

CHRISTOPHER GRAY

The Acid Diaries

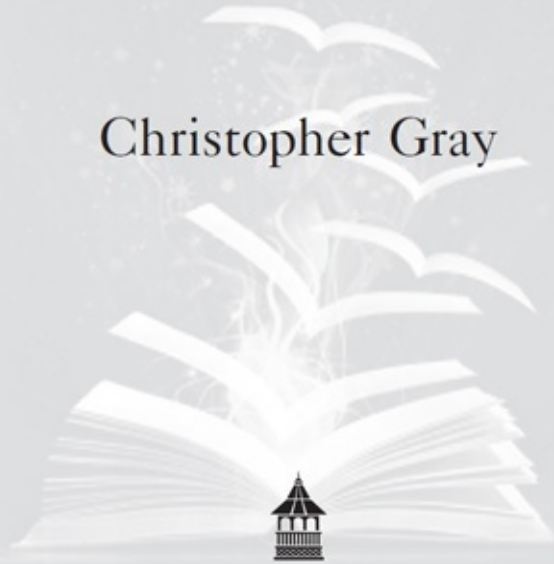


A Psychonaut's Guide to the
History and Use of LSD

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History and Use of LSD

Christopher Gray



Park Street Press
Rochester, Vermont • Toronto, Canada

For the Children

The Acid Diaries

“A unique account of a courageous psychonaut’s journey into the preternatural depths of human consciousness.”

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“If you have any interest at all in acid, then get your hands on this book!”

STEWART HOME, ARTIST, ACADEMIC, FILMMAKER, ACTIVIST, AND AUTHOR

*Who, if I cried, would hear me among the angelic
orders? And even if one of them suddenly
pressed me against his heart, I should fade in the
strength of his stronger existence. For Beauty's nothing
but beginning of Terror we're still just able to bear,
and why we adore it so is because it serenely
disdains to destroy us. Every angel is terrible.*

RAINER MARIA RILKE, *DUINO ELEGIES*

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Preface

WHAT FOLLOWS IS A report on a self-experiment with the psychedelic drug lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD).

There are two main parts to it: first, what happened to me over the period I took the drug, which was close on three years; and second, accounts, in their own words, of other people's experiences before the drug was banned in the mid-1960s, plus a synopsis of what little theory there is as to what the drug does to you.

The LSD used was black market and high quality. I always took it alone, at regular two- to three-week intervals, gradually stepping up the dose. For the first year I made a systematic attempt to turn the drug's energy inward, using methods pioneered during the decade before its criminalization—this is to say, with the subject reclining, using a blindfold, and listening to music on earphones. After the first year I took it outdoors, though still on my own, deep in woodlands close to where I live.

Roughly speaking, the experiment could be divided into three stages. The first was about personal and biographical issues. The second was about boundary and ego loss, sometimes harrowing, and not infrequently associated with the supernatural. The third consisted of glimpses of something transcendent and deeply sacred. The three interpenetrated and overlapped, but those were the basic themes.

Case history . . . ghost story . . . and finally theophany.

I have used first-person narrative throughout, both to convey the immediacy of the experience, and to underline that any speculation I may make is entirely my own responsibility. I have felt myself to be in the position of geographers or explorers of an earlier age, as they pushed into terra incognita. I am still not sure myself of exactly what happened, or of what I saw. In the words of Terence McKenna:

The early approach with psychedelics was the correct one. This is the notion that intelligent and thoughtful people should take psychedelics and try and understand what's going on. Mature and intelligent people need to share their experiences. It's too early for a science. What we need now are the diaries of explorers. We need many diaries of many explorers so we can begin to get a feeling for the territory.¹

Batch 25

EARLY IN 1943, AT the height of the Second World War, a research chemist called Albert Hofmann employed by Sandoz Pharmaceuticals at Basel in Switzerland accidentally absorbed a tiny quantity of a chemical he was working with. The compound, originally synthesized for its possible use in obstetrics, had previously only been tested on lab animals, where its effects had seemed negligible. Now, however, Albert Hofmann felt as though he were drunk. The world seemed dreamlike, colors began to glow with a deep inner light, and his sense of time became erratic. After about two hours these phenomena gradually faded away, leaving no aftereffects; but the chemist, his curiosity piqued, decided to run further tests.

Lab-coded LSD-25, the compound was the twenty-fifth of a series of lysergic acid derivatives—analogs of ergot, a naturally occurring fungus that grows with particular vigor on rye and has been used widely in folk medicine since at least the Middle Ages. Three days later, Hofmann took what he considered a minuscule dose, 250 micrograms—that is, 250 millionths of a gram. His lab notes read:

April 19, 1943: Preparation of an 0.05% aqueous solution of d-lysergic acid diethylamide tartrate.

4:20 P.M.: 0.05 cc (0.25 mg LSD) ingested orally. The solution is tasteless.

4:50 P.M.: no trace of any effect.

5:00 P.M.: slight dizziness, unrest, difficulty in concentration, visual disturbances, marked desire to laugh . . .

At which point the notes stop abruptly. Hofmann found he could no longer write, nor even think clearly. Starting to panic, he asked his lab assistant to accompany him on his bicycle journey back home, but no sooner had the two set off than the drug's effects became positively alarming. "I had great difficulty in speaking coherently," Hofmann later recorded. "My field of vision swayed before me, and objects appeared distorted like the images in curved mirrors. I had the impression of being unable to move from the spot, although my assistant told me afterwards that we had cycled at a good pace."

By the time he finally arrived home, the structure of time and space was coming apart. The outside world was undulating and hallucinatory; his body image was distorted, and he was finding it difficult to breathe. Colors turned into sounds and sounds into colors. During brief moments of lucidity, he could only imagine he had poisoned himself with the drug and was dying; or, alternatively, that he had driven himself irrevocably insane. Later he described the height of his delirium.

The worst part of it was that I was clearly aware of my condition though I was incapable of stopping it. Occasionally I felt as being outside my body. I thought I had died. My "ego" was suspended somewhere in space and I saw my body lying dead on the sofa. I observed and registered clearly that my "alter ego" was moving round the room, moaning.

I quote this in full. While Hofmann's tripped-out bicycle ride was to become iconic for the 1960s and '70s, this other part of his report, at the very height of his intoxication, has been comparatively neglected. Hofmann himself seemed uncomfortable with it. Was he noting this sense of dissociation as a particularly outlandish hallucination—or was he half-suggesting that he had somehow “left his body”?

However, this was to be the climax of his experience; shortly afterward, some six hours after he first took the drug, its effects started to ebb. Slowly things began to return to normal, and finally he fell asleep.

One last feature that struck Albert Hofmann was how positive and healthy he felt on awakening the next morning.

A sensation of well-being and renewed life flowed through me. Breakfast tasted delicious and was an extraordinary pleasure. When I later walked out into the garden, in which the sun shone now after a spring rain, everything glistened and sparkled in a fresh light. The world was as if newly created. All my senses vibrated in a condition of highest sensitivity that persisted for the entire day.¹

Wonder Drug

SANDOZ PHARMACEUTICALS WAS BAFFLED as to what its chemist had discovered. Further experiments with lower doses seemed to bear out Hofmann's own provisional conclusion, that the drug precipitated a temporary mental breakdown. LSD-25 was a test-tube case of schizophrenia; and it was as such that Sandoz began, tentatively, to explore the possibilities of marketing it. The first samples of the drug were sent out to psychiatrists and hospital workers and—picking up the tale—"psychotomimetic," or imitating psychosis, along the way—began to circulate as an educational tool as a possible means of understanding, of experiencing from the inside, what mental patients were going through.

Yet from the first there were dissenting voices. Repeatedly, experimental subjects insisted that, far from being delusional, they were seeing the workings of their minds with exceptional clarity. "I can watch myself all the time as in a mirror and realise my faults and mental inadequacies," wrote one in an early report.

With hindsight, you can see what a nightmare Sandoz must have had trying to profile the drug's effects.

In the first place, the drug didn't affect any two individuals in the same way. Not only that, but it didn't always affect the same individual in the same way. Any single session could break down into different episodes, often bearing no apparent relation to one another; furthermore, the same individual might have wildly different experiences over a series of sessions. Pragmatically, the first thing Sandoz established was that only very low doses—within the 50 to 100 microgram range—were suitable if you wanted to keep one foot in the world of madness and one in the world of sanity. No other drug in the world was effective at such tiny dose levels.

But no sooner did researchers begin to get a handle on dosage than it became apparent that the milieu in which the drug was taken was also a major factor in what happened. The psychotomimetic or "model schizophrenia," approach broke down when it was observed that if lysergic acid was administered in a hospital setting, with white lab-coats and harsh lights and hypodermics, subjects were indeed likely to become psychotic . . . however, the paranoia was being caused by the doctors as much as by the drug.

The chemical appeared to be chameleon-like, and the ensemble of factors shaping its effects in any one case gradually came to be conceptualized as *set and setting*, the *set* being the psychological makeup of the subject and the *setting* the environment and its associations. It was from exploring different combinations of these—plus adjusting the hair-trigger dosage—that the first major use of lysergic acid emerged, as what was referred to as an "adjunct" to conventional psychoanalysis.

Given a relaxed, relatively informal analytic setting and a lowish dose, what happened was that patients got in touch with long-repressed feelings, which they could both express and analyze for themselves with remarkable fluency. Bonding with the analyst occurred easily, traumas seeming

leap into consciousness of their own accord.

Depression and anxiety were particularly responsive to treatment, and by the mid-1950s, lysergic acid was beginning to look like a major breakthrough in the entire field of analytically oriented psychotherapy. The drug worked equally well for Freudians, Jungians, and any other major school of psychoanalysis, and a variety of new approaches to treatment began to appear.

A patient might, for instance, be seen the day before a session with the drug, be supervised for the session itself, then be seen again for a follow-up session the following day. This made work with patients much more intense, but it was estimated that the overall length of individual analysis could be reduced to one-tenth of what it had been. At last there was the real possibility psychoanalysis could be applied on a mass level.

Particularly promising work was being done with alcoholics, largely in Canada; and it was here lysergic acid suddenly proved that its creative potential had still barely been touched.

While the doses used as an adjunct to analysis were on the low side, alcoholics were found to respond much more positively to high ones. Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), during the time the “moderate schizophrenia” concept was still in vogue, had suggested that high doses—300 micrograms or more—could simulate delirium tremens and the harrowing experience of “hitting bottom,” which for AA was the key to successful rehabilitation. However, when this was tested out, it was found that, on the contrary, a large number of alcoholics had eminently positive experiences that they insisted were deeply religious and that the insights they brought back had enormously healing effects in their own right.

In fact, when high doses began to be explored systematically, they were found to stimulate seemingly mystical feelings in a high proportion of people. Whether such individuals had previously been “religious” did not seem to matter. At one or another stage of their session, they would undergo a meltdown of everything they had previously taken for reality and glimpse what they claimed was the sacred core to existence. Furthermore, there were scattered but persistent reports of telepathy, extrasensory perception, and other cases of esoteric and paranormal experience.

Dosage was finally established around the mid-1950s. One hundred micrograms was low, 200 was medium, 300 and above, high. And the two major schools of LSD psychotherapy that evolved were defined primarily by the dose range they employed.

The first school used relatively low doses for session after session, or “serially,” as it was called, an approach that became known as psycholytic therapy. The second was based on the concept of the “single overwhelming dose,” sessions never being given more than twice or at most three times, the purpose of which was to shock patients out of their obsessional behavior and give them a glimpse of transcendent reality. Sacred music, religious statues, or other imagery could form part of the setting for this second approach—as could natural beauty—which became known technically as psychedelic therapy.

The first was the dominant school in Europe, the second in the United States.

By the early 1960s, well over a thousand research papers and several dozen books had been written on the subject; and lysergic acid diethylamide, or LSD, as it was already becoming known, seemed so fair to become the wonder drug of psychotherapy for the second half of the twentieth century.

The Doors of Perception

WHAT NO ONE DREAMED was that the drug was about to become part of the roller-coaster political ride of the 1960s. The first step toward this happening was that the drug began to break free of doctors and psychoanalysts. During the early '60s, LSD was still perfectly legal. Providing you had half-way reasonable professional qualifications, independent research projects could be set up with relative ease.

Oscar Janiger, a Los Angeles psychotherapist, was the first person to study the effects of LSD on a wide range of people not suffering from any particular psychological problem. Janiger's approach was very largely nondirective: the setting was a ground-floor apartment, part of which was a well-equipped art studio for anyone who wanted to paint. (Janiger was especially interested in the drug's effects on creativity.) It had a comfortable modern living room with a record player for anyone who had brought music they wanted to listen to, and French windows giving on to a secluded garden for those who wanted to sit quietly on their own. You could take a walk through the neighborhood so long as you were accompanied by a member of the staff.

The emphasis Janiger put on painting, and on studying the effects of LSD on creativity more generally, indicates how far the drug had already slipped from psychiatric control. LSD was being taken up by avant-garde artists and intellectuals, at first by painters amazed by what the drug could do to form and color; then by writers, musicians, and philosophers equally astounded at what high doses could do to cognition.

Mescaline, which had hung fire since its synthesis just after the First World War, was found to resemble LSD very closely in its effects, and for several years the two drugs were used almost interchangeably. As a consequence, the peyote cactus cult of the Native Americans of the American Southwest was suddenly treated with new respect, and the anthropological dimension to hallucinatory drug use began to open up. Gordon Wasson, a New York banker, and his wife, Valentina, tracked down a functioning magic-mushroom cult of what seemed great antiquity deep in the mountains of Mexico. Could hallucinatory drugs have played a much more dynamic role in tribal religions and primitive societies in general than had been previously imagined? The word *psychedelic* entered the language.

In fact, it was mescaline rather than LSD that proved the inspiration for what was to become the most famous of all testimonials to psychedelics, Aldous Huxley's *The Doors of Perception*.

Little more than a lengthy essay, the book opens one May morning in 1953 with Aldous Huxley being given 400 milligrams of mescaline sulfate by Humphry Osmond, an English doctor responsible for much of the research into LSD and alcoholism in Canada.

Huxley was at his home in the Los Angeles hills, and having taken his dose, he lay down and closed his eyes. All he had read about mescaline's effects led him to expect that within half an hour or so he would begin to see shifting geometric patterns in brilliant color, which would then gradually transform into fantastic landscapes and jeweled architecture. However, as time passed, no such thing

took place; there were a few colored shapes, but they were devoid of interest. Not until he opened his eyes and sat up did the drug kick in.

Huxley found himself sitting in a transfigured room. Furniture and walls of books were glowing though lit from within. The jewel-like colors for which mescaline was celebrated were there . . . not inside, but out, the spines of the books glowing, he wrote, like rubies and emeralds and lapis lazuli and when he looked down at his own body, the very material of his trousers had become a source of wonder.

Beside him was a small vase with three flowers in it, a casual combination of a rose, a carnation, and an iris, but what he saw took his breath away.

I was seeing what Adam had seen on the morning of his creation—the miracle, moment by moment, of naked existence. . . . Flowers shining with their own inner light and all but quivering under the pressure of the significance with which they were charged.

World authority on comparative religion and leading exponent of Indian Advaita Vedanta, Huxley may well have been—but nothing had prepared him for this, this beauty of everyday objects that led him deeper and deeper into is-ness. Perhaps that was the most striking thing *The Doors of Perception* did; it replaced the concept of hallucination with that of *vision*.

What rose and iris and carnation so intensely signified was nothing more, and nothing less, than what they were—a transience that was yet eternal life, a perpetual perishing that was at the same time pure Being, a bundle of minute, unique particulars in which, by some unspeakable and yet self-evident paradox, was to be seen the divine source of all existence.

Equally important was that Huxley was the first person to point to *boundary-loss* as being the keynote psychedelic experience. He noted the way the grid that the mind or ego imposes on perception loosens and dissolves, the way phenomena breathe and pulse as they lead you deeper and deeper into themselves. In many ways Huxley's experience that spring day was more typically Platonic than Indian *advaitin*. Beauty dissolved into is-ness, and is-ness into intelligible Being.

He looked away from the flowers and books, and some furniture caught his eye: the composition formed by a small typing table, a wicker chair, and his desk. At first what struck him was the intricacy of their spatial relationships observed from a purely artistic viewpoint, as a still life, something that could have been composed, he writes, by a Braque or a Juan Gris.

But as I looked, this purely aesthetic Cubist's-eye view gave place to what I can only describe as the sacramental vision of reality. I was back where I had been when I was looking at the flowers—back in a world where everything shone with the Inner Light, and was infinite in its significance. The legs, for example of that chair—how miraculous their tubularity, how supernatural their polished smoothness! I spent several minutes—or was it several centuries?—not merely gazing at those bamboo legs, but actually being them—or rather being myself in them; or, to be still more accurate (for “I” was not involved in the case, nor in a certain sense were “they”) being my Not-self in the Not-self which was the chair.

Here both Eastern and Western religion began to transform into something qualitatively new stretching Huxley's spiritual articulacy to the breaking point. This was, in fact, to prove the climax of

his trip, and shortly after this passage he starts to fall back from the existentially searing quality such nonduality and relate his experience to philosophy more generally. Earlier in his essay he had referred to possibilities broached by the English philosopher C. D. Broad.

The function of the brain and nervous system and sense organs is in the main eliminative and not productive. Each person is at each moment capable of remembering all that has ever happened to him and of perceiving everything that is happening everywhere in the universe. The function of the brain and nervous system is to protect us from being overwhelmed.

Now Huxley replaced this with a much more vigorous paraphrase:

Each one of us is potentially Mind at Large. But in so far as we are animals, our business is at all costs to survive. To make biological survival possible, Mind at Large has to be funneled through the reducing valve of the brain and nervous system. What comes out at the other end is a measly trickle of the kind of consciousness which will help us to stay alive on the surface of this particular planet.¹

What mescaline does, Huxley suggests, is temporarily bypass this “reducing valve” function of the brain, allowing through a flood of data that had previously been screened out as it served its “practical” purpose . . . a speculation that has remained the guiding image of theories as to how psychedelics work.

Psychopolitics and the Sixties

DURING THE LATTER HALF of the 1950s, self-experiment with cannabis, mescaline, and LSD began to spread across Europe and the United States. By the early '60s mescaline had been overtaken by LSD, and LSD was swept up in the snowballing “youth revolt” of the time.

Psychotherapists bitterly attacked what they saw as irresponsible, purely recreational use of enormously potent drugs. Yet it was difficult not to agree with the lobby for the legalization of drugs headed by crusading ex-Harvard psychology professor Tim Leary, that psychedelics weren't the private property of psychotherapists to dictate as to how and when they should be used.

Moreover, even the most cursory examination of young people's use of LSD would have shown that far from being merely recreational, what was happening was that features of an entirely new set of settings were beginning to appear. Outside the analytic setting the drug lent itself to something far more Dionysian and celebratory. “Acid” could melt the boundaries between individuals and border large groups of people.

While researching this book, I reread Martin Lee and Bruce Shlain's *Acid Dreams: The CIA, LSD, and the Sixties Rebellion*. Not only is the book the best history of LSD, it's the best history of '60s counterculture as a whole: an eyewitness account of just how close the West, in particular the apparently monolithic United States, came to internal breakdown in the late '60s. I was beginning to think I had imagined it all, so outrageous did the things we had done seem in the light of the past twenty-five years' abject political and cultural conformism—but no, everything was there in *Acid Dreams* . . .

During the early '60s a large, and certainly the most spirited, part of the post-Second World War generation started to drop out of society. They dropped out of school, college, and steady jobs and lived off expedients in inner-city slums and threadbare country communes. While all were active against the Vietnam War, their politics weren't so much focused on specific issues as on a gut-feel sense that society as a whole was bankrupt and that it could be meaningfully opposed only by living a different way of life here and now.

By the middle of the decade so many young people were dropping out that it looked as though “youth” was becoming a social class in its own right, one about to inherit the revolutionary dynamism Marx had ascribed to the industrial proletariat.

For between the two world wars, capitalism had cut a deal with the traditional working class. The worst of the exploitation would be relegated to the Third World, and workers in the West would be given a larger slice of the capitalist pie—providing they stayed in line. Over the following years the standoff had become status quo; more than that, the ever-increasing consumption of goods by the updated, mid-twentieth-century working class had become an essential part of capitalist economy, one without which it couldn't continue to function . . . but the exclusion of the vast majority of people from any real control of their own lives remained untouched.

What the hippies were saying was that poverty and exploitation hadn't been done away with, they had merely been modernized.

The overcrowding, hunger, and disease of the nineteenth-century working class had been replaced by the loneliness, tension, and free-floating anxiety of its twentieth-century equivalent. Poverty had become psychological, and this at a time when there was logically no need for poverty at all. Technologically, humanity had reached the point where basic material survival could be assured with much less labor than ever before. In principle, at any rate, we stood on the verge of a new age of leisure.

“Workers of the world disperse,” as one hippie graffito put it succinctly. That was the negative side of the '60s political program, the refusal to work, the embracing of a degree of voluntary poverty. The positive side lay in trying to prospect the values of the new Renaissance now possible. If consumer goods are a mockery of true human desires, then what exactly do we want? Most of the '60s experiments in creating a new lifestyle can be seen as an attempt to answer this question.

Acid Dreams zeroes in on the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco as reflecting most of the themes of such a “revolution of everyday life” . . . Sexually, free love and the dissolution of the nuclear family in a new tribalism . . . Socially, the bid to create much smaller communities, where everyone knows most everybody else, with a politics based on consensus and direct action continually fed by, and over-spilling back onto, the street . . . Culturally, a huge stress on individual creativity, not creating the “art” of middle-class spectator/show culture, but something genuinely interactive—something closer to children’s play—games directly creating experience itself . . . Spiritually, the “Acid Tests,” the fusion of music, dance, and psychedelics originally devised by ex-novelist Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters, in which the whole community could participate in celebratory loosening of boundaries and ego transcendence . . .

So what role did LSD play in this?

In *Acid Dreams*, Shlain and Lee suggest that essentially LSD functioned as a rite of passage.

What’s the simplest way you can sum up the drug’s effects? Surely by saying it reveals that evolution is in no way complete or even stable. Life has been frozen in its present form, and we have been informed that this is objective reality . . . while it’s no such thing. Life is wild and free and total unknown, and taking acid was initiation into this awareness. “That,” write Shlain and Lee, “was what Kesey and the Merry Pranksters meant when they invited people to try and ‘pass the Acid Test.’ The willingness to endure what could be a rather harrowing ordeal was for many young men and women a way of cutting the last umbilical cord to everything the older generation had designated safe and sanitized.”¹

I think Shlain and Lee have put their finger on what really was a breakthrough in the hippie use of LSD. What hippies sensed was the initiatory and ceremonial side of the drug . . . the social, not so communistic, dimension that psychotherapists, with their fixation on individual subjectivity, had completely blanked out.

Ultimately, both hippies and the New Left saw individual isolation and the separate self-sense as being the crucial revolutionary issue of the time. What had to be created was a new culture offering the transcendence of these: a body of sacraments, available to everyone, at the heart of social life. Arguably this insight, on the part of people barely out of their teens, was as profound as anything psychotherapists had to offer.

Bad Trips

THE FIRST TRIP I had was mescaline. I took it in Paris when I was twenty, and it didn't do anything. The problem wasn't the mescaline. The friend I took it with got off all right, off to a classic bummer.

We were sitting in my hotel room waiting for the drug to come on when he suddenly caved in on himself. "I am seeing terrible things about myself," he said, looking at me with this strange, stricken expression. He had gone as white as a sheet. I had no idea what he was talking about, and when someone took him off in search of antidepressants, I was left to go wandering on my own through the Latin Quarter. Apart from one brief moment when all the flowers in the Luxembourg Gardens lit up as though they were neon and someone had tripped the switch, nothing happened at all. Somehow I had managed to stop the trip dead in its tracks.

Mescaline didn't come my way again for nearly a year, by which time I was living in Tangier alone with a pileup of other young misfits and adventurers, getting our first taste of the Third World.

My dud trip in Paris didn't lead me to expect anything very much, so I decided I would take the capsule of white powder at night and go down to a small bar on the Tangier waterfront that had a collection of jazz records.

I was sitting quietly in a corner listening to whatever was playing, the initial nausea fading and the trip just starting to come on, when suddenly someone knocked the record player behind the bar. The needle skidded across the vinyl, producing a shriek hideously amplified by the drug.

The very fabric of reality sounded as though it had been torn, and before I knew it I was on my feet and blundering through the door. However, no sooner was I outside than I saw I had been quite right: the veil of the world had indeed been rent.

The palms, which fringed the boulevard, had all shrunk to a fraction of their former size. What had been trees now resembled a row of houseplants.

Everything else remained unchanged, which had the effect of making whatever fate the trees had met even more scary. I looked around the empty boulevard and felt horribly vulnerable: it was as though some threat of a qualitatively different order was hanging over me . . . as indeed it was. Deciding I'd be better off in my room in the medina, I made my way back along the deserted waterfront, then up the steep flight of steps through the old city wall. I passed the fleapit cinema and The Dancing Boy (a dope café where a boy in drag danced to a small live band), finding my way instinctively through the grimy labyrinth behind the Socco Chico.

I climbed the stairs to my room, thinking, Thank God for that, as I shut the door behind me. Fumbling in the dark with the matchbox, I lit a couple of candles . . . to illumine a room I had never seen before, one hallucinatory beyond belief. In the flickering light the arabesque tiles on the wall had not only become lustrous in their colors, but as I watched, first one then another section started to move, until there was an enormous and insanely complex system of cogs turning busily all around me. The walls had vanished; there were just wheels upon wheels revolving as far as I could see. I was

the center of a throbbing, incandescent machine.

Suddenly there was a blinding flash of pain in my head, and I staggered back.

The pain faded, but in its place I found something had gone wrong with my breathing. I couldn't tell what it was, but I felt I was about to suffocate. Then, to my horror, the pain in my head started to come back—not too badly at first, but slowly building up in waves to the point that it felt like my head was splitting, then ebbing away . . . only to build up again, in a rhythm that was to continue throughout the night.

I was terrified.

Whatever was happening contravened everything I knew of what the world was and the way it was supposed to work—yet my fear went beyond anything you could analyze. It was terror in its raw state. Like slipping on an icy pavement, when your feet shoot out from under you and for a single suspended moment you know you're falling, but you're so disoriented you don't even know the direction you're falling. Like that—but being frozen in that moment forever and ever.

For there was no sense of time, absolutely none.

The only thing that helped was to try to walk. If I kept on stumbling up and down, I found I could retain a semblance of subject/object relations. In some corner of my poor mad mind was the memory that vitamin C was supposed to cut bad trips; and, with the promptness of things in a dream, I found I had half a lemon in my hand, which I was trying desperately to suck. That was as good as it got in the thinking department. Most of the time I couldn't remember having taken a drug at all; or if I did remember for a moment, I couldn't work out what taking a drug meant.

This was eternity. This was it.

A vase of flowers, like flowers in a Chagall painting, hung impossibly in midair. The blossoms were tastefully arranged, as though in a bowl, but there wasn't any bowl; they weren't held up there by anything at all. Rainbow-colored strips of light from the Moroccan slit windows crept across the walls and floor in a strange jerky manner, like miniature Technicolor searchlights. I shambled backward and forward, sucking my vile half-lemon, trying to avoid stepping in the machinery or the searchlight beams, through this unspeakably evil Wonderland . . .

Never afterward could I work out how such hallucinations were possible. On present evidence I was in another dimension, separate from but closely adjacent to this, one whose nature was predicated on timelessness, incandescence, and torture. Clearly, looking at it afterward, wherever I had been corresponded in shocking detail to the Christian concept of hell, shot through with the most terrible conviction that this nightmare was what lay, and had always lain, behind the affable world of my appearances. Biding its time . . .

But how could that be? Apart from chapel at boarding school, I had never been particularly exposed to Christian conditioning.

At some point the peak must have leveled off into a plateau, one which stretched throughout the eternal night, only to disappear—almost in a matter of seconds—as the first light of dawn slipped across the roofs of the medina. Horribly, the speed and ease with which it vanished seemed a token that it hadn't gone very far.

The First Maps

LOOKING BACK ON THAT time, what seems so incomprehensible is that we never took LSD more seriously. How was it we failed to grasp its importance? For the concept of deconditioning was at the heart of the New Left of the time. If any single feature set '60s and '70s radicalism apart from any previous insurrectionary politics, it was insistence that individual subjectivity had to be transformed. The political was the personal. Politics were psychopolitics. Our own hearts and minds were precisely where the old order was ingrained—and if we couldn't change ourselves, then what hope was there we could ever change the world?

The near hysterical hostility of psychotherapists toward hippies didn't help. It made us disregard everything else they said, which was stupid. The best summary of research until then, Robert Masters and Jean Houston's *Varieties of Psychedelic Experience*, came out in 1966, and there was much we could have learned from it.

Masters and Houston start by asking the basic question facing anyone who becomes involved with LSD—how can individual trips differ so wildly from one person to the next?—and drawing on several years of research, they speak of “four levels of the drug experience hypothesized as corresponding major levels of the psyche,” levels that they proceed to characterize as follows:

the sensory level

First, LSD brings changes to perception, most obviously to sight, but more generally to the body image—which can appear to grow or shrink, age or become youthful—changes tending to congregation in the early stages of a session, while the drug's effects are still mounting.

the recollective-analytic level

This general loosening of one's perception of oneself and the world, plus the massive influx of energy allows unconscious material to begin to work itself free. This was the level that so excited psychotherapists. There was no longer any need to go digging for repressed emotions or memories—they burst into consciousness with little or no prompting. Using the term loosely, this could be described as the Freudian level of the drug's action.

the symbolic level

If the session goes deeper, a further level is reached. Personal identity starts to thin out and disappear. Phenomena don't just become more beautiful physically, they become more densely charged with meaning. They become mythopoetic. The personal unconscious appears to be becoming replaced by something you could well call the collective one . . . the theater of ritual and myth. Masters and Houston call this the “symbolic level”—and it could, again using the term loosely, be characterized as the drug's Jungian dimension.

the integral level

The sensory . . . the autobiographical . . . the archetypal. A typical session would be multilayered with these three levels shifting in and out of one another. However, there was one final, qualitative, different variety of psychedelic experience, reported by Freud and Jung, that in a few cases appeared to be religious epiphany. This had always been the most contentious implication of psychedelics, the possibility that God could be put in a pill; and Masters and Houston, while admitting themselves baffled as to how any such thing could be happening, were forced to acknowledge that a small number of their subjects did appear to be having authentic mystical experiences.

By their very nature, such maps are bound to be oversimplified, but analyzing a session in terms of these four levels can provide surprising insights. Look more closely, for instance, at something celebrated as Aldous Huxley's mescaline trip in *The Doors of Perception*. Why has no one else, or at least no one on record, ever managed to reproduce his experience?

If we look at Huxley's trip in terms of Masters and Houston's schema, we can see that it started out with a highly positive experience of natural beauty, which then shot straight to the symbolic or archetypal—"I was seeing what Adam had seen on the morning of his creation," and so forth. Apparently there was no intervening biographical or recollective-analytic level . . . but anyone familiar with Huxley's life knows that he is withholding a vital piece of information here. As a schoolboy Huxley had contracted an eye disease that had made him unable to see for a matter of several weeks, and left him with appallingly bad eyesight for life—so bad that at times he'd been forced to use a guide dog. *Huxley was all but blind*. Could he, as he sat gazing at his little nosegay of flowers, have passed quickly through something you could well describe as recollective-analytic? Realized in a flash that he was seeing far better, better qualitatively, than most people ever see? His blindness had been healed. Essentially, he had experienced a classic miracle.

I'd suggest he was swept up by such a wave of gratitude and trust that it bore him effortlessly through the symbolic level up to the non-duality of Masters and Houston's "integral level." But had this breakthrough not been based on such positive emotions, it could equally well have lurched into schizophrenic terror.

Perhaps Masters and Houston's book simply came out too late. By 1966, you could feel the impending violence in the air. That's something *Acid Dreams* conveys so well, the huge groundswell of collective energy, then the riptide that surged through '67 and burst into '68, revolutionary year of miracles . . .

Politically, the first thing to happen in 1968 was the Vietcong's Tet Offensive, which proved that a peasant army could whip the most powerful nation on Earth. A few weeks later in early April, the rioting, looting, and arson after the assassination of Martin Luther King seemed to have brought the war back home to America. There were 125 cities on fire in the United States, twenty thousand people arrested, and fifty thousand troops on the streets. Nothing like it had happened since the Civil War. Shortly after, Europe erupted with the Paris May Days, when a student occupation of the Sorbonne sparked a nationwide wildcat strike that brought France in its turn to the brink of civil war, with President de Gaulle, if rumors were to be credited, getting ready to bomb Paris.

And these were only the spectacular highlights of something far more serious: the ongoing dropping out of the most intelligent and adventurous young people of the time, which for several years seemed to promise a massive, all-inclusive general strike, one not only against the economy, but against the entire capitalist version of reality. Sustained psychedelic research was well-nigh impossible amid such

apocalypticism—but this was only the first part of the Sixties Rebellion, and events were to develop still further . . .

Historically, “the ’60s” never dovetailed with a decade. The period of maximum turbulence was much more like 1965–75, with “the Movement” peaking politically in ’68 and ’69, then collapsing at what was apparently the height of its strength. The headline-grabbing tactics of the hippie terrorists in the early ’70s—Baader-Meinhof in Germany, the Weathermen in the States, the Angry Brigade in England, the Red Brigades in Italy—were not only a disastrous political miscalculation, but they also served to confuse a far deeper and more significant reorientation of opposition.

Rather than the terrorists, it was the early feminists who dealt capitalism the body blow. Their work offered the first critique of Western society as a whole and provided the first tools with which revolutionaries could begin to revolutionize themselves—to question their very concept of identity, their mind or ego. During the early to mid ’70s, erstwhile militants in droves took to individual and group psychotherapy and later in the decade to various spiritual practices. This was the time that the counterculture really tried to come to grips with deconditioning in an organized manner. And this was the time you would have expected a proper exploration of LSD . . . but no such thing took place.

Why? For myself, I had gone on tripping after my nightmare in Tangier—as a self-styled rebel, one who had little choice in the matter—but always with a whipped-dog wariness. Basically, I never trusted LSD; and despite all the song and dance about psychedelics at the time, I suspect that a large number of my peers didn’t either. Amazing eye-opener LSD might be, but it seemed too volatile, too violent to be workable. Had we known of the research Stanislov Grof had been doing in Prague—with its high doses, dozens of sessions, and openness to religious or paranormal experience if it occurred—we might have changed our attitude, but Grof’s *Realms of the Human Unconscious* was not published until 1976, and by then it was already too late.

By that time the possibility of any real revolutionary confrontation was draining away. While a few experimental cults, such as Osho’s or Adi Da’s, were to continue into the ’80s, the zeitgeist that had inspired our generation was all but played out. Perhaps we had destroyed too much and failed to replace it with anything positive, leaving the next generation with no alternative but to back away from the yawning void we bequeathed them. The impotence of the Left became patent, and throughout the ’80s and ’90s, yuppie neoconservatism swept all before it. Nothing was done to contest the ever-increasing totalitarianism introduced by the Reagan and Thatcher regimes, or even to publicize the corporate World State agenda that lay behind it.

Perhaps revolts that fail always create this murderous backlash. Ringleaders are either dead or thoroughly discredited; and the rest, however sick at heart, have little option but to try to pick up the pieces and lead some semblance of normal life, to curl up with a lover and a couple of kids and draw the curtains on the horror outside. Acid and the revolution dropped out of sight together; and there the matter stood until . . . well, I’d say, comparatively recently.

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