordinary consciousness. Do not force your ideas on your consciousness. There is nothing wrong with expressing your thoughts, but you should respect the fact that your companions have thoughts of their own.

If you ever feel that you have all the answers you may be sure that you don't—no matter how many sessions you have had.

\* \* \*

## Messiah

The *Messiah* player not only has all the answers, he's going to tell the world about them. He runs out into the street or grabs the phone and tries to call the President. Anyone who interferes with him is preventing the salvation of the world and is put in his place.

One can't help sympathizing a bit with this guy. The world does need saving. If only it were so easy. Alas, the insights of LSD, vivid though they may be to you, are not readily communicated. Being essentially nonverbal, they are not even easily remembered. You will be batting above average if you can save yourself.

The urgent message you have to convey to those outside, if it is really communicable and worth communicating, can be conveyed tomorrow, more effectively because you will be in a state of mind nearer to that of your audience. *Write it down.*

\* \* \*

## Us Against Them

There is something about LSD revelations that makes them seem so obvious you can't figure out why you never saw them before. This tempts some people to jump to the conclusion: *It's Them. They* (the squares, the Establishment or what have you) *don't want people to know this. They're keeping it secret.*

Now this doesn't make much sense, because *They* would have to take LSD *Themselves* to have this particular secret to keep—and *They* don't. But the legal restrictions on psychedelics add impetus for many to leap to this implausible hypothesis, and to build on it a view of society divided into the *Good Guys* and the *Bad Guys*.

There are two separate questions here: *Why are the psychedelics banned?* and *Why do you not ordinarily have the degree of illumination that you have when you're high?* I doubt these questions have any connection with one another, because the people who ban LSD don't know much about the nature of the experience.

Politicians who make laws are usually motivated by a complex mixture of the desire to promote the public welfare and the desire to promote their own careers, conditioned always by what they know and what they don't know. Some undoubtedly sincerely believe that LSD is dangerous, and that passing a law can reduce the harm. Others may not give a hoot about LSD, but see a chance to make political capital out of the issue. What is extremely unlikely is that a group of evil men in a smoke-filled room conspired to keep some cosmic secret from the public knowledge.

The reason why you do not have a certain kind of consciousness without the aid of LSD is probably just that your nervous system doesn't work that way. Should it work that way? Is the psychedelic state the natural state, which you have been deprived of by your particular kind of upbringing?

I don't think so. There is no evidence that any culture, anywhere, ever produced a race of permanently turned-on individuals. The psychedelic state, which is suited for contemplation and for overlooking the universe, is probably not well suited to the kind of daily work that produces the necessities of life. Remember that the psychotics and Holy Men who are (somewhat romantically) supposed to have attained a permanent high generally have to be supported by others.

Does this mean that you can take nothing of the experience back with you? Obviously this is not so, since psychedelic experiences seem to make such a profound impression on those who have them. Any insight which you can formulate verbally can be brought back, and will continue to be useful even though it no longer has the emotional immediacy of the session. Some of the ecstatic glow can be remembered, but only dimly; and you will realize when you have a second session how much you had forgotten. The effort to bring back and apply to your life what you have learned from LSD is a continual challenge.

It is to be hoped that you will not go back with an arrogant view of humanity that divides the world into *We Who Have Been There* and *They Who Have Not*. A sense of community with your fellow LSD users is natural and good, but if you sever your relations with non-users, and look down on them as squares, you will become irrelevant, and your message will not be heard.

\* \* \*

## Let's Call It a Day

is the commonest of session mistakes, and perhaps the one least deserving of being called a game, since it so often results from ignorance, rather than from any dishonesty or evasion. It is simply the attempt to terminate the session too early.

An LSD session lasts at least 12 hours, more often 16. There comes a time between the fourth and sixth hours when the intensity of the experience drops sharply and the remaining hours are a kind of leveling out. This time has sometimes been called the *re-entry period*. The *re-entry period* retains the accelerated thoughts of the earlier parts of the session, with somewhat more visual distortion and somatic sensations, and less of the euphoria and flexibility of mood. It feels a lot more like the normal state than the earlier hours, but it is not the normal state. Most people who have not been told otherwise assume that the session is over when they reach this point around the fifth hour and try to go back to everyday activities, go out, eat dinner, or try to sleep.

This is a mistake, because rushing back to everyday activities tends to dissipate the insights of the session, and it also tends to be

depressing or a *bringdown*. Sleep is impossible, and premature attempts usually make you uncomfortable. Eating too early in the session can make you feel sick.

Actually some of the most valuable work of the session can be done during re-entry. This is the time when you can think over the insights of the session, from a vantage point somewhat closer to your usual state. In fact, whether your experience is merely an isolated event or is relevant to your life as a whole may depend largely on how you use your re-entry time.

Stay in one place, together with your session mates. You can talk more now than you did before, but periods of silence are still helpful. Sit quietly and meditate; don't become distracted. This takes patience, because re-entry hours pass very slowly. By the eleventh hour it is OK to eat a light meal or to go off by yourself if you want to. After sixteen hours you should go to bed and get some sleep. If you have difficulty sleeping at this time, a light dose of Librium or Phenobarbital will help. You will be somewhat high until you go to sleep.

\* \* \*

### A Few Tips

- A session is tiring enough without staying up all night. Get a good night's sleep and start in the morning.
- Shun mirrors. On LSD you probably look awful to yourself in the mirror, probably because your pupils are dilated, and you see all your pores. You don't really look that bad.
- Don't stare at a companion, just because his face is changing into a multitude of different forms. He doesn't know why you're staring.
- Respect the undrugged state—you have to live in it. Write your memoranda in a form that will make sense to you tomorrow.

To avoid bad session games:

- Stay in one place
- Don't talk too much
- Be considerate of your companions

\* \* \*

## So You've Had LSD

So you've had LSD. It was your own unique experience. You may be wondering whether various aspects of your session were typical or not. Undoubtedly some were and some weren't. Since you are a unique person, your experience was not quite like anybody else's. If, in the coming weeks, you find, talking it over with your friends, that something happened to you that nobody else is expressing, that, at any rate, is very typical.

For the next several days, you will experience a mood that is a little different than your usual one. If the session went well, you'll probably feel better than usual. But if the session was disappointing you may be depressed. If so you should be aware that this is an after-effect that will go away within about two days. The experience of an altered mood after a session lasts about as long as the physiological tolerance to LSD, and may quite possibly have a physical, as well as a psychological, basis.

You may be wondering whether you should take LSD again and, if so, how soon? I advise waiting at least three months. Why so long? Well, hopefully this session has given you a lot to think about. You should have time to work on integrating what you have learned into your everyday life. After you have lived with it for several months you can come back to LSD from a new point on your life path and find new messages and new meaning.

But if you take LSD too frequently it can become a disruptive force; instead of gaining strength and understanding, you may only become more confused. Also, the experience may lose its profundity, may become commonplace and ineffectual. In general, I find that the longer I wait for a session the more meaningful and helpful it is.

If this talk of meaning leaves you cold because your experience wasn't very meaningful, it may be that you got gypped on the dose, or it may be that your state of mind kept you from letting go. I'd still recommend waiting a few months before trying again.

I think most people, just after a session, realize intuitively that they should not turn on again soon—but sometimes they forget how they felt and do it anyway. Therefore you should make a decision now about how long you are going to wait and stick to it.

If you do take LSD again, your next session will be different from the first—in fact each following session will also be different.

There is something very special about a first session that is never quite repeated. Do not try to repeat or relive past sessions, but be open to what each new experience has to add to what you have learned.

*Now that you have had this experience, what do you do about it? People have been asking this question ever since psychedelics were discovered, and it has never really been answered. Do you go turn on everyone that you can (hoping that maybe they'll figure out what to do about it)? Do you emulate the hip crowd, adopting their psychedelic fashions and jargon? Should you become a monk? Take up Buddhism or astrology? To whom should you turn for advice?*

A complicating factor is that at the present time of writing (early 1967) the word *psychedelic* seems to be an adjective that sells soap. A great deal that has little relevance to the LSD experience goes under the name *psychedelic*. Don't be hasty to plunge into what somebody else calls *psychedelic* if it doesn't make sense in terms of your experience. Suspend judgment on it and see what sort of people are involved in it and where it is leading them. The same goes for cults that other LSD users may belong to. Cults and fads are transient. Try to distinguish them from that which is of lasting truth in your experience.

Because the use of LSD is a controversial social issue you will have to decide what part you will play in the social and legal conflicts over this issue. It may be my own bias, but I feel that everyone who owes something of value to LSD should take some part. There is something eroding to one's integrity about keeping silent and doing secretly what others are going to jail for. Of course you do not want to go to jail yourself and thus curtail the good you can do. It is necessary to learn the law in your area (from the statutes, not from rumor) and to learn for what people are prosecuted and for what they are not. One is not, for instance, prosecuted for writing or speaking out about his experience or the LSD issue in general. Some may choose to be prosecuted in order to make a test case, but this course of action is not for everyone, and if you are considering something of the sort you should plan it very carefully with the help of a lawyer.

The ways in which people incarnate their vision are as individual as their lives, and this book can go no further in telling you how to do it. You will find some of the answer in your sessions and in your life experiences between sessions. It may be as simple as living, or as difficult.

\* \* \* \* \*

## The Acid Makers of Denver

Published October 31, 2017 by *Westword*:  
[tinyurl.com/acid-makers-of-denver](http://tinyurl.com/acid-makers-of-denver)

*i.*

Louis Chance was afraid there was a body inside his house. It sure smelled like it: A rank odor was wafting out of a vent toward the rear of the ranch-style home that he rented out in southeast Denver. Suspiciously, all of the curtains had been closed, to block any view inside.

Chance had discovered the smell after he'd driven by the house and noticed that the front lawn was dying. He was annoyed that his tenants weren't taking care of the yard; since a leasing agent took care of renting the place, he'd never interacted with them. But now he parked, stepped onto the property, and rapped on the front door. No one answered. He tried his key and was surprised to find that the lock had been changed. He found the same thing with the back door—only there, he was overwhelmed by the odor.

Assuming the worst, Chance called the police. At 8:40 p.m. on June 23, 1968, two Denver police officers arrived at 1050 South Elmira Street. They concurred with the landlord's assessment: It smelled like there was a dead body inside the building. With Chance's go-ahead, the officers broke one of the windowpanes in the back door, and reached through the shattered glass to unlock it.

The upstairs of the house was clear.

But as the officers crept down a staircase into the basement, they encountered an unusual sight: dozens of cases stacked against a wall, empty trash-can-sized barrels, a sophisticated tool bench, plastic hoses that ran from a bathroom under two padlocked doors. That's where the smell seemed to be coming from.

The cops called for backup, and Denver Police Department detectives Jim Laurita and John Gray showed up to investigate. With Chance's permission, they busted through the padlocked doors, ready for anything.

They did not find a body.

Instead they found a laboratory. It was a sophisticated setup; the rooms contained flasks, tubes, beakers, mounted glassware, and containers of all shapes and sizes filled with chemicals. Both narcotics detectives, Laurita and Gray knew that they had just uncovered a massive drug lab. When they returned the following day with a signed search warrant, they cased the rest of the house and discovered letters, journals, and prescription bottles suggesting that three individuals lived inside the house.

On a search inventory list, they included this line item: “#23: Personal files of R. Timothy Scully.”

The name didn't mean anything to them at the time, but the DPD detectives would later learn that Tim Scully was one of the country's most important psychedelics manufacturers. A known associate of West Coast LSD impresario Owsley Stanley and the Grateful Dead, Scully was already being investigated by federal agents in California. No one knew that he had secretly moved his operation to Denver the year before, running a lab in a City Park neighborhood that had produced hundreds of thousands of hits of pure, crystalline LSD.

Today, fifty years after the Summer of Love, it's still a little-known fact that Denver had been home to two major LSD laboratories. Even though the operations were short-lived, they created significant repercussions—not just legally for their operators, but for the psychedelic movement as a whole.

*ii.*

Tim Scully first dropped acid—LSD in capsule form—on April 15, 1965, in his living room in Berkeley, California. He was twenty years old, and wasn't quite sure what he was in for.

After about an hour, he felt a tingling, euphoric sensation wash over him. Suddenly, patterns in the carpet came to life. A clock and other objects on the mantle moved before his eyes, swaying with a cosmic current he'd never known surrounded him. When Scully closed his eyes, paisley patterns were projected onto the back of his eyelids, in bright, intense colors that he didn't recognize.

It was as if a valve had opened in his brain, allowing him to perceive raw, sensory information from the outside world that a person normally misses.

He turned to his friend Don Douglas, wondering if he was

experiencing this, too?

Scully had known Douglas since kindergarten. After a stint at San Jose State University, where he'd studied Eastern philosophy, Douglas had moved in with his childhood friend. It was Douglas who'd first turned Scully on to pot, then to written explorations of mind-altering substances by writers like Aldous Huxley—*The Doors of Perception* and *Island* among them.

But the two really wanted to try psychedelics. Douglas had learned about LSD during a 1964 lecture at San Jose State by Richard Alpert; the Harvard psychologist had told students about his collaborations with another psychedelic pariah from Harvard, Dr. Timothy Leary.

At the time, lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) was only beginning to enter the pop-culture lexicon, even though the substance had been around for at least a decade, albeit in a secret capacity. Back in the 1950s, the United States intelligence community had caught wind that powerful, mind-altering substances were being produced by the Soviet Union. Fearing that countries behind the Iron Curtain were making LSD to use as a tactical weapon to incapacitate enemy soldiers in the field, the U.S. government funded research by the Eli Lilly Company, which produced LSD on an industrial scale and developed multiple manufacturing patents. Vague details on those patent documents would later allow enterprising citizens to figure out the chemistry behind LSD production.

As the acid took hold, Douglas confirmed that he was in just as deep as his friend. “It was like the universe with the lights turned on,” Douglas remembers.

The two spent much of the night sitting in front of the fireplace, slowly feeding logs into dancing flames. They only spoke occasionally, but both had an overwhelming sensation that there was a common consciousness shared by everyone on earth, an inexplicable, intense feeling of oneness that bonded everyone together.

Scully had no doubt: Taking acid was the most important thing he'd ever done.

The young man had never been particularly spiritual, especially when it came to organized religion. As he was growing up, he'd viewed the arbitrary distinctions between his mom's Protestant leanings and dad's Catholicism as canceling each other out. Instead, Scully thrived on science. Awkward and bookish in elementary school, he was called “mad

scientist” by kids on the playground. As he grew older, teasing turned to contempt for a “know-it-all.” Friends were few, and relationships with the opposite sex were a foreign concept.

“I think I have a touch of Asperger’s, although no one’s ever formally diagnosed me,” Scully says.

Yet there was no denying he was brilliant.

During high school, Scully persuaded administrators to give him a spare classroom where he could build a linear accelerator designed to bombard mercury with neutrons. It was scientific alchemy; he hoped to cause a specific isotope of mercury to capture a neutron and turn into gold.

“Then the school realized that the accelerator was going to produce radiation, and parents and students freaked out and encouraged me to go to a university,” Scully recalls with a laugh. His transfer to the University of California, Berkeley was approved while he was still a junior in high school.

But despite Scully’s academic rise, he felt unsettled and directionless. The world appeared to be unraveling around him. His dad, who worked for the military, terrified him with stories about nuclear winters; his father’s job called for using Bay Area weather forecasts to figure out where nuclear fallout would go in the event of a Soviet missile strike on California. At the same time, President Lyndon Johnson was sending more and more troops and bombs into Vietnam.

Scully’s LSD trip didn’t just expose him to another realm of existence, it gave him a mission. As he later wrote: “I saw the world as a place where most people lived lives of quiet desperation, working in jobs they hated to earn rewards that turned out to be tasteless and unsatisfying. Hypocrisy and hatred, double-dealing and cheating seemed to be the way of life in the business world. Ecologically, the world was clearly headed for disaster . . . . Our technological power to control (and destroy) our environment and fellow humans was increasing, at an explosive rate, but our understanding of ourselves, our relationships to each other and the universe around us, was not . . . . This was the gap that I believed psychedelics could help close.”

Douglas had similar thoughts. As the two came down from their LSD trip, they determined that they would find a way to make as much LSD as possible and give it all away, for free, to whoever wanted it. They were going to save the world with psychedelics.

They had no illusions that this task would be easy. While LSD

was still legal in 1965, Scully figured it wouldn’t remain so forever. “I knew I was going to have to break some laws and do things that weren’t right for this higher cause,” he explains. “It was that sense of breaking eggs to make omelets.”

Scully had a basic understanding of organic chemistry, but knew he needed to learn more in order to produce high-quality acid. The bookshelves at UC Berkeley’s library provided a good start, but his real break would come through meeting an LSD legend, the man who’d created the first acid he’d taken.

The introduction came through one of Scully’s other roommates, Diana Nason. She’d met Augustus Owsley Stanley III at a party thrown by Ken Kesey, the eclectic writer of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, who was hanging with a group of psychedelic evangelists who called themselves the Merry Pranksters. The Pranksters didn’t believe in privacy and had taken off all the doors leading into bedrooms and bathrooms in Kesey’s house. But Nason and Stanley managed to find a closet that still had a door, and that’s where they got to know each other.

Not long after, Stanley came calling at Scully’s house in Berkeley. He’d learned some intriguing information from Nason. “She’d told him that she had this landlord with a crazy idea of wanting to turn the world on to LSD, and he was looking for lysergic acid,” recalls Scully.

Stanley was rather impressed by Scully’s earnestness, but told him he was taking a break from LSD production. All he could focus on at the moment was a band he’d heard at a Merry Pranksters event: the Grateful Dead. “He’d had the experience of psychically linking up with them,” says Scully.

Skilled at electronics work, Stanley was offered a job as the Grateful Dead’s sound engineer, which he accepted. Soon after, he and his principal romantic partner, Melissa Cargill, invited Scully to their home to take LSD and meet these Grateful Dead guys.

It was a fun acid trip. Stanley brought out acoustic ceiling tiles and had everyone paint bright paisley patterns on the tiles that he could glue overhead to create a psychedelic ceiling. “It was a nice and relaxing way to get to know the band members,” Scully says. He was especially drawn to the friendliness of Jerry Garcia.

“And so I agreed to go on the road with Owsley and the Grateful Dead,” Scully continues. “I looked at it as an extended job

interview for what I really wanted to do: work in [Stanley's] LSD lab.”

*iii.*

By February 1966, Scully and Douglas had become roadies. They followed the Grateful Dead to Los Angeles, where Stanley rented a place in Watts that became known as the “Pink House”: a three-story pink-stucco mansion that had previously been used by a religious sect, and contained built-in confessionals.

Living there was like joining a circus, Scully says. It was all an adventure for the shy, awkward introvert. Prior to meeting the band, he'd been a virgin—but that was a tough status to maintain when you were hanging around the Grateful Dead and dropping acid once a week.

Scully soon began advocating free love. He took a woman named Donna to the Pink House and, after she slept with Scully, she made her way through most of the band members.

That was perfectly fine with Scully—until he and everyone else in the house got the clap. “I ended up paying the doctor bills because I was the one who brought her into the house,” Scully recalls.

Douglas, meanwhile, developed a reputation for being able to drive the band's sixteen-foot GMC truck through Los Angeles while high on 600 micrograms of acid. (A typical dose is 100 to 200 micrograms.)

Primarily, though, the young men focused on pleasing their mentor, Stanley. He was a quirky fellow, full of odd notions, such as forcing everyone in the Pink House to go on an all-meat diet. He was obsessed with perfecting the Grateful Dead's live sound and spent weeks buying hi-fi audio equipment, experimenting with large PA speakers, and rewiring gear to use low-impedance signals to reduce feedback.

An autodidact, when Stanley became interested in something, he'd find out everything he could about the subject, often giving lectures to whoever was within earshot, whether they wanted them or not. And what increasingly interested him were “acid tests”—large social gatherings where the Merry Pranksters would dose everyone with psychedelics, often with the Grateful Dead providing the entertainment.

Scully and Douglas were on hand to witness one of the more infamous of these, the Watts Acid Test, which took place in a warehouse in South Los Angeles on February 12, 1966.

While most of their experiences with LSD had been positive, they remember becoming concerned as they watched Stanley pour liquid

LSD into one of several garbage cans full of Kool-Aid. The garbage cans had no signs on them indicating that they were “electric”—meaning that they contained LSD—and Douglas watched a family with kids come in off the street and naively consume some of the Kool-Aid.

“It became apparent that there were people freaking out,” remembers Scully. “And the iconic freakout was the ‘Who Cares Girl.’”

In the middle of the warehouse, a woman began screaming, “Who cares?! Who cares?! Who cares?!” Rather than comfort her—or care—some of the Pranksters shoved a microphone into her face.

“Don and I agreed that that was deeply unethical. That was like raping people,” recalls Scully. At that point, he realized he might need to clarify his mission somewhat: A person needed to be a stable vessel and voluntarily agree to take LSD in order to have a positive outcome; you couldn't just give it to unsuspecting people.

But at the same time, the acid tests could be transcendent.

“There was a phenomenon that happened at acid tests—when things went well—where many of the people who were high would mentally link up to form a single additional entity, like an additional consciousness,” explains Scully. “I believe that a lot of people who became Deadheads were people who linked up with the band, and they had that psychic connection and wanted to experience it again and again. There was something magical about it, no doubt about it.”

By July 1966, Stanley needed more money to continue facilitating such far-out experiences. To raise capital, he decided to set up another LSD lab. He still had many of the necessary chemicals in storage—which was fortunate, as those chemicals were becoming increasingly difficult to buy—especially the main component of LSD, lysergic acid.

This was the moment that Scully and Douglas had been waiting for. As it turned out, Stanley had been monitoring how well they handled certain tasks while high on acid, and they passed his test: Stanley determined that Scully and Douglas could be his lab assistants, at a salary of \$500 a week.

Along with Cargill, the trio set up shop in a rental house in Point Richmond, north of Oakland, in California's Bay Area. As Stanley laid out the laboratory, Scully was amazed by the man's genius. Since Stanley had first manufactured LSD in Berkeley two years earlier, he'd figured out the difficult step of purifying acid using one of the methods that government researchers had patented, the Garbrecht method.

And he'd worked out other details, some through careful study, others through trial and error. For instance, his lab was lit with yellow bug lights rather than incandescent bulbs, since regular bulbs emit some ultraviolet rays and, when LSD is exposed to UV, it turns into lumi-LSD, which is weak and undesirable.

LSD manufacturing also involves a lot of solvent stripping—boiling off unwanted chemicals such as methanol and chloroform. A naïve chemist would use heat to strip solvents, but Stanley figured out that heat caused LSD to decompose. So he employed glass contraptions known as vacuum flash evaporators to reduce the pressure on the chemicals, which in turn lowered their boiling points.

In some cases, he was boiling chemicals at the temperature of cold tap water. Stanley also devised a “recycling loop,” after discovering that each conversion of lysergic acid produced 88 percent “normal LSD”—what was desired—and 12 percent undesirable, “iso-LSD.” By running the loop over and over, he could convert almost all of his lysergic acid into pure LSD.

Scully soaked up all the information he could. Once production was under way, he quickly learned that running an LSD lab was a 24/7 operation, since so many processes needed to happen simultaneously. To handle the demands, the team worked in shifts. “I was able to step in and handle parts of the process while [Stanley] and Melissa were sleeping,” says Scully. “And Don would get groceries and dry ice and so on.”

Another thing Scully learned: It was impossible to avoid getting high while making LSD.

“Once you start making acid, unless you take extraordinary measures, which we never did, then you’re going to get high,” he says. “It tends to get in the air and on your clothes. But what happens is that you rapidly build up a tolerance. So you’re not hallucinating violently. You’re not even that aware that you’re in an altered state unless you talk to someone who’s not in the lab. But there was definitely an electric feeling. There was a sense that we were doing something to change the world in a positive way.”

Douglas had a name for this constant exposure to LSD: “Acid Makers’ Queasy.”

By the time they’d processed all of the raw lysergic acid, Stanley and his apprentices had 100 grams of pure LSD, or nearly 360,000 individual doses at the strength Stanley preferred them. That left just

one final step: divvying up the product.

Stanley decided to switch his delivery method from that of previous batches. Rather than pack LSD in a powder formula inside capsules, which could result in inconsistent doses depending on how tightly the powder was packed, Stanley bought a tableting machine, which compressed carefully diluted LSD powder into a pill-like form with consistent strengths. And it was all legal, more or less.

On October 3, 1966, the *Los Angeles Times* ran a story about Stanley under the headline: “‘Mr. LSD’ Makes Million Without Breaking the Law.”

“What kind of man is he?” the article asked. “By reputation, he is a drifter, a dapper ladies’ man, and a professional student. One of his two ex-wives calls him ‘just a little boy afraid to grow up—a Peter Pan.’”

But suddenly the legal landscape changed. That month, California became the first state to declare LSD illegal, and it became nearly impossible to obtain lysergic acid. Federal agents also began monitoring orders for other chemicals that went into LSD. That’s what brought Scully to the feds’ attention on December 8, 1966, when he drove his green GMC truck to Nurnberg Chemical to pick up supplies. As he’d find out years later in court testimony, the stock boy who helped load his truck that day was actually an undercover drug agent named Orve Hendrix.

Scully and Douglas soon noticed that they were being trailed all over the Bay Area. The feds weren’t exactly hard to spot; they tended to pair up in unmarked cars, with one agent driving and the other manning a radio. In sections of town with gridded streets, they’d employ multiple cars, with one driving north-south and another east-west.

But it quickly became apparent that the agents weren’t going to pull over Scully or Douglas; they were hoping to follow them back to a laboratory.

Losing the agents became a constant dance. Scully and Douglas started employing counter-surveillance techniques: jotting down license-plate numbers, driving on side streets and, most important of all, never going to a lab or tableting facility unless they were certain they weren’t being followed.

Nevertheless, the heat increased. Having learned Stanley’s secrets for LSD manufacturing, Scully was itching to set up another LSD lab and continue his mission of turning on the world. He realized that the best course of action might be to relocate production away

from California, in a state where LSD was still legal.

He convinced Douglas to join him on an interstate scouting trip. They managed to evade the feds and travel to Seattle, where they bought a used station wagon that they used to drive east through Washington into Idaho and Wyoming. The pair had envisioned setting up a lab in an extremely rural, isolated location, but they realized that wouldn't work for two reasons.

"In Wyoming, we learned that cowboys don't like hippies. We stuck out like sore thumbs," says Scully.

The other reason? To run certain processes in the lab, they'd need plentiful supplies of dry ice—which were only available in big cities. So Douglas and Scully turned south, setting their sights on Denver.

The moment they arrived in Colorado's capital in mid-December 1966, they knew they'd found their spot. While the Mile High City was seeing increasing numbers of young vagabonds around lower downtown and the railyards, some of whom formed communes in abandoned buildings, Scully and Douglas wanted to keep a distance from their most likely clients.

Instead, they were drawn to quieter areas. "Denver felt really good," recalls Scully. "It was a beautiful city and, when we were driving around near City Park, we saw that lots of houses had basements, which we also liked."

After flipping through advertisements in the *Denver Post*, the pair signed a lease for a house at East 26th Avenue and Ash Street. Using false names, they told the leasing agent that they would be conducting scientific work in the basement as part of a river-flow testing project for the Bureau of Reclamation.

Lab location secured, the two still faced the daunting task of moving their lab equipment from California to Denver without attracting the attention of federal agents.

Sure enough, no sooner had they loaded a van full of equipment than they spotted a car with federal agents hot on their tail. But Douglas had a plan. He knew of an intersection in the Bay Area with a short stoplight cycle and heavy cross traffic, and figured he could lose the tail if he timed things just right. So he drove up to the intersection, agents right behind, then floored it as the light turned from yellow to red. The agents were stuck at the light.

Scully was elated. They'd successfully evaded their pursuers. In

fact, even though he and various associates would make numerous trips between California and Colorado, they were never followed to Denver.

*iv.*

Scully and Douglas moved into the house near City Park just before Christmas 1966. It took some time to retrofit the basement into a laboratory—building shelves, mounting "monkey bars" onto which they could clamp glassware, installing ventilation fans—, but, at the end of February 1967, Scully reported to Stanley that the Denver lab was ready.

Although Stanley had provided the funds for the lab, he stalled. He wanted Scully to produce another psychedelic that was still legal at the time—STP, which some said stood for "Serenity, Tranquility, and Peace"—before he'd agree to bring lysergic acid out to Colorado for another batch of LSD.

Scully was no fan of STP, having had a negative trip during which he hallucinated that he was trapped in a war zone. But he was willing to jump through that hoop while Stanley and Cargill collected their last lysergic acid from a safe-deposit box in Phoenix. That took a while, since Cargill had either forgotten the name of the bank or the name on her account; she finally found the box in May 1967.

Making LSD in Denver was very similar to making LSD at the Point Richmond lab. Acid Makers' Queasy kept everyone wired and focused, but Scully was just as high on the idea that they were pumping out a miracle substance that would save the world. With Stanley and Cargill's help, he and Douglas had converted all the lysergic acid into pure LSD by early September. The output this time was even larger than before: 300 grams, or about a million doses of LSD.

Stanley and Scully took the acid back to California for tableting. As always, the heat was on as soon as Stanley or anyone associated with him showed their faces in the Bay Area.

It was getting to be too much for Douglas. In a private meeting with Scully and Stanley, he begged them to take a hiatus. They could still pursue their mission, he said, but they should work normal jobs for a while until the feds grew bored of watching them. Then they could resume manufacturing LSD without so much pressure.

Scully and Stanley refused to slow things down.

"I'm out, then," Douglas remembers telling them. "And I'm not just out for the next lab. I mean I'm out."

As it turned out, Douglas made his exit just before things started going downhill.

On December 20, 1967, Scully noticed that there were ten times as many federal agents milling around his house in Berkeley as usual. He called Stanley, warning that his tableting facility might be compromised.

Sure enough, it was busted the next morning, and 67 grams of LSD that had come from the Denver lab were confiscated. Stanley was arrested.

Although he made bail, the bust initiated a long, drawn-out legal process that would consume him for years. That's when Stanley decided to turn his back on acid production for good, focusing exclusively on doing sound work for the Grateful Dead.

With his mentor out of the LSD game, Scully was on his own, which meant he had to go further afield for financing and chemicals. In order to find some of the latter, especially lysergic acid, he started making trips to Europe with another psychedelic missionary named Nick Sand.

Theirs was a marriage of convenience. Although Sand professed to have the same zeal for LSD, their personalities were polar opposites. "I got the impression that he was an adrenaline junkie of sorts," recalls Scully. "He was much more into taking risks." And that included hiring drug smugglers to transport various chemicals through way stations like Montreal.

While Sand took over tableting operations in California, Scully decided to set up a second lab in Denver. Now that Douglas was out, he recruited his then-girlfriend, Ruth Pahkala, and a street hustler named Rory Condon to help him.

Once again, they scanned the classifieds and located an ideal house, this one at 1050 South Elmira Street, just blocks from Aurora. On February 26, 1968, Condon signed a lease under the alias "John R. Roberts," claiming he was a representative of "Western Research and Development."

The trio remodeled the basement of the rental house, occasionally using the lab equipment for side projects like making DMT or cannabis extracts, while Scully worked to secure the chemicals needed for LSD.

In June, after he left on another scouting trip to Europe, Pahkala and Condon decided to kill time in California. As they left

the Denver lab, they noticed that the water spigots outside the house weren't working—a pump inside a well on the property had broken—but they figured that repairs could wait until they returned.

When Scully returned from Europe on June 22, he was surprised to find Pahkala and Condon in Berkeley. When they told him about the broken water pump and unwatered lawn, he had what he calls an "oh, shit" moment. "You have to get back there tonight and get the pump fixed, because the landlord is going to freak out!" Scully exclaimed.

Today, Scully believes that if Pahkala and Condon had followed his instructions and flown back that night, they would have been there to greet Chance, who would never have discovered the smell—and the police would not have been called in. (Scully thinks the odor could have come from spilled dimethylamine—one of the chemical components of DMT—though he has no idea how the spill might have occurred in the usually immaculate lab.)

But Condon and Pahkala did not fly back to Denver. Scully discovered that when he called the laboratory two days later, on June 24, and got a strange voice on the other end of the line.

"Scully residence," the voice said.

The real Scully hung up immediately. He knew that the lab had been busted, since the property hadn't been rented in his name.

Two days later, his lab assistants finally arrived at the house. As Condon pulled up, he noticed an unmarked van parked on the street. Pahkala, sensing something was off, told him, "No, don't stop!" But Condon went ahead and pulled into the driveway.

As they entered the house, they were surprised to hear Johnny Cash's "Folsom Prison Blues" playing on the basement hi-fi.

Detective John Gray, who happened to be inside the home inventorying items, was alerted that two strangers had just walked through the front door. After identifying himself, the detective asked Condon, "Do you live here?"

"Yes."

"What's your name?"

"Rory Condon."

Gray then turned to the woman and asked the same.

"Ruth Pahkala," she answered meekly.

Gray recognized the names from letters and journals he'd collected around the house, and he placed the pair in handcuffs right

away.

By the time Scully learned what had happened from his lawyer, Al Matthews, he realized that he'd made some grave errors himself. While he was traveling in Europe, he'd missed the news that Colorado had made LSD illegal in early 1968. This state's law was even stricter than California's, with LSD production a felony punishable by up to fourteen years in prison compared to California's five.

Freaking out, Scully shackled up in a cabin near Eureka, California, where he could collect his thoughts. As part of that process, he wrote a list of all the things he wouldn't be able to do if he decided to live the rest of his life as a fugitive.

It included things like using his real name, visiting close friends or relatives, and subscribing to his favorite magazines (even under an alias), because it could give away his location. "I made a longer and longer list of things that I couldn't do, and finally came to the conclusion that being a fugitive wasn't for me," he recalls.

Still, he elected not to turn himself in after he had his lawyer check to see if there was a warrant out for his arrest in Colorado. Matthews didn't find one (but only because the warrant was sealed under a grand jury indictment).

Assuming that he still had time, Scully decided to set up another LSD laboratory to raise money for Pakhala and Condon's bail and legal defense. He'd lost his glassware during the bust but still had most of the raw chemicals—"the hard stuff to get," as he puts it today—in California.

He also had an eager partner in Sand, who'd been doing tableting work and hounding Scully to teach him the secrets behind LSD manufacturing. Together they set up a lab in Windsor, California, where they made what would become the most famous acid of all time. They called it Orange Sunshine.

The little orange pills were distributed through a network of ragtag bohemians called the Brotherhood of Eternal Love. The sales generated a significant income—enough for Scully to get Condon and Pakhala out of jail and cover their legal costs.

The money that was left over would later go toward Scully's own defense.

v.

When Condon and Pakhala went to court in July 1968,

detectives Laurita and Gray figured they had a slam dunk.

"There was no doubt about who was there in the house," says Laurita today. "It was the most elaborate lab I ever saw in Denver."

The prosecution, led by a passionate deputy district attorney named Irving Ettenberg, was also getting a boost from the federal government, which was providing expert witnesses, including a chemist with the Food and Drug Administration. "We felt good about the trial throughout. We had ample evidence, and it impressed the jury," remembers Laurita. The two were convicted.

Laurita and Gray were even more ecstatic when Scully was arrested, on May 26, 1969, at an airfield in California, where he was having work done on a plane he owned. He faced a possible sentence of 56 years in prison with four felony charges (fourteen years for each charge) stemming from the Denver lab.

Through the late '60s, Laurita and Gray were the DPD's main weapon against psychedelics, which they considered a growing and existential threat. "They were a danger. No one could say that there weren't any permanent ramifications when someone used or abused them," says Laurita, who today works as a private eye. "Parents would come in with their children whacked out, and you'd sit there and wonder what the future is for them."

Using the alias "Sonny," Laurita used to go undercover—complete with a wig and a fake moustache—and bust people for LSD possession at venues like the Family Dog, where the Grateful Dead played, and some of the seedier downtown clubs.

But the detectives' satisfaction over the South Elmira drug bust wouldn't last.

Scully, Pakhala, and Condon all appealed their cases, based on a Denver ordinance that their lawyer found stipulating that even in the case of a suspected dead body, a search warrant was necessary to enter a property without a tenant's permission. The Colorado Supreme Court agreed to hear the appeal and, in October 1971, determined that the Denver police had conducted an illegal search of the property at 1050 South Elmira.

"To this day, I can't figure out what the Supreme Court was thinking," complains Gray. "We were really frustrated—and so ticked off that we had to give them back all that stuff to make LSD."

He points out that the responding officers had the owner's permission to enter the property, and even if a dead body doesn't require

medical attention, that doesn't mean there isn't someone alive inside who might need help.

"It was jarring from the standpoint that there was no common sense applied in the appeal process," Laurita adds.

Scully calls the Colorado Supreme Court's decision "my one free trial." Throughout the Denver court proceedings, he was out on bond, traveling back and forth between Colorado and California, where the feds were still pursuing him because of his production of Orange Sunshine. They were getting better at tracking him; there were times he couldn't lose the tail. He spilled LSD on his skin in a lab accident and began hallucinating that federal agents were camped out in trees, watching his every move.

But the feds weren't the only reason he was ready to turn away from psychedelics. "The psychedelic scene was getting darker and darker by 1969," he explains. "There were fewer smiling faces on the street, and more people who looked like they were strung out on hard drugs."

While he was giving up his original mission, Scully was excited about another, legal outlet: designing "biofeedback" instruments that measured brain waves and muscle contractions.

But he couldn't escape his past. A federal task force investigated an accountant that Sand and Scully had shared, as well as the financial records of their wealthy friend Billy Hitchcock, who had financed many of the acid labs after Stanley backed out of LSD production in 1967. In April 1973, Sand and Scully were indicted by a federal grand jury and charged with income-tax evasion and conspiracy to produce and distribute LSD.

During their trial, which began in October that year, they drew the ire of Judge Samuel Conti when they lied on the stand, saying they'd been trying to make a close relative of LSD: ALD-52, which was still legal. They even had a friend make some ALD-52, then pretend to have dug it up from an old stash that Scully and Sand had "buried." The tablets were ready just before Scully took the witness stand, so he didn't have a chance to try them ahead of time.

When the government's chemist tested the substance, it presented as LSD.

"That's when we learned, boys and girls, that ALD-52 is very unstable and will decompose into LSD at the blink of an eye," says Scully, who adds that he regrets lying to the judge.

Scully was sentenced to twenty years in federal prison, and

Sand received fifteen years.

They wound up sharing a cell. Although their personalities still grated, both appreciated that they hadn't testified against each other.

*vi.*

McNeil Island Prison was a maximum-security penitentiary in Washington State where people with long federal sentences were sent. Many of them had violent pasts, including an Eskimo who'd eaten his family. Sometimes inmates would detach the metal handle from mop buckets and beat rivals to death with them. "There's someone getting piped," Scully would think when he heard screaming at night.

But Scully's time at McNeil Island was remarkably short. Just before he entered the prison, his reporting officer had introduced him to Robin Wright, a woman who had cerebral palsy and a difficult time communicating, since she could only control motion in one of her knees.

Drawing on his expertise with electronics, Scully saw that he could design a button-and-computer program—sort of an early version of autocorrect spelling on smartphones—that would allow Wright to communicate much more efficiently.

Wright's family believed in Scully; they raised money to buy computer parts and lobbied the prison to allow him to work on the device. Not only did Scully ultimately build the computer for Wright, but he also designed a new computerized inventory system for federal prisons.

With the recommendation of the warden, Scully's sentence was dropped from twenty to ten years. Then, against Judge Conti's wishes, Scully was given an early parole hearing. The judge offered a furious statement for the record: "I have been involved in the law for thirty years, and I have never in my life seen any case that was so damaging to society as this case was. A man who was intelligent—I knew he was intelligent, everybody knows he was intelligent—but that doesn't mean, because he is intelligent, we are now going to give him the Congressional Medal of Honor, which apparently he is one step from receiving. He may be the outstanding man of the year in your book, but he is not the outstanding man of the year in my book."

Scully was released from prison on May 29, 1979. He'd spent just three and a half years behind bars.

In the nearly four decades since then, Scully has been successful in a variety of fields, including computer programming and making biofeedback instruments. Although he says he hasn't touched LSD in all that time, he can't escape his reputation as a psychedelic revolutionary. LSD enthusiasts sometimes reach out to him, occasionally asking chemistry advice, which Scully refuses to give.

In response to the continued interest, though, in the 1990s Scully began compiling an extensive record on psychedelics, which he calls the "History of Underground LSD Manufacturing." He's located and scanned over 50,000 pages of primary-source documents, including court transcripts and newspaper articles, and has over 13,000 entries in a computerized file directory detailing specific labs, busts, agents, and more involved in the psychedelic movement.

He plans to eventually donate the project to a university, but is currently using his research to write a narrative memoir with the working title *Trying to Save the World*.

Scully has also been featured in documentaries—most recently, *The Sunshine Makers*, which was released in 2016, and focuses on his and Sand's strange but fruitful relationship.

Unlike Scully, Sand went on to make more LSD. While released on an appeal bond in 1976, he went on the lam in Canada and India, producing more psychedelics, until he was caught in 1996. He passed away on April 24 of this year, at the age of 75.

Today, Scully has conflicting feelings about psychedelics and the role he played in their proliferation. Over the years, he's corresponded with people who were never the same after bad acid trips. "That's hard," he says. "It's clear that as much good as we were trying to do, we also managed to do some harm."

He now believes that his illegal production of LSD hindered valuable studies, including ways it might be used to help people with conditions like PTSD or autism. "We bear a significant responsibility for setting the research back forty years or more," Scully says. That research is just beginning again, spurred in part by growing trends like microdosing—taking regular, small amounts of LSD.

In retrospect, he sees that his original mission of spreading LSD around the globe was deeply flawed.

"The bad thing about scattering it to the four winds the way

that we did is that there was no control to keep people who shouldn't be given LSD access to it, like very young children, adolescents, and teenagers," Scully explains. "With hindsight, if we get to the point—and I hope we do—where people can legally take LSD for spiritual exploration, I think that it should be treated at least as carefully as liquor is. People should be adults before they have access to it. Their egos should be fully formed, their brains mature enough, so that you're not dissolving your ego to [the point that you're not] able to recover in a safe way."

But Cosmo Fielding, director of *The Sunshine Makers*, thinks that Scully is being too hard on himself. "I don't think he should take any personal blame, because if it wasn't him who was going to be making LSD, it was someone else," Fielding says. "Tim did his best to keep it out of the criminal underworld . . . and keep it as a spiritual tool for growth and enlightenment."

In fact, Fielding believes that the activities of Sand and Scully, including the Denver labs, played a positive role. "They were fueling the global psychedelic revolution, and if you look at the impact that the widespread psychedelic use of that period had on society, it's profound," he says.

"Before the 1960s, no one had long hair, no one had sex before marriage, no one knew who the Dalai Lama was. If you were a vegetarian you were a complete freak, no one knew what yoga was . . . and so all of these things that we take for granted, including freedoms and expressions and things that enrich one's life today, were all represented from the hard-fought battles by these guys. And Nick and Tim were right at the center of that movement. They produced the most widely distributed and highest-quality psychedelics of the psychedelic revolution."

\* \* \* \* \*

*Joe Goodden*

## The Beatles and LSD

Published on The Beatles Bible:  
[tinyurl.com/beatles-and-ld](http://tinyurl.com/beatles-and-ld)

### The First LSD Trip: London

While The Beatles were no strangers to drugs prior to 1965, their introduction to LSD caused a major shift in their music and personalities, as well as in the public perception of them. The event was later termed the “Dental Experience” by George Harrison, and it had a profound effect on all those present.

The precise date of this first encounter is unknown, although it’s likely to have been in March or April 1965. It *is* known, however, that it took place at Flat 1, 2 Strathearn Place, London, in the home of 34-year-old cosmetic dentist John Riley.

Riley invited John and Cynthia Lennon, and George Harrison and Pattie Boyd to dinner. After the meal he gave them coffee laced with LSD, which at the time was little-known and still legal.

*He laid it on George, me and our wives without telling us at a dinner party at his house. He was a friend of George’s, and our dentist at the time. He just put it in our coffee or something. He didn’t know what it was, it was just, “It’s all the thing,” with the middle-class London swingers. They had all heard about it and didn’t know it was different from pot or pills. And they gave it to us, and he was saying, “I advise you not to leave,” and we thought he was trying to keep us for an orgy in his house and we didn’t want to know.*

—John Lennon, 1971, *Lennon Remembers*.

After the meal the five, along with Riley’s 22-year-old girlfriend Cyndy Bury, adjourned from the flat’s small dining room into the lounge. On the mantelpiece six sugar cubes had been carefully lined up. The cubes, each of which contained a dose of LSD, were slipped into the guests’ coffees.

Riley’s LSD supply had been manufactured at a farmhouse in Wales. His intention to keep his guests at the apartment backfired when they insisted on leaving for the Pickwick Club at 15-18 Great Newport Street.

*Later that night we were going to a London nightclub called the Pickwick Club. It was a little restaurant with a small stage where some friends of ours were playing. Klaus Voormann, Gibson Kemp (who became Rory Storm’s drummer after we stole Ringo) and a guy called Paddy. They had a little trio.*

*After dinner I said to John, “Let’s go—they’re going to be on soon,” and John said “OK,” but the dentist was saying, “Don’t go; you should stay here.” And then he said, “Well, at least finish your coffee first.” So we finished our coffee and after a while I said again, “Come on, it’s getting late—we’d better go.” The dentist said something to John and John turned to me and said, “We’ve had LSD.”*

*I just thought, “Well, what’s that? So what? Let’s go!”*

*This fella was still asking us to stay and it all became a bit seedy—it felt as if he was trying to get something happening in his house; that there was some reason he didn’t want us to go. In fact, he had obtained some lysergic acid diethylamide 25. It was, at the time, an unrestricted medication—I seem to recall that I’d heard vaguely about it, but I didn’t really know what it was, and we didn’t know we were taking it. The bloke had put it in our coffee: mine, John’s, Cynthia’s and Pattie’s. He didn’t take it. He had never had it himself. I’m sure he thought it was an aphrodisiac. I remember his girlfriend had enormous breasts and I think he thought that there was going to be a big gang-bang and that he was going to get to shag everybody. I really think that was his motive.*

*So the dentist said, “OK, leave your car here. I’ll drive you and then you can come back later.” I said, “No, no. We’ll drive.” And we all got in my car and he came as well, in his car. We got to the nightclub, parked and went in.*

*We'd just sat down and ordered our drinks when suddenly I feel the most incredible feeling come over me. It was something like a very concentrated version of the best feeling I'd ever had in my whole life.*

*It was fantastic. I felt in love, not with anything or anybody in particular, but with everything. Everything was perfect, in a perfect light, and I had an overwhelming desire to go round the club telling everybody how much I loved them—people I'd never seen before.*

*One thing led to another, then suddenly it felt as if a bomb had made a direct hit on the nightclub and the roof had been blown off: "What's going on here?" I pulled my senses together and I realised that the club had actually closed—all the people had gone, they'd put the lights on, and the waiters were going round bashing the tables and putting the chairs on top of them. We thought, "Oops, we'd better get out of here!"*

—George Harrison, 2000, *Anthology*.

From the Pickwick Club the party went on to the Ad Lib on 7 Leicester Place, a popular destination among London's stars. They had arranged to meet Ringo Starr there.

*We went out to the Ad Lib and these discotheques and there was incredible things going on. This guy [Riley] came with us, he was nervous, he didn't know what was going on. We were going crackers. It was insane going around London on it.*

*When we entered the club, we thought it was on fire. And then we thought it was a premiere, but it was just an ordinary light outside. We thought, "Shit, what's going on here?" And we were cackling in the street, and then people were shouting, "Let's break a window." We were just insane. We were just out of our heads.*

*We finally got in the lift and we all thought there was a fire in the lift. It was just a little red light, and we were all screaming—it was hysterical. We all arrived on the floor, 'cause this was a discotheque that was up a building.*

*The lift stops and the door opens and we're all going "Aaahhhh" [loud scream], and we just see that it's the club, and then we walk in, sit down, and the table's elongating. I think we went to eat before that, where the table went this long, just like I'd read somebody—who is it, Blake, is it?—somebody describing the effects of the opium in the old days. And I thought, "Fuck, it's happening."*

*And then we went to the Ad Lib and all that. And then some singer came up to me and said, "Can I sit next to you?" And I was going, [loudly] "Only if you don't talk," 'cause I just couldn't think.*

—John Lennon, 1971, *Lennon Remembers*.

When the Ad Lib Club closed in the early hours of the following morning, George Harrison drove the others home in Pattie's orange Mini Cooper S, which he had given to her as a present.

*It was daylight and I drove everyone home—I was driving a Mini with John and Cynthia and Pattie in it. I seem to remember we were doing 18 miles an hour and I was really concentrating—because some of the time I just felt normal and then, before I knew where I was, it was all crazy again. Anyway, we got home safe and sound, and somewhere down the line John and Cynthia got home. I went to bed and lay there for, like, three years.*

—George Harrison, 2000, *Anthology*.

John Lennon revealed more about the journey to George's in his 1971 interview with *Rolling Stone* magazine.

*George somehow or another managed to drive us home in his Mini. We were going about ten miles an hour, but it seemed like a thousand. And Pattie was saying, "Let's jump out and play football, there's these big rugby poles" and things like that. I was getting all this sort of hysterical jokes coming out, like with speed, because I was always on that, too.*

*George was going, "Don't make me laugh!" Oh God! It was just terrifying. But it was fantastic. I did some drawings at the time—*

*I've got them somewhere—of four faces and “we all agree with you,” things like that. I gave them to Ringo; I've lost the originals. I did a lot of drawing that night—just like that.*

*And then George's house seemed to be just like a big submarine. I was driving it—they all went to bed and I was carrying on on me own—it seemed to float above his wall, which was eighteen foot, and I was driving it.*

—John Lennon, 1971, *Lennon Remembers*.

Lennon's wife Cynthia remembered the occasion less fondly:

*John and I weren't capable of getting back to Kenwood from there, so the four of us sat up for the rest of the night as the walls moved, the plants talked, other people looked like ghouls and time stood still. It was horrific: I hated the lack of control and not knowing what was going on or what would happen next.*

—Cynthia Lennon, 2005, *John*.

George Harrison later claimed that the shared experience of LSD brought him and John Lennon closer together.

*After taking acid together, John and I had a very interesting relationship. That I was younger or I was smaller was no longer any kind of embarrassment with John. Paul still says, “I suppose we looked down on George because he was younger.” That is an illusion people are under. It's nothing to do with how many years old you are, or how big your body is. It's down to what your greater consciousness is and if you can live in harmony with what's going on in creation.*

*John and I spent a lot of time together from then on and I felt closer to him than all the others, right through until his death. As Yoko came into the picture, I lost a lot of personal contract with John; but on the odd occasion I did see him, just by the look in his eyes I felt we were connected.*

—George Harrison, 2000, *Anthology*.

Although Cynthia Lennon only had two subsequent

experiences with LSD after the “Dental Experience,” her husband became a regular user. John Lennon's infatuation with the drug eventually created distance between the couple.

*When John was tripping I felt as if I was living with a stranger. He would be distant, so spaced-out that he couldn't talk to me coherently. I hated that, and I hated the fact that LSD was pulling him away from me. I wouldn't take it with him so he found others who would. Within weeks of his first trip, John was taking LSD daily and I became more and more worried. I couldn't reach him when he was tripping, but when the effects wore off he would be normal until he took it again.*

—Cynthia Lennon, 2005, *John*.

To Cynthia, the chemically-assisted intimacy felt false and phoney. She decided not to dabble any further, telling her husband that she wanted nothing more to do with LSD. He reluctantly accepted her decision, although it did little to temper his own use.

In addition to his emotional detachment, Lennon was often unpredictable and obnoxious to her while in his drug stupors. Cynthia decided to resume painting, which she had put on hold since their 1962 wedding, and while the Beatles were working long hours in the studio she painted an elaborate floral design on the surround of the family's television.

*The following morning I was up with Julian, about to give him his breakfast, when I glanced at my artwork. I could hardly believe what I saw. It was completely covered with circular stickers that read, “Milk Is Good For You.” John had come in during the early hours, high on drugs, and destroyed my efforts.*

*I was shaken and hurt. Did he not want me to have anything for myself? Was he so determined to have my total attention focused on him? Or was he simply so stoned that he hadn't realised what he was doing?*

—Cynthia Lennon, 2005, *John*.

## The Second LSD Trip: Los Angeles

The Beatles had their second encounter with LSD on 24 August 1965. It was during an afternoon party in Los Angeles, on a break from their US tour.

On this occasion Paul McCartney declined to try LSD:

*Paul felt very out of it 'cause we were all a bit cruel. It's like, "We're taking it and you're not." We couldn't eat our food. I just couldn't manage it. Picking it up with our hands, and there's all these people serving us in the house, and we're just knocking it on the floor—oh!—like that.*

*It was a long time before Paul took it. And then there was the big announcement. I think George was pretty heavy on it. We were probably both the most cracked. I think Paul's a bit more stable than George and I. I don't know about straight. Stable. I think LSD profoundly shocked him.*

—John Lennon, 1971, *Lennon Remembers*.

Ringo Starr, however, took his first trip in LA, as did Beatles roadie Neil Aspinall. The other key member of their entourage, Mal Evans, stayed straight to look after them all.

*I'd take anything. John and George didn't give LSD to me. A couple of guys came to visit us in LA, and it was them that said, "Man, you've got to try this." They had it in a bottle with an eye-dropper, and they dropped it on sugar cubes and gave it to us.*

*That was my first trip. It was with John and George and Neil and Mal. Neil had to deal with Don Short while I was swimming in jelly in the pool. It was a fabulous day. The night wasn't so great, because it felt like it was never going to wear off. Twelve hours later and it was: "Give us a break now, Lord."*

—Ringo Starr, 2000, *Anthology*.

Although Starr remembered visitors bringing LSD to the LA house, Harrison said the Beatles themselves had carried it from New York. The likely supplier was David Schneiderman, a twenty-two-

year-old Canadian in possession of a quantity of pure Sandoz LSD. Schneiderman was temporarily living in New York's Greenwich Village; the Beatles arrived in the city on the afternoon of 13 August, remaining for four days before flying to Toronto for the next stop on their tour.

*John and I had decided that Paul and Ringo had to have acid, because we couldn't relate to them any more. Not just on the one level—we couldn't relate to them on any level, because acid had changed us so much.*

*It was such a mammoth experience that it was unexplainable; it was something that had to be experienced, because you could spend the rest of your life trying to explain what it made you feel and think. It was all too important to John and me.*

*So the plan was that when we got to Hollywood, on our day off we were going to get them to take acid. We got some in New York; it was on sugar cubes wrapped in tinfoil and we'd been carrying these around all through the tour until we got to LA.*

—George Harrison, 2000, *Anthology*.

The guests at the LA party included Eleanor Bron, The Byrds, and journalist Don Short. Also there was actor Peter Fonda, who told the guests of accidentally shooting himself as a child while playing with a gun.

*He was describing an acid trip he'd been on. We didn't want to hear about that! We were on an acid trip and the sun was shining and the girls were dancing and the whole thing was beautiful and Sixties, and this guy—who I really didn't know; he hadn't made Easy Rider or anything—kept coming over, wearing shades, saying, "I know what it's like to be dead," and we kept leaving him because he was so boring!*

*And I used it for the song, but I changed it to "she" instead of "he." It was scary. You know, a guy . . . when you're flying high and [whispers] "I know what it's like to be dead, man." I remembered the incident. Don't tell me about it! I don't want to know what it's like to be dead!*

—John Lennon, 1980, *All We Are Saying*.  
*A Thirteenth Anthology of Writings About Psychedelics* ● 55

The song Lennon wrote about the encounter was "She Said She Said," from 1966's *Revolver*. With neat symmetry, it features each of the Beatles apart from McCartney.

### Paul Tries It

Due to McCartney's natural reticence, it wasn't until the end of 1965 that he decided to take LSD. It was in the company of Tara Browne, a young socialite whose death in December 1966 inspired the opening lines of "A Day In The Life." McCartney's decision not to take his first trip with the other Beatles was indicative of a gap that was opening up between him and the rest of the group, which would widen further towards the end of the decade.

It took place the night after the Beatles' final British tour date. After performing in Cardiff on 12 December 1965 they were driven to London, where they celebrated the end of the tour at the Scotch of St James nightclub. The following night Lennon and McCartney returned to the club, where they met Tara Browne's wife Nicky, who invited them all back to her Eaton Row home. Lennon declined and returned to Weybridge, but McCartney and Pretty Things drummer Viv Prince accepted the offer, as did several girls, and a dancer, Patrick Kerr, from the television show *Ready Steady Go!*

At the house, Tara Browne suggested they all take LSD. McCartney and Prince were unsure, having never tried the drug.

*I was more ready for the drink or a little bit of pot or something. I'd not wanted to do it, I'd held off like a lot of people were trying to, but there was massive peer pressure. And within a band, it's more than peer pressure, it's fear pressure. It becomes trebled, more than just your mates, it's, "Hey, man, this whole band's had acid, why are you holding out? What's the reason, what is it about you?" So I knew I would have to out of peer pressure alone. And that night I thought, well, this is as good a time as any, so I said, "Go on then, fine." So we all did it.*

—Paul McCartney, 1998, *Paul McCartney: Many Years From Now*.

Nicky Browne served the guests tea, also offering them sugar lumps impregnated with liquid LSD. Unlike the "Dental Experience,"

however, nobody had their drinks spiked, and all stayed in the house through the night.

*It was such a mind-expanding thing. I saw paisley shapes and weird things, and for a guy who wasn't that keen on getting that weird, there was a disturbing element to it. I remember looking at my shirtsleeves and seeing they were dirty and not being too pleased with that, whereas normally you wouldn't even notice. But you noticed and you heard. Everything was supersensitive.*

*We sat around all evening. Viv Prince was great fun. Someone said, "Do you want a drink?" And everyone would say, "No thanks, don't need drink, this is plenty." If anything, we might smoke a joint. But Viv demolished the drinks tray: "Oh yeah, a drink!" Cockney drummer with the Pretty Things. "Orrright, yeah! Nah, does anyone want a drink? I fink I'll 'ave one of them." And he had the whisky and he had everything. He was having a trip but his was somehow a more wired version than anyone else's. In the morning we ended up sending him out for ciggies.*

*Then one of the serious secretaries from our office rang about an engagement I had; she had traced me to here. "Um, can't talk now. Important business" or something. I just got out of it. "But you're supposed to be at the office." "No. I've got flu." Anything I could think. I got out of that one because there was no way I could go to the office after that.*

—Paul McCartney, 1998, *Paul McCartney: Many Years From Now*.

McCartney took LSD several more times, although he didn't embrace it with the fervour of Lennon and Harrison.

*I had it on a few occasions after that and I always found it amazing. Sometimes it was a very very deeply emotional experience, making you want to cry, sometimes seeing God or sensing all the majesty and emotional depth of everything. And sometimes you were just plain knackered, because it would be like sitting up all night in a train station, and by the morning you've grown very stiff and it's not a party any more. It's like the end of an all-nighter but you*

*haven't danced. You just sat. So your bum might be sore, just from sitting. I was often quite wiped out by it all but I always thought, Well, you know, everybody's doing it.*

—Paul McCartney, 1998, *Paul McCartney: Many Years From Now*.

Indeed, it was McCartney's lack of stamina which largely put him off LSD.

*The thing I didn't like about acid was it lasted too long. It always wore me out. But they were great people to be around, a wacky crowd. My main problem was just the stamina you had to have. I never attempted to work on acid, I couldn't. What's the point of trying, love?*

—Paul McCartney, 1999, *Groovy Bob*.

### LSD and The Beatles' Songwriting

LSD had a profound effect on The Beatles' songwriting and recording. The first-released song to mention it was "Day Tripper," but over time its influence resulted in less explicit and more abstract references to acid.

The Beatles increasingly tapped into the burgeoning counterculture of 1966, and the first song recorded for *Revolver*, the psychedelic "Tomorrow Never Knows," featured lyrics adapted from Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert's 1964 book *The Psychedelic Experience* (itself a modern reworking of the ancient *Tibetan Book of the Dead*).

Paul McCartney believed it to be their only recording about the LSD experience. Speaking to *Playboy* in 1984, he said: "It was a kind of Bible for all the psychedelic freaks. That was an LSD song. Probably the only one."

The song perhaps most often associated with The Beatles' use of LSD, however, is Lennon's "Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds." While the group always denied that the title was a reference to acid—Lennon and McCartney both maintained it was inspired by a painting drawn by Julian Lennon and named after a school friend—there is little doubt that the *Through The Looking Glass* imagery was the product of drug intake.

Lennon only took LSD once in the studio, unwittingly, on 21 March 1967 during a recording session for the *Sgt Pepper* song "Getting Better."

*I thought I was taking some uppers, and I was not in a state of handling it. I can't remember what album it was but I took it and then [whispers] I just noticed all of a sudden I got so scared on the mike. I said, "What was it?" I thought I felt ill. I thought I was going cracked. Then I said, "I must get some air."*

*They all took me upstairs on the roof, and George Martin was looking at me funny. And then it dawned on me. I must have taken acid. And I said, "Well, I can't go on, I have to go." So I just said, "You'll have to do it and I'll just stay and watch."*

*I just [became] very nervous and just watching all of a sudden. "Is it alright?" and they were saying, "Yeah." They were all being very kind. They said, "Yes, it's alright." And I said, "Are you sure it's alright?" They carried on making the record.*

—John Lennon, 1971, *Lennon Remembers*.

In fact, the session was stopped once The Beatles realised that Lennon was tripping. Lennon's car was not at the studio, and so McCartney took him to his nearby home at Cavendish Avenue. This became the first occasion on which Lennon and McCartney took LSD together, with the trusty Mal Evans looking after them.

*I thought, "Maybe this is the moment where I should take a trip with him. It's been coming for a long time. It's often the best way, without thinking about it too much, just slip into it. John's on it already, so I'll sort of catch up." It was my first trip with John, or with any of the guys. We stayed up all night, sat around and hallucinated a lot.*

*Me and John, we'd known each other for a long time. Along with George and Ringo, we were best mates. And we looked into each other's eyes, the eye contact thing we used to do, which is fairly mind-boggling. You dissolve into each other. But that's what we did, round about that time, that's what we did a lot. And it was*

*amazing. You're looking into each other's eyes and you would want to look away, but you wouldn't, and you could see yourself in the other person. It was a very freaky experience and I was totally blown away.*

*There's something disturbing about it. You ask yourself, "How do you come back from it? How do you then lead a normal life after that?" And the answer is, you don't. After that you've got to get trepanned or you've got to meditate for the rest of your life. You've got to make a decision which way you're going to go.*

*I would walk out into the garden—"Oh no, I've got to go back in." It was very tiring, walking made me very tired, wasted me, always wasted me. But "I've got to do it, for my well-being." In the meantime John had been sitting around very enigmatically and I had a big vision of him as a king, the absolute Emperor of Eternity. It was a good trip. It was great but I wanted to go to bed after a while.*

*I'd just had enough after about four or five hours. John was quite amazed that it had struck me in that way. John said, "Go to bed? You won't sleep!" "I know that, I've still got to go to bed." I thought, now that's enough fun and partying, now . . .*

*It's like with drink. That's enough. That was a lot of fun, now I gotta go and sleep this off. But of course you don't just sleep off an acid trip so I went to bed and hallucinated a lot in bed. I remember Mal coming up and checking that I was all right. "Yeah, I think so." I mean, I could feel every inch of the house, and John seemed like some sort of emperor in control of it all. It was quite strange. Of course he was just sitting there, very inscrutably.*

—Paul McCartney, 1998, *Paul McCartney: Many Years From Now*

### Turning Point

On 17 June 1967 *Life* magazine published an interview with Paul McCartney in which he admitted having taken LSD. Two days later, following intense press attention, he gave an interview to

Independent Television News in which he discussed his use of the drug and the media reaction.

*I remember a couple of men from ITN showed up, and then the newscaster arrived: "Is it true you've had drugs?" They were at my door—I couldn't tell them to go away—so I thought, "Well, I'm either going to try to bluff this, or I'm going to tell him the truth." I made a lightning decision: "Sod it. I'll give them the truth."*

*I spoke to the reporter beforehand, and said, "You know what's going to happen here: I'm going to get the blame for telling everyone I take drugs. But you're the people who are going to distribute the news. I'll tell you. But if you've got any worries about the news having an effect on kids, then don't show it. I'll tell you the truth, but if you disseminate the whole thing to the public then it won't be my responsibility. I'm not sure I want to preach this but, seeing as you're asking—yeah, I've taken LSD.' I'd had it about four times at the stage, and I told him so. I felt it was reasonable, but it became a big news item.*

—Paul McCartney, 2000, *Anthology*.

The Beatles' use of LSD decreased after the 1967 Summer of Love. For George Harrison, the turning point came during a trip to San Francisco's hippie district Haight-Ashbury on 7 August 1967. They walked around the area while tripping on LSD, but became increasingly uncomfortable as they became surrounded.

*I could see all the spotty youths, but I was seeing them from a twisted angle. It was like the manifestation of a scene from an Hieronymus Bosch painting, getting bigger and bigger, fish with heads, faces like vacuum cleaners coming out of shop doorways . . .*

*They were handing me things—like a big Indian pipe with feathers on it, and books and incense—and trying to give me drugs. I remember saying to one guy: "No thanks, I don't want it." And then I heard his whining voice saying, "Hey, man—you put me down." It was terrible.*

*We walked quicker and quicker through the park and in the end we jumped in the limo, said, "Let's get out of here," and drove back to the airport.*

—George Harrison, 2000, *Anthology*.

The crowd began to grow hostile as they returned to the limousine, and those outside began rocking the vehicle as their faces pressed against the windows. The narrow escape increased Harrison's resolve to move away from LSD.

*That was the turning point for me—that's when I went right off the whole drug cult and stopped taking the dreaded lysergic acid. I had some in a little bottle—it was liquid. I put it under a microscope, and it looked like bits of old rope. I thought that I couldn't put that into my brain any more.*

*People were making concoctions that were really wicked—ten times stronger than LSD. STP was one; it took its name from the fuel additive used in Indy-car racing. Mama Cass Elliot phoned us up and said, "Watch out, there's this new one going round called STP." I never took it. They concocted weird mixtures and the people in Haight-Ashbury got really fucked-up. It made me realise: "This is not it." And that's when I really went for the meditation.*

—George Harrison, 2000, *Anthology*.

On 26 August 1967 The Beatles publicly renounced the use of drugs, pledging their belief in Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's system of Transcendental Meditation instead.

Although their attempts at sobriety were short-lived, among John Lennon's reasons for his declining use of LSD was the number of bad trips he experienced, along with a gradual diminishing of his ego.

*I had many. Jesus Christ. I stopped taking it 'cause of that. I mean I just couldn't stand it. I dropped it for I don't know how long. Then I started taking it just before I met Yoko. I got a message on acid that you should destroy your ego, and I did. I was reading that stupid book of Leary's and all that shit.*

*We were going through a whole game that everybody went through. And I destroyed meself. I was slowly putting meself together after Maharishi, bit by bit, over a two-year period. And then I destroyed me ego and I didn't believe I could do anything. I let Paul do what he wanted and say, them all just do what they wanted. And I just was nothing, I was shit.*

*And then Derek [Taylor] tripped me out at his house after he'd got back from LA. He said, "You're alright." And he pointed out which songs I'd written, and said, "You wrote this, and you said this, and you are intelligent, don't be frightened."*

*The next week I went down with Yoko and we tripped out again, and she freed me completely, to realise that I was me and it's alright. And that was it. I started fighting again and being a loud-mouth again and saying, "Well, I can do this," and "Fuck you, and this is what I want," and "Don't put me down. I did this."*

—John Lennon, 1971, *Lennon Remembers*.

By the time of his death in 1980 Lennon had stopped taking LSD, but nonetheless defended it against common public perception of its effects.

*A little mushroom or peyote is not beyond my scope, you know, maybe twice a year or something. But acid is a chemical. People are taking it, though, even though you don't hear about it anymore. But people are still visiting the cosmos. It's just that nobody talks about it; you get sent to prison . . .*

*I've never met anybody who's had a flashback. I've never had a flashback in my life and I took millions of trips in the Sixties, and I've never met anybody who had any problem. I've had bad trips and other people have had bad trips, but I've had a bad trip in real life. I've had a bad trip on a joint. I can get paranoid just sitting in a restaurant. I don't have to take anything.*

*Acid is only real life in Cinemascope. Whatever experience you had is what you would have had anyway. I'm not promoting, all you committees out there, and I don't use it because it's chemical,*

*but all the garbage about what it did to people is garbage.*  
—John Lennon, 1980, *All We Are Saying*.

*Michael Pollan*

## My Adventures with the Trip Doctors

### Works Cited

- The Beatles, *Anthology*, Chronicle Books, 2000.
- Lennon, Cynthia, *John*, Three Rivers Press, 2005.
- Miles, Barry, *Paul McCartney: Many Years from Now*, Vintage, 1998.
- Shef, David, *All We Are Saying: The Last Major Interview with John Lennon and Yoko Ono*, 2010
- Vyrer, Harriet, *Groovy Bob*, Faber & Faber, 1999
- Wenner, Jann, *Lennon Remembers*, Straight Arrow, 1971.

\* \* \* \* \*

Published May 15, 2018 by the *New York Times Magazine*:  
[tinyurl.com/adventures-with-trip-doctors](http://tinyurl.com/adventures-with-trip-doctors)

*i.*

My first psilocybin journey began around an altar in the middle of a second-story loft in a suburb of a small city on the Eastern Seaboard. On this adventure I would have a guide, a therapist who, like an unknown number of other therapists administering psychedelics in America today, must work underground because these drugs are illegal. Seated across the altar from me, Mary (who asked that I use a nickname because of the work she does) began by reciting, with her eyes closed, a long and elaborate prayer derived from various Native American traditions. My eyes were closed, too, but now and again I couldn't resist peeking out for a glance at my guide: a woman in her 60s, with long blond hair parted in the middle, and high cheekbones that I mention only because they would, in a few hours, figure in her miraculous transformation into a Mexican Indian.

I also stole a few glances at the scene: the squash-colored loft with its potted plants and symbols of fertility and female power; the embroidered purple fabric from Peru that covered the altar; and the collection of items arrayed across it, including an amethyst in the shape of a heart, a purple crystal holding a candle, a bowl containing a few squares of dark chocolate, the personal "sacred item" that Mary had asked me to bring (a little bronze Buddha a friend brought me from Tibet) and, set squarely before me, an antique plate holding the biggest psilocybin mushroom I had ever seen.

The crowded altar also held a branch of sage and a stub of palo santo, a fragrant wood that some Indians in South America burn ceremonially, and the jet-black wing of a crow. At various points in the ceremony, Mary would light the sage and the palo santo, using the crow's wing to "smudge" me with the smoke—guiding the spirits through the space around my head.

The whole scene must sound ridiculously hokey, not to

mention laced with cultural appropriation, yet the conviction Mary brought to the ceremony, together with the aromas of the burning plants and the spooky sound of the wing pulsing the air around my head—plus my own nervousness about the journey in store—cast a spell that allowed me to suspend my disbelief. Mary trained under one of the revered “elders” in the psychedelic community, an 80-something psychologist who was one of Timothy Leary’s graduate students at Harvard. But I think it was her manner, her sobriety, and her evident compassion that made me feel sufficiently comfortable to entrust her with, well, my mind.

As a child growing up outside Providence, Rhode Island, Mary was an enthusiastic Catholic, she says, “until I realized I was a girl”—a fact that would disqualify her from ever performing the rituals she cherished. Her religiosity lay dormant until, in college, friends gave her a pot of honey infused with psilocybin for her birthday; a few spoonfuls of the honey “catapulted me into a huge change,” she told me the first time we met. The reawakening of her spiritual life led her onto the path of Tibetan Buddhism, and eventually to take the vow of an initiate: “‘To assist all sentient beings in their awakening and enlightenment.’ Which is still my vocation.”

And now seated before her in her treatment room was me, the next sentient being on deck, hoping to be awakened. She asked me to state my intention, and I answered: to learn whatever the “mushroom teachers,” as she called them, could teach me about myself, and about the nature of consciousness.

*ii.*

Psychedelic therapy, whether for the treatment of psychological problems or as a means of facilitating self-exploration and spiritual growth, is undergoing a renaissance in America. This is happening both underground, where the community of guides like Mary is thriving, and aboveground, at institutions like Johns Hopkins University, New York University (NYU) and University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), where a series of drug trials have yielded notably promising results.

I call it a renaissance because much of the work represents a revival of research done in the 1950s and 1960s, when psychedelic drugs like LSD and psilocybin were closely studied and regarded

by many in the mental health community as breakthroughs in psychopharmacology. Before 1965, there were more than 1,000 published studies of psychedelics involving some 40,000 volunteers and six international conferences dedicated to the drugs. Psychiatrists were using small doses of LSD to help their patients access repressed material (actor Cary Grant, after 60 such sessions, famously declared himself “born again”); other therapists administered bigger so-called psychedelic doses to treat alcoholism, depression, personality disorders, and the fear and anxiety of patients with life-threatening illnesses confronting their mortality.

That all changed in the mid-’60s, after Dr. Timothy Leary, the Harvard psychologist and lecturer turned psychedelic evangelist, began encouraging kids to “turn on, tune in and drop out.” Silly as that slogan sounds to our ears, a great many kids appeared to follow his counsel, much to the horror of their parents. The drugs fell into the eager embrace of a rising counterculture, influencing everything from styles of music and dress to cultural mores and, many thought, inspired the questioning of adult authority that marked the “generation gap.” “The kids who take LSD aren’t going to fight your wars,” Dr. Leary famously claimed.

In 1971, President Nixon called Dr. Leary, who by then had been drummed out of academia and chased by the law, “the most dangerous man in America.” That same year, the Controlled Substances Act took effect; it classified LSD and psilocybin as Schedule 1 drugs, meaning that they had a high potential for abuse and no accepted medical use; possession or sale became a federal crime. Funding for research dried up, and the legal practice of psychedelic therapy came to a halt.

But, beginning in the 1990s, a new generation of academics quietly began doing psychedelics research again, much of it focusing on people with cancer. Since then, several dozen studies using psychedelic compounds have been completed or are underway. In a pair of Phase 2 psilocybin trials at Hopkins and NYU, 80 cancer patients, many of them terminal, received a moderately high dose of psilocybin in a session guided by two therapists.

Patients described going into their body and confronting their cancer or their fear of death; many had mystical experiences that gave them a glimpse of an afterlife or made them feel connected to nature or the universe in a way they found comforting. The studies, which were

published in *The Journal of Psychopharmacology* in December 2016, reported that 80 percent of the Hopkins volunteers had clinically significant reductions in standard measurements of depression and anxiety, improvements that endured for at least six months.

Other, smaller studies of psilocybin have found that one, two, or three guided sessions can help alcoholics and smokers overcome their addictions; in the case of 15 smokers treated in a 2014 pilot study at Hopkins, 80 percent of the volunteers were no longer smoking six months after their first psychedelic session, a figure that fell to 67 percent after a year—which is far better than the best treatment currently available. The psychedelic experience appears to give people a radical new perspective on their own lives, making possible a shift in worldview and priorities that allows them to let go of old habits.

Yet researchers believe it is not the molecules by themselves that can help patients change their minds. The role of the guide is crucial. People under the influence of psychedelics are extraordinarily suggestible—“think of placebos on rocket boosters,” a Hopkins researcher told me—with the psychedelic experience profoundly affected by “set” and “setting”—that is, by the volunteer’s interior and exterior environments.

For that reason, treatment sessions typically take place in a cozy room, and always in the company of trained guides. The guides prepare volunteers for the journey to come, sit by them for the duration and then, usually on the day after a session, help them to “integrate,” or make sense of, the experience and put it to good use in changing their lives. The work is typically referred to as “psychedelic therapy,” but it would be more accurate to call it “psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy.”

Though the university researchers seldom talk about it, much of the collective wisdom regarding how best to guide a psychedelic session resides in the heads of underground guides like Mary. These are the people who, in many cases, continued to do this work illicitly, long after the backlash against psychedelics during the 1960s ended most research and therapy. But their role in the current renaissance is an awkward one, as I discovered early this spring when I sat in on the nation’s first certificate program for aspiring psychedelic guides.

*iii.*

On a Friday afternoon in late March, 64 health care

professionals of various stripes—doctors, therapists, nurses, counselors, and naturopaths—gathered in Namaste Hall at the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS), a school of psychology and social sciences in San Francisco, to begin their training to become legal psychedelic therapists. To be admitted to the program, an applicant must have a professional medical or therapy license of some kind, and most of the trainees—whose average age looked to be about 45, and whose number included nine psychologists, nine psychiatrists, and four oncologists—had enrolled in this certificate program in the belief that psychedelic drugs like psilocybin and MDMA, administered with the proper support and guidance, hold the potential to revolutionize mental health treatment. The career path might not be clear or straight yet, but these people want to be ready to lead that revolution when it arrives—which may be sooner than we think.

It quickly became clear that the reason most of the people in the room were willing to devote the time (five weekends and one full week over nine months) and the money (\$7,800) to be certified as a graduate of the program is that they’d been persuaded—often by personal experience—of the therapeutic potential of these compounds. As Manish Agrawal, a rugged 48-year-old oncologist who practices in Maryland, told me, with a sardonic lift of an eyebrow, “You don’t do something like this because you read a magazine article.”

The drugs at the center of the therapy being taught—still classified by the government as Schedule 1—cannot be used in the training, a limitation that both students and instructors lamented (CIIS plans to petition the FDA for permission to give psilocybin and MDMA to students in future trainings). And while most of the faculty was drawn from the ranks of therapists who work in sanctioned clinical trials of psilocybin and MDMA, because so much of the relevant experience belongs to guides who have been working underground, the program draws on the wisdom of these people too. Though the program’s explicitly stated intention is to train guides to work in the world of legal psychedelic therapy, that world (apart from the handful of clinical trials) doesn’t quite exist yet, while the psychedelic underground beckons right now.

Janis Phelps, a psychologist and CIIS administrator who established and directs the program, forthrightly confronted the issue in her introductory remarks to the class Friday evening. “We are training you to be aboveground therapists,” she emphasized. “If you

are thinking of working underground”—she later told me a strenuous effort had been made to weed out such people—“you need to think about that. Because we want you to be aboveground, FDA-approved therapists. Everyone engaged in this research is squeaky clean.”

She looked out over the room of aspiring guides. “So I invite you into the tensions of the field as it now exists.”

*iv.*

Bill Richards, clinical director of the psychedelics-research program at Johns Hopkins and the author of *Sacred Knowledge: Psychedelics and Religious Experiences*, is one of the few surviving links between the first and second waves of sanctioned psychedelic research in America. A jovial, goateed psychologist in his 70s with an infectious cackle, Richards led off the weekend’s instruction on Saturday morning.

Working at the Maryland Psychiatric Research Center at Spring Grove in the 1970s, Richards and his colleagues successfully treated alcoholics, cancer patients, and people suffering from depression with LSD until 1976, when research at the center shut down. “How can this ever have been illegal?” Richards likes to say. “It’s as if we made entering Gothic cathedrals illegal, or museums, or sunsets!”

When research with psilocybin resumed in the 1990s, Johns Hopkins recruited Richards because of his long experience guiding patients during a high-dose psychedelic experience. Today’s researchers work with psilocybin and MDMA because a session tends to be shorter than with LSD, and because the words carry much less political baggage.

Since the ’60s, LSD has been associated in the public mind with the counterculture and with stories, true or not, of people jumping off buildings thinking they could fly, blinding themselves by staring at the sun or landing themselves in the emergency room after psychotic episodes. MDMA and psilocybin are less well known and don’t seem to have the same associations (Also, the fact that psilocybin is “natural”—derived from a mushroom—seems to count in its favor). Richards has trained many of the guides now working in clinical trials not only at Hopkins but also at NYU and at Imperial College London.

In his PowerPoint presentation, Richards laid out what have become the standard protocol for aboveground psychedelic therapy, and the role of the guide at each of the three principal stages of

“the journey.” First comes a series of preparation sessions, in which volunteers are told what to expect, asked to set an intention (to quit smoking, say, or confront their fear of death) and offered a set of “flight instructions” for the journey ahead. These generally advise surrendering to the experience, whatever it brings and however disturbing it might become. (“Trust, let go, be open” is one mantra he recommends or, borrowing from Dr. Leary, Dr. Richard Alpert, and Dr. Ralph Metzner’s 1964 book *The Psychedelic Experience*, “Turn off your mind, relax and float downstream.”) If you feel as if you are “dying, melting, dissolving, exploding, going crazy, etc.—go ahead.”

Richards stressed how important it is for the guide to quickly establish a rapport with volunteers, so that during the session “they can let themselves ‘die’ or go crazy—that requires an awful lot of trust!” Because the patients’ ego defenses are likely to be disabled by the drug, it’s crucial that they feel safe.

The second stage is the journey itself. Richards showed a slide of the Hopkins treatment room, decorated to look like the office of a psychiatrist with an interest in Eastern religion and indigenous peoples, with shelves holding large-format art books and spiritual tchotchkes, including a Buddha and a large ceramic mushroom. The volunteer stretches out on a couch and puts on eyeshades and headphones to encourage an inward journey free of distraction. Richards has put together a playlist consisting mainly of classical compositions arranged to support and structure the experience.

Two guides, typically one male, the other female, sit with the volunteer for the duration but say very little, allowing the journey to unfold according to its own logic. Mostly the guide is present to offer a comforting hand if the journeyer is struggling, jot down anything he or she has to say, and generally keep an eye on the volunteer’s physical well-being while he or she is roaming his or her psychic landscape.

Because it is the drug and the mind that drive the journey, and not the therapist, the guide’s role calls for an unusual degree of humility, restraint, and patience—the sessions can last for hours. No snoozing or checking of email; meditating, however, is OK. Richards describes the session as the “*pièce de résistance*” of the work, “in which you’re focused intensely on one human being as if that’s all that exists in the world. It’s a great way to get exhausted!”

The last stage is integration, which typically takes place the following day. Here the guide helps the volunteer make sense of what

can be a confusing and inchoate experience, underscoring important themes, and offering ideas on how to apply whatever insights may have emerged to the conduct of the volunteer's life. The challenge, as Richards put it, is to help the volunteer transform "flashes of illumination" (he's quoting Huston Smith, the late scholar of religion) experienced during the trip "into abiding light"—a new, more constructive way to regard your self and situation.

It is sometimes said that in the last few decades psychiatry went from being brainless—relying on talk therapies oblivious to neurobiology—to being mindless—relying on drugs, with little attention to the contents of consciousness. If psychedelic-assisted therapy proves as effective as early trials suggest it might, it will be because it succeeds in rejoining the brain and the mind in a radical new therapeutic paradigm: using not just a chemical but the powerful mental experience it can occasion, given the proper support, to disrupt destructive patterns of thought and behavior.

Such a new approach couldn't come at a better time for a field that is "broken," as Tom Insel, head of the National Institute of Mental Health until 2015, told me bluntly. Rates of depression (now the leading cause of disability worldwide, according to the World Health Organization) and suicide are climbing; addictive behavior is rampant. Little has changed, meanwhile, in psychopharmacology since the introduction of SSRI antidepressants in the late 1980s.

This may explain why prominent figures in the psychiatric establishment are voicing support for psychedelic research. Addressing a conference on psychedelic science in Oakland last spring, Insel and Paul Summergrad, a former president of the American Psychiatric Association, offered encouragement to the psychedelic researchers in the audience, with Insel singling out for praise "the novel approach here"—the way the psychedelic therapist combines pharmacology and psychotherapy to create a single transformative experience.

v.

Psychedelic therapy, as the idea is now understood, was developed by a group of researchers working in Saskatchewan in the mid-1950s, including the psychiatrists Abram Hoffer, Humphry Osmond (who, in 1957, coined the word "psychedelic," which loosely translates from the Greek as "mind manifesting"), and their frequent

collaborator and muse, a brilliant amateur therapist named Al Hubbard. After both conducting and participating in a great many mescaline and LSD sessions—at the time it was routine for scientists to test drugs on themselves, the researchers observed how variable the experience could be, depending on circumstance and mind-set.

In those days, no one knew how best to administer these strange new compounds; the need for a guide wasn't immediately apparent. Some early scientists in white coats bearing clipboards dosed volunteers in a hospital room with white walls and fluorescent lights. Very often, the volunteers would then be left alone. Researchers didn't yet understand that the psychedelic experience is not foreordained by the chemical but rather is "constructed" in the mind from an unpredictable mix of expectation, memory, the contents of the unconscious, and a variety of environmental factors.

Beginning in the late 1950s, as the researchers began to better grasp the many factors at work, they began to work more consciously with *set and setting* (though this phrase wasn't coined until 1961, by Dr. Leary), bringing music and images into a treatment room they made comfy, and emphasizing the role of a guide.

Shamans have known for thousands of years that a person in the depths of a trance, or under the influence of a hallucinogenic plant like ayahuasca or peyote, can be readily manipulated with the help of certain words, cues, special objects, or music. They understand intuitively how the suggestibility of the human mind during an altered state of consciousness can be harnessed as an important resource for healing—for breaking destructive patterns of thought and proposing new perspective in their place. One of the Canadian group's key contributions to psychedelic therapy was to introduce the tried-and-true tools of shamanism, or rather the Westernized version of it that, to one degree or another, most of today's psychedelic guides still practice, whether working aboveground or below—though the tools of shamanism play a larger role in the underground.

Before my own psychedelic journey, I met and interviewed more than a dozen such guides, many of them trained by the therapists who were using psychedelics in their practices before they became illegal and decided that, rather than give up a tool they had found to be effective, they would continue to work underground, at substantial personal risk. One such therapist was a Bay Area Jungian psychologist named Leo Zeff, perhaps the best-known underground guide of his

generation; before his death in 1988, he claimed to have “tripped” 3,000 patients and helped train 150 underground guides, many of whom are still at work.

My travels through the psychedelic therapy underground convinced me that while the community is obviously far-flung and heterogeneous, and has its complement of charlatans, many guides are professionals who share an approach and even a code of conduct.<sup>1</sup>

Relative to the way guiding is practiced in the aboveground clinical trials (and taught at CIIS), the underground guides I interviewed, and eventually worked with, take a somewhat more active role in choreographing the experience, bringing into the “ceremony,” as they’re apt to call it, such traditional elements as incense, tobacco and sage smoke, rattles, the singing of *icaros* (sacred songs), and chanting of prayers.

“There are now two distinct lineages,” I was told by an underground guide with 35 years of experience, who asked me to use a family name, Michelle. “In the Western medical model, the guide is taught never to ‘get ahead of the medicine’”—that is, he or she aims for a noninterventionist, back-seat role during the session and, because these are foremost scientific trials, sticks to a standardized protocol in order to minimize the number of experimental variables in play. Many underground guides find this needlessly confining.

“The journey should be customized to each person,” Michelle said. “The idea of playing the same music for everyone makes absolutely no sense.” Instead, she might choose a comforting piece to support someone struggling with a challenging trip, or put on something “chaotic and disassembling” to help break down another client’s defenses. “A healer is not just a sitter. She does stuff.”

Many underground guides have traveled extensively in Mexico, Brazil, and Peru to study with traditional healers; Michelle believes psychedelic therapy still has much to learn from the “earth peoples” who have made use of psychedelic plants and fungi in their healing ceremonies for thousands of years. She feels the work she does offers more scope for “creativity and intuition” than the rote clinical techniques being taught aboveground allow.

*vi.*

I would have preferred to have my own guided psilocybin

session aboveground in the reassuring confines of a medical institution, but the teams at Hopkins and NYU weren’t currently working with so-called healthy normals (do I flatter myself?)—and I could lay claim to none of the serious mental problems they were studying. I wasn’t trying to fix anything big—not that there wasn’t room for improvement.

Like many people in late middle age, I had developed a set of fairly dependable mental algorithms for navigating whatever life threw at me, and while these are undeniably useful tools for coping with everyday life and getting things done, they leave little space for surprise or wonder or change. After interviewing several dozen people who had undergone psychedelic therapy, I envied the radical new perspectives they had achieved. I also wasn’t sure I’d ever had a spiritual experience, and time was growing short. The idea of “shaking the snow globe” of my mental life, as one psychedelic researcher put it, had come to seem appealing.

In Mary, I had found an underground guide with whom I felt comfortable. Mary’s approach, in terms of dosage, also happened to approximate the aboveground experience, though she worked with whole mushrooms rather than the capsules of synthetic psilocybin used in the university trials.

“The mushroom teachers help us to see who we really are,” Mary said, as we sat across the altar from each other. “They bring us back to our soul’s purpose for being here in this lifetime.” By now I was inured to the New Age lingo. I was also impressed, and reassured, by Mary’s professionalism. In addition to having me consent to the standard “agreements” (bowing to her authority for the duration; remaining in the room until she gave me permission to leave; no sexual contact), she had me fill out a detailed medical form, a legal release, and an autobiographical questionnaire that resulted in 15 pages of writing it took me the better part of a day to complete. All of which made me feel I was in good hands, even when those hands were flapping a crow’s wing around my head.

On my tongue, the dried mushroom, which was easily four inches long and had a cap the size of a golf ball, was as parched as desert sand and tasted like earth-flavored cardboard, but alternating each bite with a nibble of chocolate helped me get it down. We chatted quietly for 20 minutes or so before Mary noticed that my face was flushed and suggested I lie down and put on eyeshades.

As soon as Mary put on the first song—an insipid New

Age composition by someone named Thierry David (an artist thrice nominated, I later learned, in *Zone Music Reporter's* category of Best Chill/Groove Album)—I was immediately propelled into a nighttime urban landscape that appeared to have been generated by a computer.

I was experiencing synesthesia, in which one sense gets cross-wired with another, so that sound was creating visual space, and what I took to be David's electronica conjured a depopulated futuristic city, with each note giving rise to another soft black stalagmite or stalactite that together resembled the high-relief soundproofing foam used to line recording studios.

I moved effortlessly through this digital nightscape as if within the confines of a dystopian video game. Though the place wasn't particularly frightening and had a certain sleek beauty, I hated being in it, and wished to be somewhere else, but it went on and on, seemingly forever. I asked Mary to please play something else, and though the mood shifted with the new music, I was still stuck—trapped—in this sunless computer world. *Why, oh why, couldn't I be outside?*

This could easily take a terrifying turn, it occurred to me, and with that a dim tide of anxiety began to build. Recalling the flight instructions, I told myself there was nothing to do but let go and surrender to the experience. *Relax and float downstream.* I realized I was no longer captain of my attention, able to direct it this way or that and change the mental channel at will. No, this was more like being strapped into the front car of a cosmic roller coaster, its heedless headlong trajectory determining moment by moment what would appear in my field of awareness.

Actually, that's not entirely true: All I had to do was remove my eyeshades and reality, or at least something loosely based on it, would re-present itself. This is what I now did, partly to satisfy myself that the world still existed, but mostly because I badly needed to pee. Sunlight and color flooded my eyes, and I drank it in greedily, surveying the room for the welcome signifiers of non-digital reality: *Walls! Windows! Plants!*

But this reality appeared in a new aspect: jeweled with morning light, every beam of it addressed to my eyes. I got up carefully from the mattress, and Mary took me by the elbow, geriatrically, and together we made the long journey across the loft to the bathroom. I avoided looking at her, uncertain what I might see in her face, or betray in mine.

After producing the most spectacular crop of diamonds, I made my unsteady way back to the mattress and lay down. Mary, speaking softly, asked if I wanted "a booster." I sat up to receive another mushroom, for a total of about four grams. Mary was kneeling next to me, the mushroom in her upturned palm, and when I finally looked up into her face, I saw she had turned into María Sabina, the Mazatec curandera whom I had read about.

Sixty years ago, Sabina gave psilocybin mushrooms to R. Gordon Wasson, supposedly the first Westerner to try them, in a dirt-floored basement of a thatch-roofed house in the remote mountains of Oaxaca in central Mexico. Mary's hair was now black; her face, stretched taut over its high cheekbones, was anciently weathered; and she was wearing a simple white peasant dress. I took the desiccated mushroom from the woman's wrinkled brown hand and looked away as I chewed; I didn't think I should tell Mary what had happened to her.

When I put my eyeshades back on and lay down, I was disappointed to find myself back in computer world, but something had changed, no doubt a result of the stepped-up dose. Whereas before I navigated this landscape as myself, taking in the scene from a perspective recognizable as my own, with my attitudes intact (highly critical of the music, for instance), now I watched as that familiar self began to fall apart before my eyes, gradually at first and then all at once.

"I" now turned into a sheaf of little papers, no bigger than Post-its, and they were being scattered to the wind. But the "I" taking in this seeming catastrophe had no desire to chase after the slips and pile my old self back together. No desires of any kind, in fact. And then I looked and saw myself out there again, but this time spread over the landscape like paint, or butter, thinly coating a wide expanse of the world with a substance I recognized as me.

But who was this "I" that was able to take in the scene of its own dissolution? Good question. It wasn't I, exactly. Here the limits of our language become a problem: In order to completely make sense of the divide that had opened up in my perspective, I would need a whole new first-person pronoun. For what was observing the scene was a vantage and mode of awareness entirely distinct from my accustomed self.

Where that self had always been a subject encapsulated in this

body, this one seemed unbounded by any body, even though I now had access to its perspective. That perspective was supremely indifferent, unperturbed even in the face of what should have been an unmitigated personal disaster. The very category “personal,” however, had been obliterated. Everything I once was and called me, this self six decades in the making, had been liquefied and dispersed over the scene. What had always been a thinking, feeling, perceiving subject based in here was now an object out there. *I was paint!*

Lots of other things happened in Mary’s room, and in my head, during the course of my journey that day. I gazed into the bathroom mirror and saw the face of my dead grandfather. I trudged through a scorched desert landscape littered with bleached bones and skulls. One by one appeared the faces of the people in my life who had died, relatives and friends and colleagues whom, I was being told, I had failed properly to mourn. I beheld Mary transformed once again, this time into a ravishing young woman in the full radiance of youth; she was so beautiful I had to turn away.

At one point Mary put on one of Bach’s unaccompanied cello suites. It was the suite in D minor, a spare, infinitely sad piece that I’d heard many times before, often at funerals. But this time was different, because I heard it in my egoless, non-dual state of consciousness—though “heard” doesn’t do justice to what transpired between Bach’s notes and me. The preposition “between” melted away.

Losing myself in the music became a kind of rehearsal for losing myself, period. I let go of the rope of self and slipped into the warm waters of this ineffable beauty—Bach’s sublime notes, I mean, drawn from a cello’s black well of space by Yo-Yo Ma’s mournful bow as it surfed across its strings. I became identical to the music, a word that doesn’t begin to describe the power of what these unearthly vibrations were, or explain how they somehow lifted up and carried me beyond the reach of all suffering and regret.

The sovereign ego, with all its armaments and fears, its backward-looking resentments and forward-looking worries, was simply no more, and there was no one left to mourn its passing. And yet something had succeeded it: this bare, disembodied awareness, which gazed upon the scene of the self’s dissolution with benign indifference. I was present to reality but as something other than my usual self. And although there was no self left to feel, exactly, there was a feeling tone, and that was calm, unburdened, content. There was life after the death

of the ego.

*vii.*

The Sunday morning session at CIIS began with great anticipation—the speaker was Dr. Ralph Metzner, who worked with Dr. Timothy Leary at Harvard, and is regarded as one of the wise elders in the psychedelic community.

Metzner is in his eighties now and, stepping up to the microphone in his newsboy’s cap, he seemed frail. For much of his presentation, he read from one of his books—something about the soul and the six archetypal paths through this life. It wasn’t until the Q&A that things got interesting.

A student who identified himself as a psychotherapist asked Metzner to talk about psychedelics, a subject he hadn’t yet mentioned. With that gentle nudge, Metzner proceeded to veer wildly off message, exposing the tensions that Janis Phelps alluded to Friday night but that had been absent from the weekend’s presentations thus far.

“These are drugs that psychotherapists unanimously feel could improve psychotherapy,” Metzner began, “but their use is illegal. What does that tell you? Something about the society we live in!”

Metzner paused—and then jumped. “There is a vast underground network of psychedelic therapy, you know—vast. Larger than the approved uses of psychedelic therapy.” He went on: “It’s an underground culture, and underground cultures are good; in fact, they can be lifesaving.”

Phelps, her porcelain complexion reddening, stood up, taking a step toward the lectern to solicit another question, but Metzner wouldn’t be deterred. Declaring that we were in the midst of a spiritual emergency in this country, he told the students we have these “fantastically promising medicines that can cure all sorts of ills, and yet doctors can’t get them.”

Metzner’s voice rose. “We don’t have to accept that!” The eminent professor seemed to be inviting his flock to engage in a collective act of civil disobedience. This he likened to the underground in Germany, where he grew up, during the war: “There were German families who took in Jewish families and hid them in their closets.” He voiced impatience with the pace of scientific research and federal approval, “at a time of civilizational collapse,” when we have these

medicines that we know work and could help our society right now. “It doesn’t need to be proven over and over again. When there’s a plague, you don’t go through double-blind placebo-controlled studies! It’s a plague!”

Finally it fell to Bill Richards to stand up and gently remind the students that while the pace of progress might be frustrating, “we have a path forward”—the path of sanctioned clinical trials leading to approval of psychedelic therapy. He pointed out that the researchers on this path had so far found federal regulators to be remarkably open and receptive. “So let’s go forward as scientist-warriors and do what we can in the aboveground world. I think we can make a significant impact.”

The students I spoke to afterward clearly shared Metzner’s sense of urgency and frustration, but they rejected his apparent invitation to join the underground. In their view, Metzner was looking backward, to a dark age when the underground served as the saving ark of psychedelic therapy.

But that dark age was drawing to a close, they believed. A generation or two younger than Metzner, these people were looking resolutely forward—to a time, not too distant they thought, when the FDA would approve the therapeutic use of psilocybin and MDMA and make them available to doctors to prescribe to their patients. This was the future they had signed up for when they enrolled in the course.

One student in the class, a psychiatrist who had participated in psychedelic therapy in South America for decades, told me after the session that she was now fully committed to the legal road. “I’ve had a secret life for 30 years,” she said. “I damn well want this opportunity to unify my life. Because of this class, I have a way to talk openly to people about psychedelics for the first time.”

She voiced deep respect for Metzner, but believed the time had come to make a choice. “I don’t want to lose the history or the knowledge we’ve gained from the underground work. But the professionals in this room have decided to put our time and credentials into furthering the legal use of these medicines.” Doing so, she said, “demands being beyond reproach so as not to endanger the work and the path that has been set out.”

Manish Agrawal, the Maryland oncologist, expressed the general sentiment in an email he sent me after Sunday’s session. He shared Metzner’s “frustration that this therapy isn’t available for my patients today, and many will suffer and die without access to this

therapy. Ralph really pushed me to feel the injustice of that.”

He went on: “But everyone senses how close we are,” and doesn’t want to jeopardize that by following Metzner off the legal route. Agrawal left San Francisco determined to find a way to incorporate psychedelic therapy in his oncology practice.

*viii.*

The day after my journey, I was grateful for the opportunity to return to Mary’s room for a couple of hours of “integration.” Without it, people might be tempted to dismiss their psilocybin journeys as simply a “drug experience,” put it in that handy box and throw it away; this has no doubt been the fate of a great many psychedelic trips.

Yet though it is true that a chemical started me on this journey, it is also true that everything that I experienced I experienced: These are events that took place in my mind, psychological facts that were neither weightless nor evanescent. But I needed help making sense of them and putting them to use.

That I could survive the dissolution of my ego and its defenses was surely something to be grateful for, and we talked at length about this. What a remarkable gift: to learn that we can let go of so much—the desires, fears and defenses of a lifetime!—without suffering complete annihilation.

This might not come as a surprise to Buddhists or serious meditators, but it was news to me, who had never felt anything but identical to my ego. Could it be that there is another ground on which to plant our feet? For the first time, I began to understand what the volunteers in the cancer-anxiety trials were telling me—how it was that a single psychedelic journey granted them a perspective from which the very worst life can throw at us could be regarded objectively and accepted with equanimity. I had been given a glimpse of that liberating perspective.

“That alone seems worth the price of admission,” Mary offered, and I had to agree. I also realized that I never would have achieved that perspective had Mary not guided me, creating a space where I felt safe enough to let go of my accustomed self and its usual defenses.

Yet 24 hours later, my old ego was back in uniform and on patrol, so what long-term good was that beguiling glimpse of a loftier perspective? Mary suggested that, having had a taste of a different,

less defended way to be, I might learn to relax the ego's trigger-happy command of my reactions to people and events. "Now you have had an experience of another way to react—or not react. That can be cultivated." She suggested meditation as one way to do that.

Many researchers believe that the experience of "ego dissolution" that I had in Mary's room can disrupt destructive patterns of thought and behavior and open us to new perspective from which to view death or addiction or depression. This was understood back in the 1950s and 1960s, when psychiatrists working with psychedelics sometimes described it as "therapy by self-transcendence."

If the ego can be said to have an address, it would probably be in something called the default mode network (DMN), a high-level hub in the brain linking the frontal cortex to older centers of memory and emotion. The DMN appears to be involved in a range of operations related to our sense of self, like rumination, time travel (contemplating the past and future), theory of mind (the ability to impute mental states to others), and the so-called autobiographical self. It helps us integrate whatever's happening to us now with the story of who we are, thereby giving us an abiding sense of a self that is consistent over time.

Neuroscientists recently began imaging the brains of people on psilocybin or LSD, and they were surprised to find that, rather than increasing brain activity, as you might expect, the drugs radically quieted traffic in the DMN. In particular, when volunteers report the experience of ego dissolution, their brain imaging shows a precipitous drop in DMN activity.

Taking this network temporarily offline may allow the whole system to "reboot," in the words of Robin Carhart-Harris, a pioneering neuroscientist who has done extensive work imaging tripping brains at Imperial College London. The "loosening of cognition" that results, he says, is especially helpful to people suffering from the varieties of mental stuckness, including depression, addiction, anxiety, and obsession.

All these conditions, as Alison Gopnik, a professor of psychology at Berkeley, points out, may share an etiology. "There are a range of difficulties and pathologies in adults, like depression, that are connected with the phenomenology of rumination, and an excessively narrow, ego-based focus."

Gopnik's research explores the consciousness of children, which she believes bears a similarity to psychedelic consciousness. "You get stuck on the same thing, you can't escape, you become obsessive,

perhaps addictive. It seems plausible to me that psychedelic experience could help get us out of those states, create an opportunity in which the old stories of who we are might be rewritten."

*ix.*

Just how soon might psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy be available aboveground, to the many people who stand to benefit from it? Before the FDA approves a new medicine, the drug must survive testing for safety and efficacy in a three-stage sequence of trials, each of them involving a larger sample and more rigorous methods. When researchers recently brought to the FDA the results of Phase 2 clinical trials of cancer patients who were given psilocybin and MDMA, they were stunned by the positive response of the regulators. Regulators told them they could move forward to Phase 3 with MDMA, the last step before FDA approval.

The FDA is still considering when psilocybin trials can move into Phase 3. The agency wouldn't comment on drugs in the approval process, but a researcher who attended one of these meetings told me the regulators seemed untroubled by the illicit status of the drugs in question or by the unique challenges of controlling studies of psychedelics.

The researchers felt heartened by the FDA's response. The message the scientists took away from the meeting was that they should raise their sights and not limit themselves to treating cancer patients, but rather test the drugs on the much larger population of patients suffering from major depression.

Thus encouraged, the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS), a nonprofit that has been working for federal approval of psychedelics since 1986, will begin Phase 3 trials of MDMA-assisted psychotherapy this summer for the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder, involving more than 200 volunteers at 16 sites in the United States, Canada, and Israel.

Phase 3 trials, which typically involve hundreds of subjects at dozens of sites, can cost tens of millions of dollars—a cost ordinarily borne by the big pharmaceutical companies that stand to profit from approval. But Big Pharma has not demonstrated significant interest in psychedelics, and it's not hard to see why: Psychedelic therapy is a rather square peg to fit into the round hole of psychopharmacology as

we now know it.

Patents on the molecules in question—LSD, psilocybin, and MDMA—have long since expired; the drugs, if approved, don't need to be taken more than a few times; and as the CIIS program recognizes, psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy is a novel hybrid of pharmacology and talk therapy, making it uncharted territory for a pharmaceutical industry organized around the selling of pills.

But the obstacle of funding Phase 3 trials appears to have been recently surmounted. The Psychedelic Science Funders Collaborative (PSFC) a new Bay Area-based consortium of philanthropists including the hippie-soap entrepreneur David Bronner, the author and tech investor Timothy Ferriss, and other donors both in and out of the tech community, has helped raise more than \$63 million in charitable contributions, an amount that could be sufficient to complete the trials. The two main beneficiaries of these funds will be MAPS and Usona Institute, a nonprofit medical-research organization that is sponsoring forthcoming psilocybin trials. Rebekah Mercer, the Trump funder behind Cambridge Analytica and Breitbart, is also a donor to MAPS.

There is at least one corporation betting that psychedelic therapy will soon become a business. Founded in London by George Goldsmith, a health care industry consultant, and Ekaterina Malievskaia, a physician, Compass Pathways aims to become the world's first psychedelic pharmaceutical company. The couple, who are married, were inspired to expand access to psilocybin after Malievskaia's college-age son was successfully treated by an underground guide with the drug for a debilitating case of depression.

Compass aims to be much more than a drug company, however. The company is developing a complete treatment package—consisting of a training program for therapists; protocols for orchestrating the entire experience; and the medicine itself—that it hopes to sell to health care institutions and national health services, first in Europe and then in the United States.

Its initial therapeutic target is treatment-resistant depression (patients who have failed to respond to at least two previous treatments); after an advisory process with the European Medicines Agency (the EU's drug-regulating body), it has decided to conduct trials in eight to 10 sites across Europe. It is also in discussions with the FDA to organize trials here. According to Goldsmith, Compass has already

raised \$13 million from investors in the United States and Europe, many of them from the tech community (Peter Thiel is an investor), but also institutional investors in the health care sector.

Phase 3 trials will take at least three years, but access to psychedelic therapy could come sooner than that. Under “expanded access” or “compassionate use” programs, patients who stand to benefit from therapies still deemed experimental can gain access to them before trials are complete. In the case of MDMA, this could happen as soon as 2020.

That tantalizing possibility is very much on the minds of the CIIS students. On the flight home, Manish Agrawal and his oncology partner Paul Thambi began planning how to talk to their colleagues about the idea of adding psychedelic therapy to their practice, and where in their offices they might create a treatment room. Did they plan to hire guides to conduct the sessions? Perhaps, they said, but the weekend had left them both convinced this was work they very much wanted to do themselves.

“We don't die well in this country,” Agrawal told me during a lunch break at the weekend course. “And we have pretty limited tools to help people deal with their fear. Prozac doesn't work. The issue isn't depression; it's facing your mortality.” The oncologists' commitment to training as psychedelic guides is notable; they would most likely be able to prescribe psilocybin once it's approved without years of experience, a prospect that concerns some of the underground guides I interviewed. “Just because you have the ability to prescribe,” one guide told me, “doesn't mean you have the wisdom to guide the experience.”

In the wake of the weekend's high hopes, I couldn't help wondering what the brave new world of legal psychedelic therapy might mean for guides like Mary and Michelle. I had heard some grumbling in the community about the limitations of the CIIS training, and the bitter twist that the psychedelic guides with the deepest experience could be excluded in favor of newly credentialed guides with no real-world experience whatsoever.

But Michelle said she is busier than ever. Mary, too, anticipates that federal approval of psychedelic medicine would bring more people to her door, especially those without an obvious pathology—the curious, the spiritual seeking, and the legions of run-of-the-mill neurotics who already fill therapists' offices. How many of them will want to try a guided psychedelic journey once they hear about it?

“I don’t think it’s going to hurt me at all,” Mary told me. “If anything, it will allow me to do even more than I do.” Was she worried about a crackdown if psychedelic therapy suddenly becomes fashionable? The work was too important to let that stop her. “I need to find a way to continue to protect myself, as I help people find their soul’s purpose in this lifetime, to help them awaken.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Laura Huxley

## The Most Beautiful Death

*Island novelist Aldous Huxley was diagnosed with cancer in 1960, at which point his health slowly began to deteriorate. On his deathbed in November of 1963, Huxley asked that his wife Laura give him a 100 microgram dose of LSD*

*The following letter was written by Laura just days after her husband’s death, and sent to his older brother Julian.*

\* \* \* \* \*

6233 Mulholland Highway  
Los Angeles 28, California  
December 8, 1963

Dearest Julian and Juliette:

There is so much I want to tell you about the last week of Aldous’ life and particularly the last day. What happened is important not only for us close and loving but it is almost a conclusion, better, a continuation of his own work, and therefore it has importance for people in general.

First of all I must confirm to you with complete subjective certainty that Aldous had not consciously looked at the fact that he might die until the day he died. Subconsciously it was all there, and you will be able to see this for yourselves because beginning from November 15th until November 22nd I have much of Aldous’ remarks on tape. For these tapes I know we shall all be immensely grateful.

Aldous was never quite willing to give up his writing and dictate or makes notes on a recorder. He used a Dictograph only to read poetry or passages of literature; he would listen to these in his quiet moments in the evening as he was going to sleep. I have had a tape recorder for years, and I tried to use it with him sometimes, but it was too bulky, and particularly now when we were always in the bedroom and the bed had so much hospital equipment around it. (We

had spoken about buying a small one, but the market here is flooded with transistor tape recorders, and most of them are very bad. I didn't have time to look into it, and this remained just one of those things like many others that we were going to do.)

In the beginning of November, when Aldous was in the hospital, my birthday occurred, so Jinny looked carefully into all the machines, and presented me with the best of them—a small thing, easy manageable and practically unnoticeable. After having practiced with it myself a few days, I showed it to Aldous, who was very pleased with it, and from the 15th on we used it a little every day, recording his dreams and notes for future writing.

The period from the 15th to the 22nd marked, it seems to me, a period of intense mental activity for Aldous. We had diminished little by little the tranquilizers he had been taking four times a day—a drug called Sperine which is akin, I understand, to Thorazin. We diminished it practically to nothing—only used painkillers like Percodon, a little Amitol, and something for nausea. He took also a few injections of 1/2 cc of Dilaudid, which is a derivative of morphine, and which gave him many dreams, some of which you will hear on the tape. The doctor says this is a small intake of morphine.

Now to pick up my point again, in these dreams as well as sometimes in his conversation, it seemed obvious and transparent that subconsciously he knew that he was going to die. But not once consciously did he speak of it. This had nothing to do with the idea that some of his friends put forward, that he wanted to spare me. It wasn't this, because Aldous had never been able to play a part, to say a single lie; he was constitutionally unable to lie, and if he wanted to spare me, he could certainly have spoken to Jinny.

During the last two months I gave him almost daily an opportunity, an opening for speaking about death, but of course this opening was always one that could have been taken in two ways—either towards life or towards death, and he always took it towards life. We read the entire manual of Dr. Leary extracted from *The Book of the Dead*. He could have, even jokingly, said, "don't forget to remind me"; his comment instead was only directed to the way Dr. Leary conducted his LSD sessions, and how he would bring people, who were not dead, back here to this life after the session.

It is true he said sometimes phrases like, "If I get out of this," in connection to his new ideas for writing, and wondered when and

if he would have the strength to work. His mind was very active and it seems that this Dilaudid had stirred some new layer which had not often been stirred in him.

The night before he died, (Thursday night) about eight o'clock, suddenly an idea occurred to him. "Darling," he said, "it just occurs to me that I am imposing on Jinny having somebody as sick as this in the house with the two children. This is really an imposition." Jinny was out of the house at the moment, and so I said, "Good, when she comes back I will tell her this. It will be a nice laugh." "No," he said with unusual insistence, "we should do something about it." "Well," I replied, keeping it light, "all right, get up. Let's go on a trip." "No," he said, "It is serious. We must think about it. All these nurses in the house. What we could do, we could take an apartment for this period. Just for this period."

It was very clear what he meant. It was unmistakably clear. He thought he might be so sick for another three or four weeks, and then he could come back and start his normal life again. This fact of starting his normal life occurred quite often. In the last three or four weeks he was several times appalled by his weakness, when he realized how much he had lost, and how long it would take to be normal again.

Now, this Thursday night, he had remarked about taking an apartment with an unusual energy, but a few minutes later and all that evening I felt that he was going down, he was losing ground quickly. Eating was almost out of the question. He had just taken a few spoonfuls of liquid and puree; in fact, every time that he took something, this would start the cough.

Thursday night I called Dr. Bernstein, and told him the pulse was very high, 140, he had a little bit of fever, and my whole feeling was one of immanence of death. But both the nurse and the doctor said they didn't think this was the case, but that, if I wanted him, the doctor would come up to see him that night.

Then I returned to Aldous' room, and we decided to give him an injection of Dilaudid. It was about nine o'clock, and he went to sleep and I told the doctor to come the next morning. Aldous slept until about two a.m., and then he got another shot, and I saw him again at six-thirty. Again I felt that life was leaving, something was more wrong than usual, although I didn't know exactly what, and a little later I sent you and Matthew and Ellen and my sister a wire.

Then, about nine a.m., Aldous began to be so agitated, so

uncomfortable, so desperate really. He wanted to be moved all the time. Nothing was right. Dr. Bernstein came about that time and decided to give him a shot which he had given him once before, something that you give intravenously, very slowly—it takes five minutes to give the shot, and it is a drug that dilates the bronchial tubes, so that respiration is easier.

This drug made him uncomfortable the time before, it must have been three Fridays before, when he had that crisis I wrote you about. But then it helped him. This time it was quite terrible. He couldn't express himself but he was feeling dreadful, nothing was right, no position was right. I tried to ask him what was occurring.

He had difficulty in speaking, but he managed to say, "Just trying to tell you makes it worse." He wanted to be moved all the time. "Move me." "Move my legs." "Move my arms." "Move my bed." I had one of those push-button beds, which moved up and down both from the head and the feet and, incessantly, at times, I would have him go up and down, up and down by pushing buttons. We did this again, and somehow it seemed to give him a little relief. but it was very, very little.

All of a sudden, it must have been then ten o'clock, he could hardly speak, and he said he wanted a tablet to write on, and for the first time he wrote, "If I die," and gave a direction for his will. I knew what he meant. He had signed his will, as I told you about a week before, and in this will there was a transfer of a life insurance policy from me to Matthew.

We had spoken of getting these papers of transfer, which the insurance company had just sent, and that actually arrived special delivery just a few minutes before. Writing was very, very difficult for him. Rosalind and Dr. Bernstein were there trying also to understand what he wanted. I said to him, "Do you mean that you want to make sure that the life insurance is transferred from me to Matthew?" He said, "Yes." I said, "The papers for the transfer have just arrived, if you want to sign them you can sign them, but it is not necessary because you already made it legal in your will."

He heaved a sigh of relief in not having to sign. I had asked him the day before, even, to sign some important papers, and he had said, "Let's wait a little while"; this, by the way, was his way now, for him to say that he couldn't do something. If he was asked to eat, he would say, "Let's wait a little while," and when I asked him to do some signing that was rather important on Thursday, he said, "Let's wait a

little while."

He wanted to write you a letter—"and especially about Juliette's book, is lovely," he had said several times. And when I proposed to do it, he would say, "Yes, just in a little while" in such a tired voice, so totally different from his normal way of being. So when I told him that the signing was not necessary, and that all was in order, he had a sigh of relief.

"If I die." This was the first time that he had said that with reference to NOW. He wrote it. I knew and felt that for the first time he was looking at this. About a half an hour before I had called up Sidney Cohen, a psychiatrist who has been one of the leaders in the use of LSD. I had asked him if he had ever given LSD to a man in this condition. He said he had only done it twice actually, and in one case it had brought up a sort of reconciliation with Death, and in the other case it did not make any difference.

I asked him if he would advise me to give it to Aldous in his condition. I told him how I had offered it several times during the last two months, but he always said that he would wait until he was better. Then Dr. Cohen said, "I don't know. I don't think so. What do you think?" I said, "I don't know. Shall I offer it to him?" He said, "I would offer it to him in a very oblique way, just say 'what do you think about taking LSD [sometime again]?'"

This vague response had been common to the few workers in this field to whom I had asked, "Do you give LSD in extremes?" *Island* is the only definite reference that I know of. I must have spoken to Sidney Cohen about nine-thirty. Aldous' condition had become so physically painful and obscure, and he was so agitated he couldn't say what he wanted, and I couldn't understand.

At a certain point he said something which no one here has been able to explain to me; he said, "Who is eating out of my bowl?" And I didn't know what this meant and I yet don't know. And I asked him. He managed a faint whimsical smile and said, "Oh, never mind, it is only a joke." And later on, feeling my need to know a little so I could do something, he said in an agonizing way, "At this point there is so little to share." Then I knew that he knew that he was going. However, this inability to express himself was only muscular—his brain was clear and, in fact, I feel, at a pitch of activity.

Then, I don't know exactly what time it was, he asked for his tablet and wrote, "Try LSD 100 intramuscular." Although as you see

from this photostatic copy it is not very clear, I know that this is what he meant. I asked him to confirm it.

Suddenly something became very clear to me. I knew that we were together again after this torturous talking of the last two months. I knew then, I knew what was to be done. I went quickly into the cupboard in the other room where Dr. Bernstein was, and the TV which had just announced the shooting of Kennedy. I took the LSD and said, "I am going to give him a shot of LSD, he asked for it."

The doctor had a moment of agitation because you know very well the uneasiness about this drug in the medical mind. Then he said, "All right, at this point what is the difference?" Whatever he had said, no "authority," not even an army of authorities, could have stopped me then. I went into Aldous' room with the vial of LSD, and prepared a syringe.

The doctor asked me if I wanted him to give him the shot—maybe because he saw that my hands were trembling. His asking me that made me conscious of my hands, and I said, "No, I must do this." I quieted myself, and when I gave him the shot my hands were very firm.

Then, somehow, a great relief came to us both. I believe it was 11:20 when I gave him his first shot of 100 microgrammes. I sat near his bed and I said, "Darling, maybe in a little while I will take it with you. Would you like me to take it also in a little while?"

I said "a little while" because I had no idea of when I should or could take it; in fact I have not been able to take it to this writing because of the condition around me. And he indicated "yes."

We must keep in mind that by now he was speaking very, very little. Then I said, "Would you like Matthew to take it with you also?" And he said, "Yes." "What about Ellen?" He said, "Yes." Then I mentioned two or three people who had been working with LSD and he said, "No, no, *basta, basta* [enough, enough.]" Then I said, "What about Jinny?" And he said, "Yes," with emphasis.

Then we were quiet. I just sat there without speaking for a while. Aldous was not so agitated physically. He seemed—somehow I felt he knew, we both knew what we were doing, and this has always been a great relief to Aldous. I have seen him at times during his illness very upset until he knew what he was going to do; then, even if it was an operation or X-ray, he would make a total change. This enormous feeling of relief would come to him, and he wouldn't be worried at all

about it, he would say, "let's do it," and we would go to it, and he was like a liberated man.

And now I had the same feeling—a decision had been made, he made the decision again very quickly. Suddenly he had accepted the fact of death; he had taken this *moksha* medicine in which he believed. He was doing what he had written in *Island*, and I had the feeling that he was interested and relieved and quiet.

After half an hour, the expression on his face began to change a little, and I asked him if he felt the effect of LSD, and he indicated no. Yet, I think that a something had taken place already. This was one of Aldous' characteristics. He would always delay acknowledging the effect of any medicine, even when the effect was quite certainly there; unless the effect was very, very strong he would say no.

Now, the expression of his face was beginning to look as it did every time that he had the *moksha* medicine, when this immense expression of complete bliss and love would come over him. This was not the case now, but there was a change in comparison to what his face had been two hours ago. I let another half hour pass, and then I decided to give him another 100 mg. I told him I was going to do it, and he acquiesced.

I gave him another shot, and then I began to talk to him. He was very quiet now; he was very quiet and his legs were getting colder; higher and higher I could see purple areas of cyanosis.

Then I began to talk to him, saying, "Light and free." Some of these things I told him at night in these last few weeks before he would go to sleep, and now I said it more convincingly, more intensely—"go, go, let go, darling; forward and up. You are going forward and up; you are going towards the light. Willing and consciously you are going, willingly and consciously, and you are doing this beautifully; you are doing this so beautifully—you are going towards the light; you are going towards a greater love; you are going forward and up. It is so easy; it is so beautiful. You are doing it so beautifully, so easily. Light and free. Forward and up. You are going towards Maria's love with my love. You are going towards a greater love than you have ever known. You are going towards the best, the greatest love, and it is easy, it is so easy, and you are doing it so beautifully."

I believe I started to talk to him—it must have been about one or two o'clock. It was very difficult for me to keep track of time. The nurse was in the room and Rosalind and Jinny and two doctors—Dr.

Knight and Dr. Cutler. They were sort of far away from the bed. I was very, very near his ears, and I hope I spoke clearly and understandingly. Once I asked him, “Do you hear me?” He squeezed my hand. He was hearing me.

I was tempted to ask more questions, but in the morning he had begged me not to ask any more questions, and the entire feeling was that things were right. I didn’t dare to inquire, to disturb, and that was the only question that I asked, “Do you hear me?” Maybe I should have asked more questions, but I didn’t.

Later on I asked the same question, but the hand didn’t move any more. Now from two o’clock until the time he died, which was five-twenty, there was complete peace except for once. That must have been about three-thirty or four, when I saw the beginning of struggle in his lower lip. His lower lip began to move as if it were going to be a struggle for air.

Then I gave the direction even more forcefully. “It is easy, and you are doing this beautifully and willingly and consciously, in full awareness, in full awareness, darling, you are going towards the light.” I repeated these or similar words for the last three or four hours.

Once in a while my own emotion would overcome me, but if it did I immediately would leave the bed for two or three minutes, and would come back only when I could dismiss my emotion. The twitching of the lower lip lasted only a little bit, and it seemed to respond completely to what I was saying. “Easy, easy, and you are doing this willingly and consciously and beautifully—going forward and up, light and free, forward and up towards the light, into the light, into complete love.”

The twitching stopped, the breathing became slower and slower, and there was absolutely not the slightest indication of contraction, of struggle. It was just that the breathing became slower—and slower—and slower, and at five-twenty the breathing stopped.

I had been warned in the morning that there might be some upsetting convulsions towards the end, or some sort of contraction of the lungs, and noises. People had been trying to prepare me for some horrible physical reaction that would probably occur. None of this happened; actually, the ceasing of the breathing was not a drama at all, because it was done so slowly, so gently, like a piece of music just finishing in a *sempre piu piano dolcemente*.

I had the feeling, actually, that the last hour of breathing was

only the conditioned reflex of the body that had been used to doing this for 69 years, millions and millions of times. There was not the feeling that with the last breath, the spirit left. It had just been gently leaving for the last four hours. In the room, the last four hours, were two doctors, Jinny, the nurse, Rosalind Roger Gopal—you know she is the great friend of Krishnamurti, and the directress of the school in Ojai for which Aldous did so much.

They didn’t seem to hear what I was saying. I thought I was speaking loud enough, but they said they didn’t hear it. Rosalind and Jinny once in a while came near the bed and held Aldous’ hand. These five people all said that this was the most serene, the most beautiful death. Both doctors and nurse said they had never seen a person in similar physical condition going off so completely without pain and without struggle.

We will never know if all this is only our wishful thinking, or if it is real, but certainly all outward signs and the inner feeling gave indication that it was beautiful and peaceful and easy.

And now, after I have been alone these few days, and less bombarded by other people’s feelings, the meaning of this last day becomes clearer and clearer to me and more and more important. Aldous was, I think (and certainly I am) appalled at the fact that what he wrote in *Island* was not taken seriously. It was treated as a work of science fiction, when it was not fiction because each one of the ways of living he described in *Island* was not a product of his fantasy, but something that had been tried in one place or another, and some of them in our own everyday life.

If the way Aldous died were known, it might awaken people to the awareness that not only this, but many other facts described in *Island* are possible here and now. Aldous’ asking for *moksha* medicine while dying is a confirmation of his work, and as such is of importance not only to us, but to the world. It is true we will have some people saying that he was a drug addict all his life, and that he ended as one, but it is history that Huxleys stop ignorance before ignorance can stop Huxleys.

Even after our correspondence on the subject, I had many doubts about keeping Aldous in the dark regarding his condition. It seemed not just that, after all he had written and spoken about death, he should be let to go into it unaware. And he had such complete confidence in me—he might have taken it for granted that had death

been near I certainly would have told him and helped him. So my relief at his sudden awakening, at his quick adjusting, is immense. Don't you feel this also?

Now, is his way of dying to remain our, and only our, relief and consolation, or should others also benefit from it? What do you feel?

\* \* \* \* \*

## Useful Cyberspatial Links for Further Research into Worlds of Psychedelia

**Bibliographia Studiorum Psychedelicorum:**

[psymon.com/psychedelia](http://psymon.com/psychedelia)

**Burning Man in Black Rock City, Nevada:**

[burningman.com](http://burningman.com)

**Carlos Castaneda's Don Juan's Teachings:**

[prismagems.com/castanedah](http://prismagems.com/castanedah)

**The Center for Cognitive Liberty & Ethics:**

[cognitiveliberty.org](http://cognitiveliberty.org)

**DanceSafe:**

[dancesafe.org](http://dancesafe.org)

**The Deoxyribonucleic Hyperdimension:**

[deoxy.org](http://deoxy.org)

**Drug Policy Alliance:**

[drugpolicy.org](http://drugpolicy.org)

**Essential Psychedelic Guide by D.M. Turner:**

[tinyurl.com/essential-psychedelic-guide](http://tinyurl.com/essential-psychedelic-guide)

**Hallucinogenic Plants by Richard Evans Shultes:**

[archive.org/details/hallucinogenic\\_plants\\_schultes](http://archive.org/details/hallucinogenic_plants_schultes)

**High Times Magazine:**

[archive.hightimes.com](http://archive.hightimes.com)

**Hyperreal - Music, Chemistry, & Rave Culture:**

[hyperreal.org](http://hyperreal.org)

**The Lazy Man's Guide to Enlightenment by Thaddeus Golas:**

[tinyurl.com/lazy-mans-guide](http://tinyurl.com/lazy-mans-guide)

**The Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies:**  
[maps.org](http://maps.org)

**NORML: The National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws:**  
[norml.org](http://norml.org)

**Psychodelia Archives:**  
[archive.org/details/psychodelia\\_collection](http://archive.org/details/psychodelia_collection)

**The Psychedelic Library:**  
[druglibrary.org/schaffer/lsd/lsdmenu.htm](http://druglibrary.org/schaffer/lsd/lsdmenu.htm)

**Rainbow Family of Living Light:**  
[www.welcomehome.org](http://www.welcomehome.org)

**Reality Sandwich:**  
[realitysandwich.com](http://realitysandwich.com)

**The Shroomery:**  
[shroomery.org](http://shroomery.org)

**SpiritPlants Online Community:**  
[spiritplants.org](http://spiritplants.org)

**SpiritPlants Radio: Global 24/7:**  
[spiritplantsradio.com](http://spiritplantsradio.com)

**TripZine: The Journal of Psychedelic Culture:**  
[tripzine.com](http://tripzine.com)

**The Vaults of Erowid:**  
[erowid.org](http://erowid.org)

*[RIP [lycaeum.org](http://lycaeum.org)]*

\* \* \* \* \*

