

LSD and the press*

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There is a legend, hallowed in journalism, about a newspaper photographer who was assigned to cover an anniversary of the first sustained nuclear reaction at the University of Chicago. Arriving on campus, the photographer addressed himself to the assembled scientists, including Vannevar Bush, Enrico Fermi, Arthur H. Compton, and Harold C. Urey. 'Now, fellows,' he said, 'I got three pictures in mind. First, you guys putting the atom in the machine. Then splitting the atom. And finally all of you grouped around looking at the pieces.'

I had always supposed the story was apocryphal – until just the other day, when I was approached by an excited photographer who works for the same Chicago newspaper I do. 'I've got a terrific idea,' he said. 'You take me out some night to one of those LSD parties. I'll set up my camera and take pictures of the whole thing. All this weird stuff that happens. Who knows? We might come back with a picture of God.'

I like to think he was putting me on. Taken together, however, the two anecdotes provide a reasonably accurate idea of the befuddled manner in which the press has often groped to understand anything radically new and complex – including nuclear energy, space flight, and now psychedelic drugs.

We are able now to cover the atom and space beats with a high degree of competence and sophistication, due in large part to the development of specialist reporters. At my own newspaper, for example, we do not have simply a science writer: we have one reporter who is assigned exclusively to the physical sciences and a second reporter assigned to the biological sciences. A third reporter is a nationally respected authority on evolution and DNA.

It seems fair to say, however, that the nation's newspapers as a whole are still befuddled about LSD. And there are several reasons for this state of affairs.

Consider first the plight of a typical city editor. Assuming he wants to provide responsible coverage of LSD phenomena, who might he assign to the job?

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The medical writer? Perhaps. But that would certainly limit the scope of the investigation, and the writer would probably tend to reflect the attitudes and concerns of the medical establishment.

The religion editor? Well, he or she is pretty busy as it is putting together the Saturday church page and trying to deal with the day-to-day hard news generated by the ecumenical movement and squabbles over birth control and priestly celibacy. The overworked religion editor seldom has the time, space, or inclination to dabble in metaphysics.

The police reporter at detective headquarters? Unfortunately, he is often enough the final choice. But obviously not a very good one.

What about that new cub reporter with the degree in sociology? He could explore the subject from the standpoint of its social impact and social origins. Not a bad idea maybe. But again, too limited.

The travel editor? He's never taken that kind of trip.

The difficulty with the psychedelics, of course, is that they cut across so many areas – law and psychology, physiology and philosophy, Eastern and Western religions. As a result, the city editor may decide to fall back on the talents of that jack-of-all-knowledge, the general-assignment reporter.

In the old days, any reporter worth his pay cheque was supposed to be capable of handling any story on any subject. The theory was that he would ask himself the same questions that the uninformed layman would ask, and that he would supply the answers in terms that could be understood by a Kansas City milkman or a little old lady in Dubuque. For years, reporters all over America were writing stories with these two mythological readers in mind. And the theory in fact was not such a bad one, until we got quite deep into the twentieth century. I still remember, however, the night the first Sputnik flashed across our innocent Western skies. There was turmoil in the city room as the general-assignment reporters placed frantic telephone calls to sleepy astronomers and physicists. We didn't even know what questions to ask. After only a few days of struggling with apogees and perigees, it became all too evident that we needed our own rocket expert, and in time a top investigative reporter was groomed to take over the field. I don't know if the little old lady in Dubuque can understand every word he writes, but she can rest assured at least that her information is accurate.

The late Professor Jacob Scher used to tell his journalism students: 'Do all you can to simplify. But keep in mind there are some things that are just damned hard to understand. They're difficult. And if you simplify beyond a certain point, you won't be telling the truth

about them.' Obviously the issues raised by the psychedelics are incredibly complex and damned hard to understand. A general-assignment Da Vinci would have trouble enough explaining all of them, if he understood them himself, and here again it is clear that complexity demands at least a degree of specialization and a fundamental background in a number of areas.

Newspapers in recent years have produced their experts on outer space, as well as education, labour, politics, urban planning, and human relations, to the point where major city rooms have come to resemble mini-universities. As yet, however, they have not developed any comparable authorities on inner space, if such a thing is possible, and it must be admitted in consequence that newspapers in general have done a bum job in telling the many-faceted story of LSD.

Some patterns are revealed by a visit to a newspaper morgue, where the files contain hundreds of clippings about LSD. The clippings were scissored from newspapers across the country, and there are very few of them that date prior to 1963. The few early ones are optimistic, and they tend to treat LSD as a possible new wonder drug:

DRUG HELPS MENTALLY ILL RECALL PAST (1960)

HOW 'NIGHTMARE' DRUG AIDS ADDICTION FIGHT (1961)

As early as 1951, readers of the *Chicago Daily News* were informed that a psychiatrist had told 'how a white powder given in so tiny an amount it could not be seen by the naked eye transformed normal people into strange, psychotic-like individuals in thirty minutes [and] hinted at the exciting possibility that mental illness could be caused by a toxic substance produced in the bodies of people who have broken down under stress'. A NEW SHOCK DRUG UNLOCKS TROUBLED MINDS, readers of the *This Week* newspaper supplement were told in 1959. 'It has rescued many drug addicts, alcoholics, and neurotics from their private hells - and holds promise for curing tomorrow's mental ills.' It has 'excited psychiatric workers all over the world'.

By 1963, however, the pattern had shifted, and the volume of stories since then has appeared to multiply almost in geometric progression. It is not a coincidence, moreover, that 1963 was the year Dr Timothy Leary took his departure from Harvard University. That was the year the press really discovered LSD, having first discovered Dr Leary, and until recently there has been little success in divorcing the one subject from the other. As far as the drug is concerned, the change in emphasis can be detected from a sampling of 1963 headlines:

A WARNING ON LSD: IT CARRIES WILD KICK

DRUG BRINGS HALLUCINATIONS; USE IS GETTING OUT OF HAND

MEDICS WARN THRILL DRUG CAN WARP MINDS AND KILL

Of psychedelic drugs in general, readers of the *Washington Post* learned in 1963: 'They have been blamed for at least one suicide, and for causing a respectable married secretary to appear nude in public.' Since that year, newspaper readers on the whole have learned very little else of consequence about the drugs; the coverage by and large has been of the cops-and-robbers variety, concentrating on police raids, drug-control bills, suicides, and fatal plunges.

As indicated, this sort of treatment can be attributed in part to a lack of reportorial expertise. Before taking a closer look at newspaper handling of the subject, however, another important factor should be pointed out.

It might be argued that the current emphasis on the negative aspects of LSD is at least partially inherent in the very nature of that curious stuff we call 'news'.

There is a common complaint that every newspaperman must have heard at least a thousand times in his lifetime. It goes something like this: 'Why do you always print bad news? Why is the front page always full of war and crime, murders and disasters? Why don't you print some of the *nice* things that happen? Why don't you write stories about all the good people who lead decent lives?'

'Because you wouldn't buy our paper any more' is an obvious and an honest answer. 'You'd run right out and buy some other paper.' And why? Because a newspaper is supposed to print the news, and news is based on conflict. Dog bites man: that's news. More to the point, news deals with *exceptions*. Its stock in trade is the exceptional event that runs counter to ordinary experience, and that is why man bites dog is *really* news. In the same sense, war, crime, and disasters are all exceptions to the normal rule, and therefore they are news. If a man rises in the morning and does not murder his wife, that is not news. If people live in harmony and do good works, that also is not news. I believe a satirist once wrote a Walter Lord type of book titled *The Day Nothing Happened*, offering an hour-by-hour chronicle of events in some hypothetical American city. One by one, with murderous suspense, these ordinary events built up to a shattering climax in which the sun went down and everybody went peacefully to bed. I can't imagine the book sold very well, but there is probably a lesson in it for those people who complain about news content.

Many complain that the 'good teenager' has had a bad press, that

his image has been ruined by a few bad teenagers. The fact is that the good teenager is not news, because he is not exceptional. By the same coin, a good trip on LSD is not news either. But a bad trip: that's news. And a bad trip that ends in suicide or a psychotic break: that's really news.

Newspapers since World War II have been giving more and more space to interpretation of news events – to what is known in the business as 'think pieces'. But their primary function, as it has always been, is still to tell the news – to record the daily glut of occurrences; and since news by definition is almost certain to be bad, it is perhaps unfair to fault the newspapers too much for doing what they are supposed to do.

Having said this, however, I must add that the run-of-mill coverage of LSD has more often than not been superficial at best and violently distorted at worst. Since 1963, the newspapers had had almost nothing to say about the potential benefits of psychedelics in psychotherapy and related fields, including the treatment of alcoholism. As evidence of the breakdown in communications, reflecting also the breakdown in legitimate research in this country, witness this pathetic little column-closer, which was filed in 1967 by an Associated Press reporter in Germany:

HAMBURG (AP) – The hallucinatory drug LSD is being used by Czech authorities as a possible cure for alcoholism, according to Radio Free Europe monitors.

End of story, in the paper where I read it. Americans can no doubt be thankful at least that they still have Radio Free Europe to keep them posted.

Two news stories in particular were probably of major importance in turning the tide of public opinion decisively against LSD. They broke within a week of each other, in April of 1966. One involved a five-year-old Brooklyn girl who suffered convulsions after swallowing an LSD sugar cube that had been left in a refrigerator by her uncle. The other concerned a former medical-school student, Stephen H. Kessler, who was charged with the stabbing to death of his mother-in-law, also in Brooklyn. 'Man,' he told police, 'I've been flying for three days on LSD. Did I rape somebody? Did I kill my wife?' (It was at this point that Sandoz Pharmaceuticals withdrew its new-drug application, citing unfavourable publicity, and thus cut off most legitimate LSD research in this country.)

Kessler vanished into Bellevue Hospital for mental tests, and that was the last news I have seen about him. But the case since then has been cited repeatedly in newspaper columns to support the assertion

that LSD 'can lead to murder'. *Post hoc, ergo propter hoc*, of course. If indeed it was a case of *post hoc*.

Later in the year, in a story on the League for Spiritual Discovery, writer Thomas Buckley noted rather wistfully in the *New York Times*, '... the increasing use of LSD poses social, medical, and religious questions that do not seem to be receiving the attention they deserve'. Soon after that, however, the drug was to receive considerable attention in the very influential pages of the *Times*:

LSD SPREAD IN U.S. ALARMS DOCTORS AND POLICE

AUTHORITIES SEE EDUCATION AS KEY HOPE IN CURBING PERIL OF THE HALLUCINATORY DRUG

Under the three-column headline, in a lengthy story that attracted widespread attention, Gladwin Hill wrote on 23 February 1967, that LSD had become 'the nation's newest scourge'. Setting out to prove it, he reported some horrifying examples – including the case of a teenage driver whose car had crashed into a house and killed a child; in a trancelike state, trying to climb the walls of his cell, the youth shouted: 'I'm a graham cracker. Oops, my arm just crumbled off.' There was no reference to any possible beneficial uses of LSD. As for the drug's supposed consciousness-expanding qualities, the article quoted an expert on the subject, California's Attorney General Thomas Lynch, who said that LSD represents 'a flight from reality'. Lynch did not say what reality is; but then Hill apparently neglected to ask him.

Reporters who wonder if LSD has any mystical or insight-producing properties can always find out by asking a cop, a doctor, or a legislator. Illinois State Senator Robert Cherry, for example, has been quoted as stating, 'This drug puts these people in the world of nothing'. Dr J. Thomas Ungerleider has said flatly, 'There is no basis in fact for their claims'. John Merlo, an Illinois state representative, has observed that the mystical claims for LSD are 'pure bunk', which he may have picked up from Commissioner James L. Goddard of the Food and Drug Administration, who told a House Government Operations subcommittee in Washington that mind-stretching claims for LSD are 'pure bunk'. (Presumably it takes a subcommittee to study a subculture.)

If there are no experts available, the reporter can always decide for himself. Thus, one reporter gave the subject a fair shake recently. He watched an LSD party and even went so far as to listen to a Jefferson Airplane record, all of which led him to conclude concerning 'the mystique' of LSD, 'Tomorrow will come, and that other world

– the straight world, the world of reality – will take over.’ Or as another reporter saw it, the hippies take LSD ‘to elude a world they don’t like, and to create an artificial one in which they feel more comfortable’. Nobody has yet suggested that hippies may take LSD to elude reporters.

The newspapers indeed are full of news about psychedelics:

MYSTERY OF NUDE COED’S FATAL PLUNGE

NAKED IN A ROSE BUSH

HER SON’S TRAGIC TRIP

STRIP-TEASING HIPPIE GOES WILD IN LAKESPUR ON LSD

‘NIGHTMARE’ DRUG PERIL GROWS

HOME DRUG LAB RAIDED IN BRONX

BOBBY BAKER KIN IN TREE NUDE

BANANA SMOKING UNDER U.S. STUDY

Some terrible things are reported. A team of investigators in California, for example, came across a former disc jockey who said he had lost his job after taking LSD, and what’s more, he didn’t care. A medical man found: ‘... LSD users are suddenly overcome with religion.’ As far back as 1960, *This Week* had recovered from its original optimism, and Dr Franz E. Winkler was warning readers of the supplement that he had detected certain ‘ominous symptoms’ in some LSD users. ‘LSD’, the doctor noted,

breaks the fetters of our disenchanted existence and releases the mind to a flight into a fairyland sparkling with colours and sounds and sensations of unearthly beauty. Under its influence, all confinements and separations fade, and the world becomes a place in which individuals need no longer be lonely but become members of an all-encompassing whole. Under such influences, people receive creative inspirations, become inclined to accept the reality of a spiritual world, and at times, even sense the existence of a supreme being.

And this is all wrong and immoral, of course. Because it’s too easy. In fact, it’s a sin.

Parents, do you know the danger signs? You do if you read a 1967 syndicated series by Ann Honig, which ran among other places in *Chicago’s American*:

Parents who suspect their offspring are turned on via LSD should be suspicious if the youngsters suddenly espouse a oneness with

God and the universe, if they are suddenly superknowledgeable about life and love, if they hear and see things no one else does, if their pupils are dilated.

Of course there are real LSD tragedies, and nobody should minimize them. Certainly the press cannot be accused of minimizing them.

BAD LSD TRIPS INCREASE, the headline over an Associated Press story reported in May of 1967. And so they probably had. But this raises an interesting possibility I remember discussing one time with Jean Houston, and I believe we agreed that the press might be partly responsible for creating a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy. One dimly recalls a halcyon time, in the beginning, when nobody spoke much about bad trips, and the psychedelic experience was almost always very nice and rewarding. Perhaps that was never the case, or it could be that fewer bad trips in the past were merely a result of a smaller drug population and/or far less publicity. But the other possibility remains.

Just suppose. Here all of a sudden is this Greek chorus of doctors and psychiatrists warning young people to avoid LSD: it might drive them crazy. And the warnings are dutifully passed on by the press. This doesn't stop the young people from taking LSD, of course; but it could possibly create a subliminal anxiety that results in either a bad trip or in a panic reaction at some later date. Since LSD subjects are so highly suggestible, as is well known, it could be that they oblige the doctors and the press by doing exactly what they were told they would do. They flip out.

In my own case, I was having dinner one night with a bearded psychiatrist of formidable appearance. This was some months after I had participated in a legal psychedelic experiment at a psychiatric hospital, for a newspaper story, and while the trip had not been a pleasant one, I had not given it any thought for some time, and I had not been worried about it in any way. Between courses, the psychiatrist declared: 'The real tragedy of LSD has only now come to light. People think they might have a bad trip for a few hours, and that's all they have to worry about. But we now know the frightening truth that *nobody comes back unharmed*. In *every* case there is some degree of brain damage.' Oh? And where had the good doctor heard that? Well, he said, he had heard it just the other day at a medical-school symposium. And whom had he heard it from? He had heard it from this doctor sitting right next to him at the symposium, he forgot his name. And where had *he* heard it? He had heard it on a recent visit to the West Coast, where the research had been done. Where on the West Coast? My dinner companion didn't

know. Who had done the research, and how was it done? He didn't know that either. He called for the dessert menu.

Driving home, like the man in the joke, I kept telling myself: 'Now is not the time to panic. Now is not the time to panic.' And then, finally: 'Now. *Now* is the time to panic!' Without dwelling on the details, I will say only that I spent a very bad week, and I can certainly understand now those stories about rational Westerners who mentally disintegrate under the suggestive curse of an African witch doctor. In my own mind at least, the experience lends credence to the hypothesis that the press and the medical profession between them may have contributed to a similar situation by continually emphasizing the dangers and negative aspects of the psychedelic experience.

One might ask why the press has been so willing to go along with the doctors in this connection, to the point of distorting the overall truth about LSD. There is in fact a fundamental dilemma involved here, and it is one that editors run into rather frequently. In short, should a newspaper tell the truth, or whole truth, when the public safety might be better served by silence or half-truths?

An obvious example is the development of a riot situation in a community. Should the local newspapers call attention to the situation and thereby possibly aggravate it by directing other malcontents to the scene? In most cases, newspapers withhold such stories during the early stages of mob action, and especially so if the disorder is still on a relatively small scale.

It would be hard to argue with that decision. But I recall a less-obvious version of the same basic problem. A rare solar eclipse was soon to occur, and our newspaper was flooded with urgent messages from individuals and organizations dedicated to the prevention of blindness. We were urged to tell our readers there was no safe way to look directly at the eclipse. It so happens that a safe eclipse viewer can be made with exposed photographic negatives, but the anti-blindness lobby said the procedure was too complicated, and many people undoubtedly would botch the job. Well, what should we do? Should we, in effect, fib and play it safe? Those who wanted us to do so were interested only in preventing blindness – not an unworthy motive, certainly – but the eclipse, on the other hand, was a phenomenon of considerable interest. Did we have the right to deny people the experience of seeing it and studying it? In the end, we decided to tell the truth. We published carefully worded instructions telling how to construct a safe viewer. (To my knowledge, nobody went blind.)

The parallel to psychedelic drugs is obvious. Medical men quite properly are interested in the prevention of suicide and psychosis,

and there are strong pressures on a newspaper editor to conform. Besides, there is no foolproof method to guarantee a safe view of the psychedelic world, and editors, in addition, are often cowed by the medical profession. If a doctor says LSD is a deadly peril, how is an editor to argue with him? The result sometimes is a certain timidity on the part of the press in any situation involving a medical judgment. It is understandable, then, if many editors decide to play it safe and treat LSD simply as something that flew out of Pandora's box.

Still, there is no obligation to overdo it.

There was widespread rejoicing when the first study was published in 1967 indicating that use of LSD might result in abnormal chromosome breakage. That would certainly solve the problem very neatly, obviating the necessity to deal with all those sticky questions the psychedelics had raised, and the press in some cases did its best to improve upon the findings. The syndicated series by Ann Honig began with the observation, 'LSD may cause cancer in drug users – and deformity and death in their children.' But the series itself was relatively restrained in comparison with the headlines and advertising that accompanied it in *Chicago's American*. There was an interesting escalation from story to headline to promotional copy. For example the headline:

LSD: FOR THE KICK THAT CAN KILL

Then the printed advertising blurbs:

LSD: THE 'FLY NOW, DIE LATER' DRUG

Although many acid-users have committed suicide or murder while high on LSD, an even grimmer indictment has been placed against it. A well-known genetics expert has found that 'harmless' LSD damages human chromosomes . . . and eventually causes cancer! Find out the frightening facts. Read 'LSD: The Tragic Fad' starting Sunday in *Chicago's American*.

Why does a young person suddenly want to jump out of a window? Or shoot a number of people? Or eat the bark from a tree? Learn what the use of the drug LSD can do to a person. . . .

And finally the spot radio announcements, prefaced with the remark that acid-heads think LSD is harmless:

'Well, they're wrong – *dead wrong*. People who take LSD eventually get cancer.'

In the series, writer Honig sought to analyse why so many young people turn to LSD. The conclusion: 'LSD offers a new mystique, a new entrée to the in-group, a new rebellion against their elders, a

new thrill. Also it's cheap, easy to make.' And so much for that. The writer went on to comment upon the experience of a San Mateo high school superintendent who raised \$21,000 to finance an 'anti-LSD film' and then asked the students 'whom they would trust as the narrator'. He was 'shocked' by their answer.

'Nobody', said the students.

Small wonder, one might add.

This isn't to say that all newspapers in all cases have taken a limited and wholly negative view of psychedelics. There have been thoughtful pieces, here and there, now and then. My own newspaper, for example, devoted a four-page section to the religious implications of LSD experience, and it also offered vigorous editorial opposition to proposed legislation making LSD possession a crime in Illinois. Occasionally one comes across an isolated headline:

LSD CHEERS UP DYING PATIENT,
DOCTOR FINDS DRUG BRINGS A NEW ZEST FOR LIFE

There has, however, been very little of substance printed. Seldom is any attempt made to explain the nature of the LSD experience, except in terms of the acting-out behaviour it sometimes produces. Even in the *New York Times*, one may be told simply that LSD '... produces hallucinations or alters thought processes in various ways'. At best, a reader may find that the experience enhances sensory perception – pretty colours are seen – and sometimes he is told that the experience breaks down the ego and produces a 'mystical' state of mind. But what constitutes a mystical state of mind is left to the imagination. Now and then a perceptive reporter notices that LSD cultists talk a lot about Hinduism and Buddhism. They are interested in something called Zen, and they like to read *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. But the implications of all this are not pursued; no effort is made to explore or explain the Eastern ideas that hold such fascination for the drug takers. The newspapers report that young drug users are in revolt; they do not say precisely what values are challenged by that revolt, and they do not say what alternatives exactly are offered by the drug movement. This is partly the fault of the cultists themselves – 'mumblers about Reality', a *Life* reporter called them – and it is also due in part to the ineffable character of the psychedelic experience. But it is the fault, too, of the press. It is easy to see why the attractions of LSD seem so inexplicable to those puzzled adults who get all their information from the newspapers. There is one LSD question that is rarely asked in the press, and when it is asked it isn't answered in any depth. In the case of psychedelics, many reporters seem to remember only Who? What?

Where? and When? They forget the most important question of all, which is Why?

One split-off of this has been the emergence of the underground press to represent the non-straight viewpoint – the San Francisco *Oracle*, the Berkeley *Barb*, the *Seed* in Chicago, and the *East Village Other* in New York, to name but a few. These improbable newspapers even have their own Underground Press Syndicate (UPS) to service them with news and features. Colourful sheets, sometimes highly original in their content and design, they are of course just as much out of balance on the one side as the regular press is on the other. But if nothing else, they indicate that newspaper readers abhor a vacuum just as much as nature does, and reporters who are still concerned about the fifth W might find a few clues in the pages of the underground journals. (I did like the classified ad I saw in one of them: 'You're welcome, St Jude.')

Recently, a modification in press attitudes seems to have occurred, with the development of a distinct drug subculture focused in such areas as San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury, New York's Greenwich Village, and Chicago's Old Town. The newspapers in these cities have been fascinated by the psychedelic hippies, and at times the fascination has verged on obsession. In New York, the *Times* has devoted many columns of newsprint to their doings, and in San Francisco, the *Chronicle* sent a bearded reporter out to spend a month prowling the acid dens. (You guessed it: 'I Was a Hippie.')

Even the 78-year-old historian Arnold Toynbee showed up mingling with the flower children of Haight-Ashbury, where he wrote a series of dispatches for the London *Observer*.

In general, the tone of most stories has been sympathetic. United Press International produced a long feature that compared the hippies favourably with their beatnik predecessors, and a similar piece by the Associated Press seemed to agree with the assessment of a San Francisco florist it quoted: 'These kids are good kids. They don't steal and they don't fight. But they should wash their feet more often.'

Toynbee thought the hippies were just splendid, seeing in them certain similarities to St Francis. I think seriously that the flowers had a lot to do with taming the savage press – it's hard to bad-mouth a little girl who hands you a posy – but even more important perhaps is the fact that the concentration of amiable hippies has taken the publicity spotlight off Dr Leary, on whom it had been shining almost exclusively. He's a very nice fellow. But no single individual can dominate a situation without rubbing many people the wrong way, and he is perhaps a trifle old for his role. The kids as a whole come off better.

In any case, the press at times has seemed on the verge of suggesting that the hippies might just possibly have something to say. They have nudged at least a few observers to inquire into their motivations – 'Why do they act like that?' – and the newspapers have actually reported a few efforts to answer that question. Toynbee said that the hippies are rebelling against American conformism, which he blamed partly on the Puritans and partly on Henry Ford (a nation of car drivers has become habituated to regimentation by traffic cops, who tell them where and how they may drive). One columnist concluded that hippies '... suffer from something the more fashionable sociologists call "anomie"'. And of course somebody, in this case a psychiatrist, had to drag Marshall McLuhan out of the wings: 'We must understand that we are dealing with the first generation raised on TV, and everything is instant. It is a generation that expects instant gratification.'

Not very good, so far. But better than nothing.

So much for the newspapers. Summing up, we have suggested that the essentially negative attitude toward LSD in this area may be attributed to three primary factors: (1) no experts, (2) the nature of news, (3) eclipse syndrome. And we have proposed that newspapers may be partly responsible for the bad trips and panic behaviour they fill their pages with.

Turning briefly to radio and television, there is little to say, since these media have virtually ignored the drug movement. The one important exception has been the 'talk shows', both on radio and television. Some of the talk programmes run up to three hours or longer, often with audience participation by telephone, and they have produced many excellent debates and discussions by experts representing every conceivable point of view on psychedelics. In other areas of programming, however, one would never guess that such a thing as LSD existed. I have never seen or heard any reference to it in a dramatic presentation, and that is understandable perhaps when you consider the fire television comes under when it shows a young person smoking even a Lucky Strike. In fact, the only substantial network show I recall on LSD was the CBS documentary, narrated by Charles Kuralt, on the psychotherapeutic sessions at the Spring Grove (Maryland) State Hospital. That was very good. But, also, that was in May of 1966. And, to my knowledge, there has been nothing since.

It is painful to admit that the major magazines have probably done a better job than newspapers in reporting on LSD, and that *Time* and *Life* between them have possibly done the best job of all. Between 1963 and 1967, *Life* carried at least ten pieces on LSD, including an important cover story on 25 March 1966. (Another

cover story, on psychedelic art, appeared on 9 September 1966.) *Time* discovered LSD in 1954 and has since published at least eighteen pieces on the drug. Other major stories have appeared in such magazines as *Newsweek*, *Look*, *Playboy*, *Reader's Digest*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, *The Nation*, *New Republic*, *The Atlantic*, and *Harper's*. In fact I recall the first time I learned about LSD – in a 1963 article by Noah Gordon in *The Reporter* magazine.

With some exceptions, the magazines have plumbed the subject to a far greater depth than most newspapers have. They, too, have given heavy play to the dangers involved – as the *Reader's Digest* saw it, 'LSD will remain about as safe and useful as a do-it-yourself brain surgery kit for amateurs' – but they also have been willing to examine psychedelics from other viewpoints, and in general they have treated the drugs with a balanced perspective. To my knowledge, incidentally, *Look* senior editor Jack Shepherd did the one thing journalistic reporters on LSD almost never do: he took the drug himself (and had a detestable trip).

A curious and significant by-product of the fuss over LSD came in 1967 in the form of a widespread effort, especially in the magazines, to give a better image to marijuana, the psychedelic near beer. The proliferation of articles provoked a suspicious complaint from a hippie friend of mine who prefers his fruit forbidden: 'Man, are you aware there's a conspiracy in the magazines to make pot legal?' And indeed I could appreciate his growing paranoia on the subject; in July alone, *Life*, *Newsweek*, and *Look* carried stories sharply questioning the wisdom of a marijuana penalties, and *Newsweek* devoted a cover story to the issue.

Life has described marijuana as 'a mild euphoric drug', adding: 'Pot is not physically addicting, nor need it lead to crime, immorality, or stronger drugs.'

Newsweek: 'Indeed, the prohibitive laws against marijuana in America today, like those against alcohol in the 1920s, have not significantly diminished its use and, in fact, may have increased it.'

Look: 'The severity of the Federal marijuana law far exceeds the danger of the drug. The law needs an overhaul, with smoking marijuana reduced from a felony to a misdemeanour, as with LSD.'

The Nation: 'It is difficult to fashion a serious case against smoking marijuana, except that a user will find himself in serious trouble with the police.'

New Republic: 'The worst thing about marijuana is the laws against it, which should be repealed.'

While the magazines outshine the newspapers in reporting on LSD, their coverage is good only by comparison, and nobody could truly grasp all the varied implications of the psychedelics just by

flipping through the slicks. In the last analysis, however, anybody in America today who is really interested in the subject can learn what is accurately known about it, which isn't much, by reading both the magazines and the newspapers (underground and above), by listening to the radio and television discussions, by dipping into the large number of books such as this one. And that, perhaps, is all one can ask. As for those who are not really interested, they will resist the best efforts of the media to inform them. As somebody has said, you can't reason people out of an opinion they did not arrive at by reason to begin with.