

**ALTERED STATES: THE AMERICAN PSYCHEDELIC AESTHETIC**

A Dissertation Presented

by

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to

The Department of English

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the field of

English

Northeastern University

Boston, Massachusetts

April, 2014

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

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in the College of Social Sciences and Humanities of

Northeastern University, April, 2014

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation traces the development of the American psychedelic aesthetic alongside mid-twentieth century American aesthetic practices and postmodern philosophies. Psychedelic aesthetics are the varied creative practices used to represent altered states of consciousness and perception achieved via psychedelic drug use. Thematically, these works are concerned with transcendental states of subjectivity, psychic evolution of humankind, awakenings of global consciousness, and the perceptual and affective nature of reality in relation to social constructions of the self. Formally, these works strategically blend realist and fantastic languages, invent new language, experimental typography and visual form, disrupt Western narrative conventions of space, time, and causality, mix genres and combine disparate aesthetic and cultural traditions such as romanticism, surrealism, the medieval, magical realism, science fiction, documentary, and scientific reportage. This project attends to early exemplars of the psychedelic aesthetic, as in the case of Aldous Huxley's early landmark text *The Doors of Perception* (1954), forgotten pioneers such as Jane Dunlap's *Exploring Inner Space* (1961), Constance Newland's *My Self and I* (1962), and Storm de Hirsch's *Peyote Queen* (1965), cult classics such as Tom Wolfe's *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (1968), and ends with the psychedelic aesthetics' popularization in films like Roger Corman's *The Trip* (1967). In their postmodern concern with ontological questions of consciousness, being and reality, these texts make visible the central tensions of an American culture in the throes of dramatic societal and technological change.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to first express my deep gratitude to my generous committee members, professors Carla Kaplan, Inez Hedges, and Kimberly Juanita Brown, who have mentored me over these years, graciously lending their time and kind words to further my development as a writer and scholar. Under their tutelage, this backcountry Mainer has become a doctorate. They challenged my thinking, refined my voice, and helped reign in my sometimes unwieldy ambitions. Beyond the dissertation, I carry the image of these women as models of what it means to be an intelligent, confident, generous woman in today's world.

Though there were many solitary hours at my desk, this dissertation is the result of much collaboration over the last seven years of my Ph.D. Tabitha Clark has been my constant companion throughout. My writing partners Elizabeth Hopwood and Jenna Sciuto reviewed many early drafts and helped keep me accountable to my deadlines and goals. This final year was very productive, thanks to the feedback from Tabitha, Jim McGrath, Brent Griffin, Laura Hartmann, Victoria Pappa, Lauren Kuryloski, and Mina Nikolopoulou. I could always count on Emily Artiano and Duyen Nguyen for encouragement, and Genie Giaimo and Art Zilleruelo were always game to chat about affect.

This dissertation, and my graduate education, would not have been possible without the funding and institutional support of Northeastern University, The English Department and the

College of the Social Sciences and the Humanities. I especially want to thank The Humanities Center for the generous fellowship that gave me the tremendous gift of time in my final year and allowed me to collaborate with the talented likes of Lori Lefkovitz, Suzanna Walters, Nicole Aljoe, Sara Wylie, Ryan Cordell, Justin Manjourides, and Michael Motta. This project especially relied on the resources of Northeastern University's Snell Library.

As I near the close of my formal education, I must reflect on those who helped get me here. TRIO education programs such as Upward Bound at the University of Maine and the McNair Ronald E. McNair Post-baccalaureate Achievement Program at the University of New Hampshire provided me the educational opportunities, financial support, and mentorship that allowed a young girl from the rural working class to achieve graduate success.

My friends and family have been constant cheerleaders from near and afar. They have been graciously patient with my hermit existence and scholarly absent-mindedness these last few months. They remind me of where I came from and where I can go.

This project is indebted to the writers, artists and researchers of psychedelics who braved the silence of taboo. I dedicate this work to the anonymous psychonauts who have been compiling the psychedelic archive on message boards and blogs, waiting for scholarly attention to catch up.

Finally, I save my heart for last, to my muse, Nate.

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The last thing a student needs is to become truly entangled in a picture, to the point where it begins to insinuate itself into her thinking, prodding and teasing her expectations, changing her mind, undermining her certainties, and even affecting the way she thinks. If they are given the chance, pictures can ruin our stable sense of ourselves, cutting under the complacent surface of what we know and starting to chafe against what we feel.

– James Elkins, *Pictures and Tears: Crying in Front of Paintings* (2002), pg. 28

# INTRODUCTION

## Altered States: The American Psychedelic Aesthetic

*As a subject of study, the counter culture with which this book deals possesses all the liabilities which a decent sense of intellectual caution would persuade one to avoid like the plague.*

– Theodor Roszak<sup>1</sup>

*The aim of this series of studies? To transcribe into history the fable of Les Bijoux indiscrets.*

– Michel Foucault<sup>2</sup>

In 1938, in the early years of the Second World War, in the city of Basel, Switzerland, chemist Albert Hofmann was in the lab working with a new synthetic compound derived from the fungus, ergot, which grows on rye and other grains. It was here that Hofmann became the first to synthesize lysergic acid diethylamide, more commonly known as LSD-25. However, Hofmann did not initially realize what he had discovered. In popular lore, the discovery was by sheer accident. While working on the crystallizations, and inadvertently getting some on his fingertips, Hofmann began to feel a bit disoriented. He wrote to his supervisor,

Last Friday, April 16, 1943, I was forced to interrupt my work in the laboratory in the middle of the afternoon and proceed home, being affected by a remarkable

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<sup>1</sup> *The Making of a Counter Culture* xi.

<sup>2</sup> *The History of Sexuality* 77.

restlessness, combined with a slight dizziness. At home I lay down and sank into a not unpleasant intoxicated-like condition, characterized by an extremely stimulated imagination. In a dreamlike state, with eyes closed, I perceived an uninterrupted stream of fantastic pictures, extraordinary shapes with intense, kaleidoscopic play of colors. After some two hours this condition faded away.<sup>3</sup>

Curious about this experience and the extreme potency of just trace amounts, Hofmann decided to self-experiment by swallowing 250 micrograms mixed with water.<sup>4</sup> Initially, haunted by paranoia and demonic visions, Hofmann thought he was having a mental breakdown. Gradually, he realized the profound implications of this richly sensorial and emotional experience, “there was to my knowledge no other known substance that evoked such profound psychic effects in such extremely low doses, that caused such dramatic changes in human consciousness and our experience of the inner and outer world.”<sup>5</sup>

In his laboratory report, Hofmann describes his scientific discovery in aesthetic terms: “fantastic pictures, extraordinary shapes with intense, kaleidoscopic play of colors,” while at the same time admits that these subjective experiences defy the kinds of positivist description and

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<sup>3</sup>See Albert Hofmann’s *LSD, My Problem Child: Reflections on Sacred drugs, Mysticism, and Science*.

<sup>4</sup>A dosage that Hofmann believed was a threshold amount (the amount where one begins to feel some effect). To give you a sense of the potency, the actual threshold is believed to be little as 20 micrograms in the case of LSD.

<sup>5</sup>Sandoz Labs began to circulate samples of the pharmaceutical to researchers to find out more about this powerful drug and its psychological effects. From Switzerland, LSD travelled to the United States. In 1949, Dr. Max Rinkel, a neuropsychiatrist in Boston, was the first to import the drug from Sandoz into the US. By 1953, Sandoz partnered with the National Mental Health Institute and the FDA to distribute LSD to interested researchers for purposes of analytic psychotherapy. Psychiatrists like Werner Stoll, Humphry Osmond, and John Smythies initially studied LSD for the treatment of alcoholism, addiction, trauma, neuroses and anxiety, that familiar string of modern illnesses. Erika Dyck provides an excellent overview of early psychedelic research in *Psychedelic Psychiatry*.

rational conceptualization expected in scientific discourse. The sensorial and affective nature of psychedelic experiences begs for aesthetic treatment, even as psychedelics reveal the very limits of literary and visual expression.<sup>6</sup> Sandoz Laboratories invested in Albert Hofmann's discovery and began to circulate samples of the pharmaceutical to researchers in hopes of finding out more about this powerful drug and its psychological effects. Psychedelic research was conducted quietly in the medical community without much attention until a famous English author read a scientific article on the use of mescaline in 1952. Aldous Huxley's widely popular essays about mescaline *The Doors of Perception* (1954) and *Heaven and Hell* (1956) became the most influential aesthetic and theoretical statements on psychedelics in the twentieth century. Gazing at a vase of flowers while under the 'mind-manifesting' influence of mescaline, "in their living light [Huxley] seemed to detect the qualitative equivalent of breathing—but of a breathing without returns to a starting point, with no recurrent ebbs but only a repeated flow from beauty to heightened beauty, from deeper to ever deeper meaning" (18). These heightened "sensations, feelings, insights, fancies," Huxley argued, "all these are private and, except through symbols and at second hand, incommunicable. We can pool information about experiences, but never the experiences themselves" (12-13). Despite his belief in the inherent ineffability of subjective experiences, Huxley still attempts to capture the intensely affective, highly unusual experiences

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<sup>6</sup> Take for example, Jane Dunlap, author of *Exploring Inner Space* (1961), who compares the psychedelic experience to cinema, a "stark and amazing reality of non-reality which claimed all my attention, each vivid scene blending into the next with lightning speed, like a movie run many time too fast" (24).

of psychedelic altered states, and, in doing so, launches an important tradition in American literature, film and visual art that I call the psychedelic aesthetic.

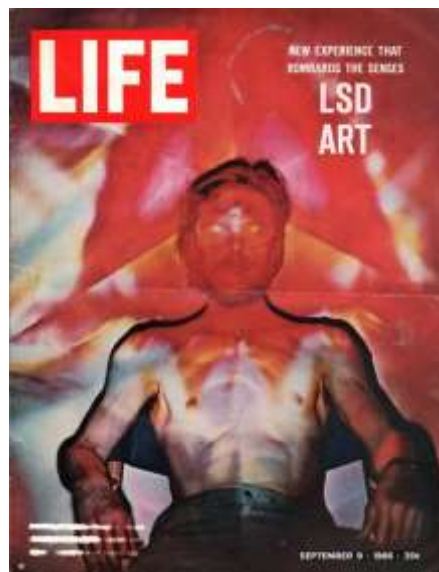
By psychedelic aesthetics, I mean the varied creative practices used to represent altered states of consciousness and perception achieved via psychedelic drug use.<sup>7</sup> Aesthetics, as Jacques Rancière outlines in *Aisthesis* (2013), are perceptual modes of experience and “regimes of emotion” that make visible “the sensible fabric of experience within which they are produced” (x).<sup>8</sup> The highly subjective emotional structures and unusual perceptual modes of drugged altered states challenged the empirical certainty of scientific discourse and psychological naturalism of literary realism, which presented vision of the material world as knowable, shared, and stable. Psychedelic aesthetics tries to find a place for Huxley and Hofmann’s visions of breathing flowers and kaleidoscopic plays of colors within a scientific positivist worldview; the

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<sup>7</sup> Psychedelics refers to the class of natural and chemical substances that, when ingested, affect the brain’s serotonin and dopamine levels, producing perceptual changes in thought, mood, and vision otherwise rarely experienced. These altered states are sometimes similar to those of dreams, meditative and trance states, religious exaltation, flashbulb memories, or acute mental disorder. There are many documented ‘mind-altering’ psychedelic substances, but the most well-known, and the ones relevant to this 1960s cultural history, include LSD, mescaline (peyote), and psilocybin mushrooms. Psychedelics are non-addictive and with few known physiological effects, much unlike alcohol, opioids, amphetamines, heroin and cocaine. Several of my key books and films refer to marijuana, which was widely used and is often associated with psychedelic culture. The physiological effects and chemical properties of marijuana are, however, not psychedelic in the scientific sense, and are thus not discussed in detail in this study. See Marcus Boon’s *Road to Excess: A History of Writers on Drugs* (2002) for a discussion of literature on cannabis.

<sup>8</sup> Treating aesthetics as conditions of sensuous perception that form “sensible communities”, Rancière stresses that the material conditions of aesthetic production and reception are integral to our treatment of aesthetics, “These are entirely material conditions – performance and exhibition spaces, forms of circulation and reproduction – but also modes of perception and regimes of emotion, categories that identify them, thought patterns that categorize and interpret them. Those conditions make it possible for words, shapes, movements, and rhythms to be felt and thought as art” (x). My understanding of the affect, emotional and cognitive dimensions of aesthetics is informed by Gilles Deleuze (and his reworking of Spinoza), Frederic Jameson’s concept of cognitive mapping, and Raymond William’s “structures of feeling” from *Marxism and Literature*. For recent work in affect studies, see Kathleen Woodward, Cathy Caruth, Jonathan Flatley, Brian Massumi, and Anne Cvetcovich.

aesthetic challenge is to represent the seemingly rationally unreal as affectively real.<sup>9</sup> Validating these altered states of being through modes of aesthetic presentation, psychedelic aesthetics make space for highly individualized, yet partially unknowable subjectivities to coexist within communally shared worldviews. Psychedelics gave writers, artists and filmmakers an impetus to develop new representational approaches, such as the strategic layering of realist and fantastic modes, invention of new language, metaphors and visual forms to capture these unusual, non-rational, affectively intense lived experiences.



**Figure 1: Image from the cover of LIFE magazine, September 9, 1966**

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<sup>9</sup> As Huxley stresses, “The world to which mescaline admitted me was not the world of visions; it existed out there, in what I could see with my eyes open. The great change was in the realm of objective fact. What had happened to my subjective universe was relatively unimportant” (17).

Psychedelic aesthetics would give the 1960s counterculture its definitive look and feel. Starting in 1954 and as late as 1973, there was an incredible flourishing of psychedelic literature, art, film, fashion and lifestyles. The 1960s became the decade of The Merry Pranksters on a Day-Glo bus named “Furthur” headed to destinations unknown, of light shows at the Fillmore with the Grateful Dead, of Haight-Ashbury’s Summer of Love, of Timothy Leary’s “Turn On, Tune In, and Drop Out,” of “quasi-art nouveau swirls of lettering, design and vibrating colors, electro-pastels and spectral Day-Glo” (Wolfe 224). And, seemingly overnight, LSD became America’s “Phantom Problem.”<sup>10</sup> The fear of a social epidemic of psychedelic drug use was a response to the highly unusual, highly visible status of psychedelic aesthetics in youth culture in the 1960s.<sup>11</sup> The psychedelic aesthetic reached an apex in the mid-twentieth century, in part because of the increased circulation of psychedelic substances and the temporary cultural permissiveness towards alternative lifestyles and experimentation during this period. Today, we are witnessing a return of the psychedelic aesthetic and its continued evolution inspired by new

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<sup>10</sup> Newspapers warned that “The nation’s colleges and universities are shadowboxing with a phantom of the campus—the potential threat of the hallucination drug LSD.” In a survey of psychedelic use on college campuses, “the response indicated that medical directors of the schools have almost no idea how many students are taking LSD which has been branded as dangerous by doctors, scientists and government spokesmen.” From *The Chicago Daily Defender* on June 1, 1966.

<sup>11</sup> Marshall McLuhan’s media age was in full force in the mid-1960s, dictating the message that LSD was a dangerous containment. Some news outlets were more responsible in their coverage. Eminent publisher Henry Luce and his wife Clare Boothe Luce were supporters of psychedelics, having taken LSD several times, and published several balanced articles on the subject in *Time* and *Life* magazines. Initially, government officials and doctors dismissed LSD as a short lived trend “like goldfish swallowing.” *The Chicago Defender* compared psychedelics to the fad for smoking banana peels. The only major consensus on LSD was that there was more unknown about psychedelics than was known. This did not stop the viral media hype about psychedelics that would have a disastrous effect on the legitimate research studies. Amidst this controversy, Sandoz halted production of LSD in 1965, and essentially turned the market over to underground chemists, and governments stopped funding research.

classes of psychedelic substances, like MDMA, a resurgence of scientific study, and the technological development of new aesthetics in digital animation and gaming, which lend greater visual details and interactive possibilities to the existing psychedelic aesthetic tradition.<sup>12</sup> This recent renaissance underlines the need for critical study of psychedelic aesthetics and its cultural history.

In the vein of Hofmann, I contend that psychedelic aesthetics can tell us much about the mysteries of consciousness by highlighting our vexed relationship with language. Altered states have been sought after throughout human history;<sup>13</sup> psychedelic culture has appeared in many forms from the start of human civilization, transcending cultural and national borders.<sup>14</sup> After

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<sup>12</sup> The psychedelic aesthetic has begun to reappear in contemporary in digital animation, photography and cinema, popping up again in fashion, and electric and folk music. See for example the work of Alex Grey, the summer festival fashions, bands like Tame Impala and War on Drugs, Oliver Sack's latest best seller *Hallucinations* (2013). New scientific research on psychedelics is finally being approved by government agencies, and a wealth of new studies show the beneficial therapeutic use of psychedelics like LSD and MDMA in coping with addiction, PTSD, anxiety and depression from terminal illness. This renaissance in scientific psychedelic research is in part due to the advocacy work of MAPS, the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies. An estimated 32 million Americans have used psychedelics in their lifetime, according to data from National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH). The scholarly study of psychedelics in the arts and in science is on the rise yet again, along with increased use. How we will treat their spread this time around? For contemporary rates of psychedelic use, see Krebs TS and Johansen PØ. "Over 30 million psychedelic users in the United States" *F1000Research* 2:98 (2013). Web.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Davidson gives a short summary of the "long history" of "vision-producing drugs," citing "the mystical nepenthe, or dissolver of sorrows, of ancient Greece," Indian hemp (hashish), Norse warriors eating hallucinogenic mushrooms, Native Americans' peyote rituals, and the Aztecs' sacred mushrooms (5-6). See "Introduction" to Jane Dunlap's *Exploring Inner Space*. For histories of drug use from antiquity to present, see D.C.A Hillman's *The Chemical Muse: Drug Use and the Roots of Western Civilization* (2008), Richard Rudgley's *The Alchemy of Culture: Intoxicants in Society* (1993) and his *Wildest Dreams – An Anthology of Drug-Related Literature* (1999).

<sup>14</sup> There is not space here to trace the full development of the psychedelic aesthetic throughout the history of human culture. The history of psychedelic culture generally disrupts and evades nationalist categories, as particularly evidenced in the merging of Eastern and Western knowledge and lifestyles in the 1960s, and the global traffic of these and other illicit substances, particularly in the Vietnam War era. Psychedelic aesthetics in the 1960s were a transatlantic and global phenomenon with particularly rich development in England, Canada, Mexico and other

inhaling ether and glimpsing the possibilities of other forms of consciousness, the eminent American philosopher and psychologist William James argued that “No account of the universe in its totality can be final which leaves these other forms of consciousness quite disregarded” (296). Like James, I contend our account of the cultural history is incomplete without an examination of the aesthetic expressions of these altered states. The visual tradition of psychedelic art, in poster art, painting and graphic design, has received the recent attention of scholars such as Ken Johnson, David Rubin, Norman Hathaway and Daniel Nadel, but there has been little literary and film scholarship that attends to the formal and thematic innovation of psychedelic aesthetics.<sup>15</sup> In *Road to Excess: A History of Writers on Drugs*, Marcus Boon surveys the history of drug use by canonical writers like Samuel Coleridge, William James, and William Burroughs. Boon begins to suggest parallels between psychedelics and literary form, but, like Martin Lee, Bruce Shlain, Jay Stevens and others scholars of psychedelic culture, Boon remains focused on the historical stakes. I extend Boon’s summary of the thematic and formal work of these psychedelic representations, by arguing that this aesthetic presents formal modes

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South American regions. The United States seemed to have the most extensive outpouring of psychedelic art during this period, though the global exchange of psychedelic themes and forms would make an interesting project for a future scholar. Psychedelic art is not strictly postmodern, though I argue the period I examine (1954-1969) is. Literary, visual and ritual forms of psychedelic aesthetics have appeared in modern, early modern and ancient traditions as well, much of which Aldous Huxley documents in *Heaven and Hell* (1956). Literature and visual art on psychedelic and hallucinatory experiences appears in references to the Hindu use of soma, the oracles of Delphi, the ergot root in medieval poetry, South American shamanic songs and rituals, among many others. For histories of psychedelics in the 1960s, Jay Stevens, David Farber, Bruce Shlain and Martin Lee provide good social and cultural histories of psychedelic use.

<sup>15</sup> For treatment of psychedelic visual art, see Ken Johnson’s *Are You Experienced?: How Psychedelic Consciousness Transformed Modern Art* (2011), David Rubin’s *Psychedelic: Optical and Visionary Art since the 1960s* (2010), and Norman Hathaway and Daniel Nadel’s *Electric Banana: Masters of Psychedelic Art* (2012).

of expression for emergent postmodern discourses on how we perceive knowledge, subjectivity, and community. Joining a small community of scholars like Richard Doyle, Michael Horowitz and Cynthia Palmer, I make claim to the psychedelic aesthetic as a distinct aesthetic and intellectual tradition that runs parallel to our canonical study of twentieth century American culture and modern and postmodern theory. My research aims to recover the intellectual weight of the American psychedelic aesthetic by demonstrating how this tradition mirrored, spoke back to and critiqued the major epistemological and ontological debates of postmodernism. The thematic and formal work of these psychedelic representations engages audiences in processes of consciousness expansion, cognitive revision, and experimental practice that help disrupt paradigmatic modes of perception and introduce new regimes of emotion that make postmodern theory's abstractions in ontology and epistemology recognizable to readers. In short, psychedelics helped America turn postmodern by teaching audiences how to feel postmodern.

I attend to the convergent social and political influences within the counter- and mainstream American cultural history that characterized the 'sixties generation' as we know it in an attempt to restore the social and philosophical value to the psychedelic canon, value that has been stripped in the depiction of psychedelic subjects as hedonistic distractions and transcendental escapes from reality. I am curious about the range of associations that psychedelics evoke, the radical allure and suggestive power of psychedelic culture, the prohibitive taboos that taint such subjects, and the mysterious deficits in our knowledge about

such seemingly profound experiences. I intend to return the real to psychedelic subjects; psychedelic aesthetics do not attempt to transcend social realities, rather these representations give visibility and spaces of recognition to marginalized personal, social and political realities by paying witness to altered states of consciousness and counterculture identities and social structures. Rooted in the historical moment of the 1960s, psychedelic aesthetics make visible the central tensions of an American culture in the throes of dramatic societal and technological change, and use that cultural moment of crisis and experimentation to challenge Cartesian dualisms and Enlightenment empiricism, and forward a postmodern epistemology and praxis that embraces the uncertainty, locality and partiality of knowledge and promotes practices of play, mindfulness, self-reflection, and egalitarian community building. Psychedelics helped to undermine, what Marianne DeKoven describes as, “the totalizing reason, science, technological and human progress of modernity, challenged but still in force in modernism” and helped cultivate postmodernism’s “manifestations of embodiment, belief, affect and open-ended, egalitarian, popular, multidirectional change” (17). I focus on the American psychedelic aesthetics in the ripe moment of American literary, cinematic and visual production during the long 1960s, a period that intersects with the development of postmodern ontological and epistemological philosophies.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> I use the plural, aesthetics, here because there is a diverse body of practices and traditions for representing psychedelic experiences, particularly due to the inherently relative and individual nature of these experiences. For example, the American psychedelic aesthetic of the 1960s borrows and recombines different global expressions of psychedelic aesthetics from Native American art inspired by the sacramental use of peyote as well as Eastern religious texts like the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*. Though these traditions share some literary and visual strategies

In my four chapters, I trace out the diverse, yet shared, ways artists represented altered states in a variety of genres from print scholarship, to confessional trip reports, narrative, performance, visual art, and film. My central texts range from early exemplars of the psychedelic aesthetic, as in the case of Aldous Huxley's *The Doors of Perception* (1954), cult classics like Tom Wolfe's *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (1968), forgotten pioneers like Jane Dunlap's *Exploring Inner Space* (1961), Constance Newland's *My Self and I* (1962), and Storm de Hirsch's *Peyote Queen* (1965), to the psychedelic aesthetics' popularization in commercial films like Roger Corman's *The Trip* (1967).<sup>17</sup> Chapter One introduces the initial scholarly and archival treatment of psychedelic aesthetics through Aldous Huxley's early landmark texts *The Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell* appearing in the mid-1950s. I then examine Jane Dunlap and Constance Newland's LSD memoirs from the early 60s, marking out the fraught space of psychedelic testimony and reception. In Chapter Three, I turn to Tom Wolfe's iconic account of Ken Kesey and Merry Pranksters in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* that marks the peak of the Haight-Ashbury scene and the psychedelics aesthetics' emergence in popular culture. The Pranksters then led me to the psychedelic visual turn. Chapter Four catalogues the development of psychedelic cinema starting with Storm de Hirsch's *Peyote Queen*. The

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in metaphor and visual form, Native American, South American, and Indian representations of psychedelics should not be collapsed into one aesthetic without careful consideration of these distinct histories and cultural context. There is not space here to fully attend to these differences, so I focus on the American expression of psychedelic aesthetics.

<sup>17</sup>With the exception of Aldous Huxley, all the central writers and filmmakers in this project are American born. I include the English born Aldous Huxley within an American tradition here because he lived and wrote in American residence for the latter half of his life. Huxley's work was well read in the United States and, in his prolific career, Huxley contributed to many of the central cultural debates of American society in the twentieth century.

psychedelic aesthetic bubbles up into mainstream culture through films such as Roger Corman's *The Trip* and Dennis Hopper's *Easy Rider* (1969). I end at the close of the decade with Tobe Hopper's *Eggshells* (1969) which tries to rescue psychedelics from Hollywood cliché by tucking it back underground.

Despite the individualized nature of each artists' account of highly relative psychedelic experiences, the shared thematic interests in consciousness and stylistic combination of realist and fantastic form coheres this collection as a distinct aesthetic. Formally, this aesthetic borrows and remixes a number of modernist modes, genres, and traditions, relying especially on metaphoric and fantastic language to represent new images and knowledge, inventive neologisms, playful punctuation, typography and visual special effects. In their search for a language, psychedelic writers and artists looked to disparate aesthetic and cultural traditions like romanticism, surrealism, medieval myth, magical realism, science fiction, documentary, and scientific reportage.<sup>18</sup> Psychedelics inspired filmmakers like Storm de Hirsch to develop new cinematic special effects in editing, filters, use of strobes and light effects, and the manipulation of film stock. The resultant literary and visual imagery is realist and fantastic, a synesthetic mix of intense colors and lights, hallucinatory visions of jewels, flowers, and nonhuman entities

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<sup>18</sup> Psychedelic aesthetics draws heavily from disparate aesthetic and cultural traditions like surrealism, Freudian dream analysis, Hindu and Buddhist religious traditions and the indigenous literatures of the Americas, traditions, which deal with other forms of altered states, such as those achieved by meditation, trance, chanting, dreams, mental disturbance or enlightenment, or through other substances like narcotics, anesthetics, or stimulants.<sup>18</sup>

within historical domestic settings.<sup>19</sup> Thematically, these works continue modernist imperatives of agency, visibility and subjectivity, even as they expand such projects toward more contingent, embodied, and ecological models of postmodern reality. Narratively, these works disrupt realist expectations of space, time, and causality, and undo the empirical certainty that underwrites hegemonic master narratives of scientific progress and heroic individualism. The resultant literary and visual imagery is realist and fantastic, a synesthetic mix of intense colors and lights, hallucinatory visions of jewels, flowers, and nonhuman entities within historical domestic settings. The psychedelic aesthetic exists along a continuum of other aesthetic modes from realism, speculative fiction, magical realism, to fantasy, sharing modes of perception and thought patterns for representing the real. In the occupation of this middle ground between realism and fantasy, psychedelic aesthetics make visible the way the locus of the real is always dependent on individually localized, yet communal vantage points.

At first, I treated the psychedelic aesthetic as a radically distinct tradition, at odds with modernist and enlightenment imperatives. What I found was that the American psychedelic aesthetic tradition engages deeply with the dominant expressions of its age, showing the continuum of modernism in American culture while providing an important pivot point towards postmodernism. The 1960s was a time when the residual ethos of the Enlightenment, the still

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<sup>19</sup> Listing features of psychedelic states provides a convenient way of categorizing psychedelic aesthetics, but we must recognize that these descriptions are by no means comprehensive. As nearly every scholar of psychedelics has at one point remarked, we fundamentally lack the language to fully represent the range of possible psychedelic experiences, particularly due to the nonverbal nature of these states. See Richard Doyle's *Darwin's Pharmacy* for a discussion of the rhetorical challenges psychedelics present.

dominant strains of modernism, and the emergence of postmodernism all converged.<sup>20</sup> The modernist phenomenological tradition of Henri Bergson, William James, Edmund Husserl, Jean-Paul Sartre and Martin Heidegger lent writers like Aldous Huxley and Tom Wolfe a starting language for describing the relativity, synchronicity, and intersubjectivity of psychedelic experiences. Representing the phenomenology of these liminal states of consciousness, psychedelic aesthetics marked the yet undefined, but affectively felt knowledge that lies at the edge of modernist literature and science's epistemological borderlines. Psychedelic literature by Alan Watts, Jane Dunlap and Constance Newland offers a pluralistic model for consciousness, subjectivity, and social identities based on postmodern theories of performativity and epistemological flexibility. The critical discourse on perception, subjectivity and reality we associate with postmodern theorists like Gilles Deleuze, Pierre-Félix Guattari, Michel Foucault, R. D. Laing and Marshall McLuhan owes a major debt to psychedelic aesthetics.<sup>21</sup> Placing the psychedelic aesthetic on the same plane as recognized postmodernists like Roland Barthes, Kurt Vonnegut, and Thomas Pynchon provides a context for the appearance of psychedelic themes and forms in works like Pynchon's *Gravity Rainbow* (1973) and William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984). Psychedelic aesthetics helped awaken the American populace to postmodern thought. I

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<sup>20</sup> In *Utopia Limited: The Sixties and the Emergence of the Postmodern* (2004), Marianne DeKoven provides a nuanced discussion of the periodization and competing definitions of modernism and postmodernism.

<sup>21</sup> I do not suggest these scholars used psychedelics, though some biographers indeed reference such drug use. See, for example, James Miller's biography of Foucault, *The Passion of Michel Foucault* (2000) where Miller writes that Foucault used acid once in Death Valley, California in 1975. Rather than arguing that scholars were each individually influenced by psychedelics, I find their theoretical work is in explicit and implicit dialogue with psychedelic aesthetics.

argue that psychedelic literature and art provides modes of expression for emergent postmodern critiques of language and its constructive power over notions of subjectivity, identity, and reality, and offered new models for thinking of time, space, and object-subject relations for the technologically networked, mass media age of the late twentieth century.<sup>22</sup> Psychedelic aesthetics were a catalyst for the postmodern turn, and, in recognizing it as such, we are reminded of the embodied roots of all paradigm change.

### Psychedelic Phenomenology: Aesthetic Affects

*Our consciousness automatically narrows our awareness, and we get out of an experience far less than is available.*

– Kathryn Hume<sup>23</sup>

*We must learn how to handle words effectively; but at the same time we must preserve and, if necessary, intensify our ability to look at the world directly and not through that half opaque medium of concepts, which distorts every given fact into the all too familiar likeness of some generic label or explanatory abstraction.*

– Aldous Huxley<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Psychedelic aesthetics especially resonate with postmodern models of relationality, for example, Jean Baudillard's simulacra, Frederic Jameson's hyper spaces, Brian McHale's ontological pluralism.

<sup>23</sup> *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature* 84.

<sup>24</sup> *The Doors of Perception* 74

LSD, mescaline (a derivative of peyote), and psilocybin mushrooms: these natural and pharmaceutical agents had profound effects on American cultural and social consciousness. The effects of psychedelic substances are highly variable, dependent on the substance's purity and dosage and an individual's mindset, preparation and environment, or the set and setting as Timothy Leary called it. As evidenced by the immense diversity of first-hand accounts on the online psychedelic database Erowid, there are a few constants that we can use to effectively classify these drugs.<sup>25</sup> Common psychedelic effects include heightened sensory awareness, feelings of synesthesia and synchronicity, visual hallucinations of jewels, flowers, intricate landscapes and buildings, out of body sensations, a loss of a sense of time, space and causality, and decreased ability to verbalize one's experience.<sup>26</sup> Psychedelic trip reports like Aldous Huxley's *The Doors of Perception*, Jane Dunlap's *Exploring Inner Space* and Constance Newland's *My Self and I* give us a glimpse into these subjective experiences. Huxley describes "supernaturally brilliant colors, not only with the inward eye, but even in the objective world around them" (27). Dunlap's senses become vividly synesthetic: "the gay, happy music of the instruments became shifting, brilliant lights and colors, and the spectrum became music of great purity and delight" (62). Some perceive immaterial forms and nonhuman entities, vibrations of

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<sup>25</sup> See *The Vaults of Erowid* (erowid.org) for an online encyclopedia, cultural archive, scientific resources, and personal testimonies. This crowd-sourced website is especially popular among youth, as the website provides extensive information on the physiological and psychological effects, dosage recommendations, risk factors and advice on psychedelics and other drugs.

<sup>26</sup> Though users may struggle to verbalize their experience, they are fully conscious at all times, as Constance Newland reports in her LSD account, "That is the one great value of the faculty granted by LSD: of being awake and dreaming at the same time. One part of the person is able to participate in the events of a dream, while a second part of him is able to interpret the meaning of the dream or fantasy" (39).

energy, and auras of light, while others observe complex networks of interconnection, pattern and flow. Subject and object relations dissolve; Dunlap becomes “weightless, boneless, and bodiless” in one of her trips, feeling “I had no more need of a body than has the odor of jasmine for a flower, once its fragrance rides the mists of night” (152). Such feelings of bodily transcendence and metamorphoses are common. Newland variously transforms into a clam at the bottom of the sea, a violin, a frozen statue, but remains in touch of her own identity, “it is extraordinary. To retain one’s own identity, yet to become another being or animal or object” (52).<sup>27</sup> Their descriptions reach the sublime; Dunlap’s emotions “towered to mountain heights, plunged to oceanic depths, soared on wings of air, or rolled like vast, restless clouds, even at times grinding me to pulp as if massive wheels were passing over me” (165-166). We commonly associated psychedelics with visual hallucinations, but emotions play the central role in most psychedelic experiences.<sup>28</sup> Psychedelics can produce tremendous waves of joy, ecstasy, peace and compassion, but also surges of paranoia and terror. A recurrent stage during the psychedelic experience is the feeling of ego-death. For the unprepared, the feeling that one’s sense of self is dissolving or is temporarily lost can be frightening, and there is much lore of bad trips in the popular imagination. Huxley frames this experience as the “Not-self,” a kind of Heideggerian

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<sup>27</sup> Such transfiguration into other beings or objects reflects the emotional quality of the individual’s psychedelic experience, as seen in the connection Dunlap draws between her material and affective states, “I found myself to be an indescribably delicate jellyfish, seemingly too fragile to contain as it did the intense feelings of exuberance, joyous aliveness, and the other gripping emotions I had already experienced many times” (Dunlap 63).

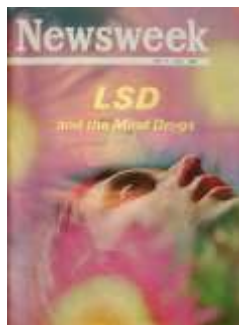
<sup>28</sup> Visual alterations depend highly on dosage. Low doses tend to produce a heightened state of ordinary perception, a vase of flowers seems richer in color and texture, the flowers can appear to breathe and pulse before one’s eyes. Higher doses can produce intense feelings of bodily transfiguration and visions of fantastic landscapes.

becoming, “In the final state of egolessness there is an ‘obscure knowledge’ that All is in all—that All is actually each” (26). Psychedelic experiences break down of static and singular notions of the self within materialist time and space. The autonomous individual is refigured as a part of an infinite whole, which, to embrace such a state, is for Huxley, an experience of grace: “for the healthy visionary, the perception of the infinite in a finite particular is a revelation of divine immanence” (134). With the breakdown of identity, people often report that they feel part of a universal or cosmic order, developing a greater global awareness, transpersonal connection and empathy towards others. Psychedelics have inspired profound religious experiences and have been long used for Native American and Eastern religious practice. Some scholars like Huston Smith and Gordon Wasson prefer the term entheogenic meaning God-containing to emphasize this spiritual value.<sup>29</sup> While others shy away from psychedelic, calling it a dated term and distancing themselves from the legacy of the psychedelic sixties, I retain the term to underline the profound effects these natural and chemical substances had on American consciousness and to give credence to the rich body of psychedelic art that needs critical examination within the sixties’ historical moment, not outside of it.

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<sup>29</sup>Huston Smith provides a good overview of the terminology debates in psychedelic studies, an issue I discuss in detail in Chapter One. “Nomenclature has been a problem. I never use the word ‘hallucinogen’ because error is built into its definition... The word ‘psychedelic’ is etymologically innocuous, literally meaning ‘mind-manifesting,’ but it is dated, tagged to ‘the psychedelic sixties’ when recreation use of drugs took over, and thus clearly inappropriate when speaking of shamans, Eleusis, and the Native American Church” (xvi-xvii). Huston uses the term entheogens, meaning God-manifesting. See Smith’s *Cleansing the Doors of Perception* (2000)

Psychedelic aesthetics intersect scientific discourse in surprising and important ways that bear on this aesthetics' challenge to literary realism.<sup>30</sup> Jane Dunlap and Constance Newland's first person trip reports, drawn from their participation in psychiatric research studies on LSD, defy scientific values of objectivity, resist the modernist model of the unified and knowable self, challenge the pathological language of psychoanalysis, and forward a more fluid, fragmented, nomadic model of subjectivity. Though users may struggle to verbalize their experience, they are conscious at all times, as Constance Newland writes of her LSD experience, "That is the one great value of the faculty granted by LSD: of being awake and dreaming at the same time. One part of the person is able to participate in the events of a dream, while a second part of him is able to interpret the meaning of the dream or fantasy" (39).



**Figure 2: Newsweek, May 9, 1966**

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<sup>30</sup> Firstly, psychedelics like the pharmaceutically synthesized substances mescaline and LSD were created out of scientific inquiry. Psychedelic literature demonstrates that the scientific and psychedelic worldviews are not on entirely opposite ends of the spectrum, though from one perspective they tend toward dramatically different outcomes, military technocracy on one end with communal utopian building on the other. Rather, the psychedelic and scientific emerge from the same point of origin, the desire to know the self and the reality we are part of.

It is this kaleidoscopic mode of observation and interpretation, sliding between the representational modes of realism and fantasy that defines the psychedelic aesthetic and that so powerfully engages audiences in processes of estrangement, recognition and reorientation. The challenge raised here is how to represent psychedelic visions as reality. Do we, as readers, judge the psychedelic narrative as empirically real or as a product of imagination? Artists had to adopt new forms and recombine older ones to adequately communicate psychedelic structures of feeling.<sup>31</sup> In testifying to what cannot be measured and verified by empirical observation, the psychedelic utterance challenges, yet arises from within, the Enlightenment scientific worldview. The realism of documentary modernism and psychological realism, popular in the postwar fiction of Philip Roth and Norman Mailer, celebrated individual and nationalist acts of valor and will, identities and cultural codes that did not have value within the psychedelic worldview.<sup>32</sup> Realism in the psychedelic aesthetic provides the anchor in reality, a touchstone on solid ground for readers during the psychedelic flights of fantasy. Writers relied on domestic details and psychological realism to communicate a shared reality, but psychedelic knowledge resisted the empirical and materialist paradigms that underline psychological realist modes.<sup>33</sup> To introduce the unfamiliar, writers borrowed from the metaphoric mode of the fantastic, an aesthetic mode of perception that works to estrange audiences from their ordinary and restricted perception of

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<sup>31</sup> The English-language particularly lacks accurate and nuanced words to describe these altered states of consciousness and heightened sensitivity as Jay Stevens discusses in *Storming Heaven*.

<sup>32</sup> Pam Morris traces out the Enlightenment roots of our constructions of realism in *Realism*.

<sup>33</sup> Enlightenment empiricism and philosophical materialism remain dominant worldviews in mainstream twentieth century society and science, propelling development in the medical and environmental sciences, war industry, and behaviorial programming in education.

reality.<sup>34</sup> From Aldous Huxley to Roger Corman, these artists use fantasy, in the form of surrealist and gothic images, science fiction metaphors, and utopian tropes, to present the radical new, while establish a reassuring realist frame through domestic settings, material details, and popular culture references.<sup>35</sup> Realism establishes a shared reality between readers and texts to build recognition and empathy, while fantasy estranges readers' from normative worldviews and puts them in a space of critical self-reflection to receive new knowledges. Such dishabituation was the value of psychedelic experiences in Huxley's mind, "to be shaken out of the ruts of ordinary perception" "for a few timeless hours" and to see the world "directly and unconditionally," "this is an experience of inestimable value to everyone and especially to the intellectual" (73).

The psychedelic aesthetic asks readers, what would it mean to validate the words and worlds of poets, prophets and seers? My suggestion of shared realism does not presume that all audiences equally share the same vision or version of reality. Individual positions within culture and society, as well as bodily and perceptual capacities, will certainly determine a subject's understanding of reality. Yet, despite the diversity of positions and backgrounds, hegemonic realisms circulate our cultures and take the form of, what Antonio Gramsci calls, cultural common sense, a normative hegemonic version of reality that in the Western world values

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<sup>34</sup> Working from Frederic Jameson, Darko Suvin, and Kara Keeling, I argue that fantastic modes of metaphor can disrupt readers' habitual reading and viewing practices, estrange conditioned perspectives, and propel audiences into critical thought.

<sup>35</sup> The American psychedelic aesthetics embraces populist influences and further effaces the remaining modernist divides between "high" and "mass" cultures.

empiricism and reason. Many works of art rely on this common sense version of reality as a point of audience recognition. Though audiences may all at some level recognize this common sense reality, their recognition of this reality and their response to it is not uniform.

Methodologically, I hope to work in this space of contingent, relative and diffuse recognition by diverse and somewhat undeterminable audiences, taking seriously the affective forms of psychedelic aesthetics as constructions of alternative versions of reality, yet leaving to conjecture the resultant effects and reception of these aesthetics by audiences.

These writers and artists help validate psychedelic realities, and, by extension, could help validate the realities of those Othered by categories of race, gender, sexuality or mental illness.<sup>36</sup>

Recognizing the empirical reality of alternative subjectivities and identities has real ethical stakes.<sup>37</sup> In their attempt to depict their subjective experiences, Jane Dunlap and Constance Newland borrow and recombine the languages of psychological realism and fantasy to validate non-verbal realities, irrational feelings, and altered states of perception within scientific contexts. Works like *Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* reject universal myths of nation, family, and essentialist identity narratives of gender and class. Wolfe, Huxley, Newland and Dunlap productively

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<sup>36</sup> Initially, the scientific view of LSD was that it mimicked psychoses and could offer psychiatrists a window into the world of the schizophrenic. Though the psychoses model for LSD was gradually disproved, the association with mental illness and psychotic breakdown continues to haunt psychedelics in the cultural imagination. See Erika Dyck's *Psychedelic Psychiatry*.

<sup>37</sup> Empathetic literary and cinematic frameworks have real social and political consequences for those who experience altered states of consciousness, whether due to drug use, to autism or schizophrenia, or to meditative or religious trance states. Expanding our contemporary canon to include psychedelic literature and film would increase our scholarly sensitivity to a wider range of embodied and immaterial knowledges and mental abilities, an expansion that has particular stakes in our understanding of mental illness, disability and emergent transhuman subjectivity in the digital age.

respond to modernist conceptions of the individual, creating space for the individual to be separate and distinct, yet allowing for a more global and cosmic view of human subjectivity where one is one and one is all. By disrupting notions of unitary subjectivity and dissolving the boundaries of self and other, the psychedelic aesthetic generates intersubjective empathy by creating emotional bonds between persons on the basis of shared experiential, embodied knowledges rather than based on social and political categories of identity. Psychedelic aesthetic themes tie readers together across class, gender, race, nationalist or religious lines by uniting people in the shared field of affect and empathy. Through empathetic narrative structures, Newland and Dunlap open up new positions for subjectivity and identity outside dominant scientific, rationalist, and patriarchal paradigms. Psychedelic aesthetics make visible the performativity multiplicity of identity. As Jane Dunlap writes in her LSD account,

Shakespeare's phrase, 'One man in his time plays many parts,' is amazingly applicable to a person having an LSD experience. It is a little like playing charades except that you are both the observer and the observed, the observed in some cases being a dozen or more different people, animals, or objects. (17)

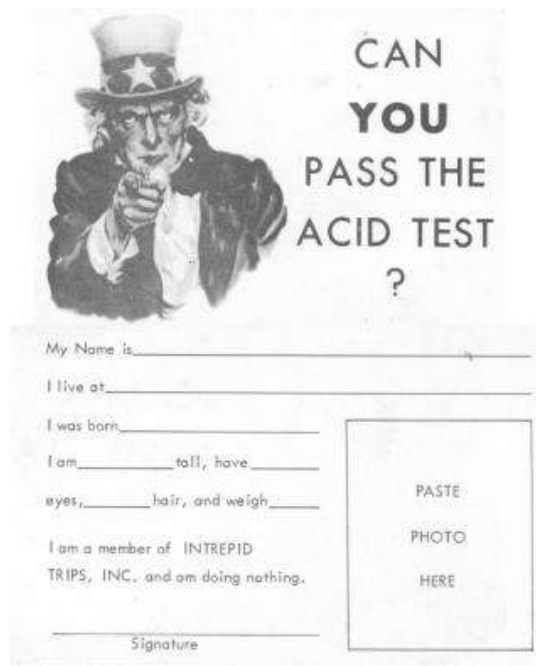
Dunlap's LSD experiences awaken the different facets of her feminist identity. Psychedelic narratives like Jane Dunlap's and Constance Newland's contributed to the consciousness raising rhetoric of the 1960s and 70s. The American psychedelic aesthetic works to estrange and engage audiences. This seeming contradiction works as a multistep process, first, estranging readers

from their habitual perception in order that they may engage empathetically with a radically Other. Hegemonic worldviews shield us from outside knowledges, particularly those that may pose a threat to epistemological closure.<sup>38</sup> The temporary and partial break in our conventional worldview is enabled by the psychedelic aesthetic's mode of estrangement, achieved through metaphor, allows readers to gain a critical hinge from which to perceive new or alternative knowledges. Transpersonal bonds of empathy are born out of readers' emotional engagement with those alternative knowledges. Through the participatory demands of the medium, the psychedelic aesthetic of the 1960s seeks to develop an engaged audience, one invested in global empathy and community care as demonstrated in the social justice activism and rhetoric of the Civil Rights and the Women's Movements, a reactionary impulse away from generational trends of disinterestedness and individualization. This project opened up larger questions for me about the relation between modes of representation and the cultural recognition and governing of social realities.

If "familiarity breeds indifference" as Aldous Huxley observes, could psychedelic estrangement breed participation and investment (115)? Psychedelic aesthetics are highly participatory mediums. Where the psychedelic aesthetic inherently lacks explicit description, where visuals and print fail to capture the integral sensory experience, the psychedelic aesthetic asks readers to participate in the making of meaning.

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<sup>38</sup> See Kara Keeling's treatment of habitual perception in *The Witch's Flight: The Cinematic, the Black Femme, and the Image of Common Sense* (2007).



**Figure 3: Acid Test Poster by The Pranksters**

Readers and audiences fill in the texts with imagination, enriching these limited verbal and visual texts with their own experiences. Developing critical frameworks for reading representations of altered states, like the psychedelic states discussed here, will enable readers and scholars to better understand how sensory experiences are mediated through aesthetic technologies, an important task as we increasingly inhabit McLuhan's prophesized electric age. Aesthetic technologies mediate our affective lived experience, shape our perception, and leave lasting effects on our individual and collective knowledge. In 1964, media theorist Marshall McLuhan wrote that aesthetic mediums are "proliferating technologies" that "have created a whole series of new environments" through which humankind is given "the means of perceiving the environment

itself” (ix).<sup>39</sup> Given McLuhan’s perceptive insight into American post-war culture, it is curious that McLuhan makes little mention of a parallel aesthetic and intellectual tradition that was also centrally concerned with perception and mediated realities and that was simultaneously in development during the richly creative 1960s.<sup>40</sup> If aesthetic mediums, in the words of Marshall McLuhan, are “extension[s] of our central nervous system[s]” (226), then LSD is an especially embodied means of intensifying human perception. Like aesthetics, psychedelic drugs are mediating technologies for tapping into the consciousness, for amplifying the senses, and for gaining previously inaccessible perceptual knowledge and relational awareness.

In my treatment of the psychedelic aesthetic, I take seriously the affective moments of encounter, meaning making, and critical reflection that bring texts and readers into mutual realization. The psychedelic aesthetic highlights the very processes by which we relate to texts, how meaning is built and shared across audiences of disparate backgrounds and knowledges. The psychedelic aesthetic makes visible the affective functions of literature, film and visual art, consciously employs these mediums to shift audiences’ sense of normative reality, and mimetically evokes the altered perceptual effects of psychedelic experiences. In doing so,

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<sup>39</sup> According to McLuhan, aesthetic mediums not only reflect ordinary perceptual positions, but to inaugurate new ones: “Art as a radar environment takes on the function of indispensable perceptual training” (xi).

<sup>40</sup> Early in the introduction to the second edition, McLuhan makes a singular nod to the psychedelic aesthetic when he remarks, “media study at once opens the doors of perception” (x). Published in 1954, ten years predating McLuhan, Huxley’s *The Doors of Perception* could be considered a psychedelic seed for McLuhan’s postmodernist thought. If the aesthetic study of media, in McLuhan’s singular echo of Huxley, “at once opens the doors of perception” (x), I wonder, could the study of psychedelic aesthetics pry those doors open even wider? And if so, why have psychedelic aesthetics been so effaced from the American literary and theoretical tradition?

psychedelic aesthetics are a continuum of avant-garde modernism's strategies of shock and disruption to dismantle the myth of the autonomy of art as a separate sphere divorced from lived experience. Psychedelics are by nature a richly affective subject; they deal centrally with the emotions. In "Toxic Substances, Semiotic Forms" (2007), Gianfranco Marrone argues that embodied nature of drug states creates aesthetic representations that seek to replicate all the "psychological, behavioral, cognitive, pragmatic, and affective effects" of the altered state (413). Tom Wolfe plays with sensory perception by layering multiple voices to create a kaleidoscopic narrative, while Tobe Hopper's film *Eggshells* (1969) creates impossible surrealist spaces for audiences to navigate. The psychedelic aesthetic relies on interrelated senses, mosaic structures, and detailed perceptual information to draw readers into a shared hallucinatory experience where audiences participate in the deconstruction and reformation of meaning. By transporting readers to temporary and partial states of transcendence, the psychedelic aesthetic enables audiences to see the always-already mediated world through fresh perspectives.

The function of the American psychedelic aesthetic, like much postmodern literature, is disruptive, estranging readers from ordinary perception and normative worldviews. But unlike more ironic and nihilist strains of postmodernism seen in the work of Kurt Vonnegut, John Barth, and Joseph Heller, the psychedelic aesthetic seeks to reintegrate the schizophrenia of

postmodern life.<sup>41</sup> The psychedelic aesthetic offers a postmodern ontology that teaches people how to be whole again, a lesson we learn from Aldous Huxley's restoration of sacred experience in Chapter One to Peter Fonda's journey of enlightenment in *The Trip* in Chapter Four.<sup>42</sup> The American psychedelic aesthetics is not nihilistically postmodern; it does not seek to wholesale reject our societal values and often celebrates the same cultural symbols it critiques and exceeds.<sup>43</sup> I contest the presumption, forwarded by Frederic Jameson, that the dominant feeling of postmodernism must be one of nihilistic cool. For Jameson to characterize postmodernity as the "waning of affect" is to ignore the psychedelic tradition, a veritable explosion of intense affects from terror to euphoria. I work in the vein of James Elkins who revalidates emotional approaches to art. In *Pictures and Tears: Crying in Front of Paintings* (2002), Elkins criticizes the "ironic tone of postmodernism" that strips our emotional registers and structures "our museums and universities [to] breed people with a cool demeanor" (210). I hope that the richly

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<sup>41</sup>Marianne DeKoven usefully summarizes the major tonal shifts in postmodernity, "The sincerity, originality, authenticity, aura, depth, reality, and directionality of modernity, in tension with irony and commodification in modernism, are supplanted in postmodernism by a pervasive irony, a pervasive culture of the commodity, the image, and the simulacrum; by flatness, and by limitless, open-ended free play, themselves in antinomial conjunction with various modes of intensified affect, fundamentalist belief, and free-floating passionate enthusiasm" (17).

<sup>42</sup>There is promising new research on the application of psychedelics for post-traumatic stress disorders, suggesting that psychedelics help loosen repressed memories, enable freer communication and help develop feelings of compassion, love and empathy that allow PTSD sufferers to heal. See reports from the Multidisciplinary Association of Psychedelic Studies ([maps.org](http://maps.org)).

<sup>43</sup> Psychedelic aesthetics respond to Ihab Hassan's call for a view of postmodernism as a "heightened mode of self-awareness, self-critical of its own assumptions, its own bleached myths and invisible theologies, and tolerant of what is not itself" (10).

emotive, mysterious and playfully exuberant nature of psychedelic aesthetics might help restore some joy to contemporary structures of feeling.<sup>44</sup>

### Recovering the Psychedelic Canon

*I assume we have lost whole territories of feeling and understanding. Possibly entire traditions have become invisible to us.*

-James Elkins<sup>45</sup>

*My reasons are theoretical rather than adversarial, for I am more philosopher than activist.*

--Huston Smith<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> I am warmed by the rise in scholarly attention to emotion and affect. Scholars like Cathy Caruth, Kathleen Woodward, Kara Keeling, Vivian Sobchack, and Elaine Scarry restore value to the felt dimensions of lived experience.

<sup>45</sup> *Pictures and Tears: A History of People Who Have Cried in Front of Paintings* 209.

Psychedelics, as a subject of inquiry, are often regulated to the cult or the taboo, placed at the margins of the intellectual tradition, discussed in footnotes, tangential asides scholars seem compelled to acknowledge, but hesitant to explicitly discuss.<sup>47</sup> Postmodern theory's foundation in the academic industry and Western canon lent it credibility and ensured its lasting philosophical legacy, while the reputation of psychedelic aesthetics was tainted by associations with naïve youth cultures and the prohibitive jurisdiction of the law. As scholars distanced themselves from the public scandals of psychedelics (ex. Timothy Leary), the psychedelic aesthetics' contributions to postmodern thought were effaced, leaving the record of psychedelics' influence on American culture and philosophy as a curious novelty, a period of hedonistic excess and frivolous indulgence. Balanced literary studies, without an overtly anti-drug agenda, of these narratives are only recently emerging.<sup>48</sup> There are too many significant works to overlook the tradition of psychedelic aesthetics offhandedly, particularly when titles like *The Doors of*

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<sup>46</sup> *Cleansing the Doors of Perception: The Religious Significance of Entheogenic Plants and Chemicals* (2000) xv. Huston Smith is a well-known figure in 1960s psychedelic studies, who continues his scholarship on the religious and sacramental nature of psychedelic experiences.

<sup>47</sup> While 1960s historians like Alice Echols and Greil Marcus have done much to give credence to the counterculture and its expressions, their cultural histories do not significantly attend to psychedelics as an aesthetic practice. Echols and Marcus discuss psychedelics, like Jay Stevens, Bruce Shlain and Martin Lee, as a social practice and personal inspiration, but not as a distinct literary and visual tradition.

<sup>48</sup> Some notable histories of 19th century opium use include M.H. Abram's *Milk of Paradise* (1934), Elizabeth Schneider's *Coleridge, Opium, and 'Kubla Khan'* (1953) and Alethea Hayter's *Opium and the Romantic Imagination* (1968). Susan Zieger's *Inventing the Addict: Drugs, Race, and Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century British and American Literature* (2008) and Lawrence Driscoll's *Reconsidering Drugs: Remapping Victorian and Modern Drug Discourses* (2000) are more comprehensive cultural histories of drug narratives in the 19th and early 20th century. Driscoll primarily focuses on discourses of opium, cocaine, alcohol and heroin, and only references psychedelics as an aside. In the existing body of drug scholarship, considerations of psychedelic literature as an aesthetic tradition are somewhat scarce. Gianfranco Marrone considers synthetic drug use in Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange*, and Rob Latham traces the impact psychedelics had on 1960s science fiction, using Kubrick's *2001: Space Odyssey* as a focus.

*Perception*, *Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, and *Easy Rider* remain enduring influences on our cultural consciousness.<sup>49</sup> Yet, psychedelic aesthetics are routinely excluded from the established academic canon; there is no to little mention of psychedelics in any of the major twentieth century literary anthologies. Recovering the place of psychedelic aesthetics in the canon allows scholars a fuller picture of the 1960s, challenges the systemic exclusion of illicit, taboo, and mystic knowledges, breaks down disciplinary and generic categories, and provides a long overdue recognition for marginalized realities and their aesthetic expression in literature and film.<sup>50</sup> As manuscripts age, records are thrown away and the baby boomer generation ages, the cultural contributions of psychedelic substances are in danger of disappearing into the historical ether unless scholars begin to archive and study these works.

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<sup>49</sup>The Romantics experimented with opiates, the Modernists with alcohol, Walter Benjamin wrote essays on hashish, and William Burroughs was a self-admitted heroin junky. Throughout the nineteenth century, writers like Samuel Coleridge, Thomas De Quincey, Edgar Allan Poe and Charles Baudelaire used opium and other drugs to access sublime transcendental states, as well as for pain management and depression. Many writers left explicit narrative accounts of their drug experiences, such as De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* and Walter Benjamin's "Hashish in Marseilles." William James and Sigmund Freud wrote of their drug experiences from a scientific and philosophic standpoint, and compiled extensive research cataloguing a spectrum of altered states from drug use to hallucination and trance states. See William James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience* and Sigmund Freud's *The Cocaine Papers*. For discussion of Freud's cocaine papers, see Driscoll's chapter "'Pleasures Impossible to Interpret': Freud and Cocaine" in *Reconsidering Drugs*. In *Affecting Fictions*, Jane Thrailkill provides some historical discussion of William James' experiments with ether, anesthesia, and trance states.

<sup>50</sup> Psychedelics are often treated with dismissive and sardonic remarks in the public imagination. Take for instance, the reviews of the recent Museum of Fine Arts fashion exhibit, *Hippie Chic*, which had a section devoted to psychedelic fashion. Instead of acknowledging the creative influence of psychedelics on this aesthetic, one reviewer referred to psychedelics as the "hedonistic distractions" of the era, while another sarcastically suggests that the museum should pump marijuana smoke into the room like Diane Vreeland did with Chanel perfume in her 1970s fashion exhibits at the Metropolitan Costume Institute. See Christopher Muther's "Summer of Love: 'Hippie Chic' at the Museum of Fine Arts." *Boston Globe*. July 17, 2013.

This dissertation contributes to the necessary compilation and critical treatment of this culturally, historically and aesthetically significant tradition.<sup>51</sup> I especially hope to add to the recovery of minor psychedelic texts and films from women such as Constance Newland's *My Self and I* (1962), Jane Dunlap's *Exploring Inner Space* (1961), and Storm de Hirsch's *Peyote Queen* (1965).<sup>52</sup> The gendered dynamics of psychedelic testimony are explored in Chapter Two. The psychedelic tradition in the United States was a predominantly white one. As my research thus far has shown, nearly all the writers and artists working on psychedelics subjects were white and of an intellectual or affluent class. White artists enjoyed the social privilege to write on culturally taboo subjects without significant censor or public ridicule, risks racially disenfranchised artists were less inclined to take. The Black Panther movement came out against drug use by black radicals, viewing such use as a distraction from revolutionary action. Collected histories of drug use are still lacking as such accounts have been hidden and erased by the judicial and religious orders during periods when such articulations were seen to violate the cultural order.<sup>53</sup> Alterations of consciousness, whether achieved by drugs, mental illness or spiritual ecstasy, have historically been viewed as non-normative, unusual, and deviant by

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<sup>51</sup> After 1969, psychedelic aesthetics continued but were increasingly commercialized, parodied, and eventually grew out of favor in the mid-1970s. Psychedelic aesthetics have resurfaced in popular culture several times over the past decades, most notably out of rave and dance club cultures of the 1990s ( the Second Summer of Love) and of today (2010s).

<sup>52</sup> There are a few scant exceptions: Carlos Castaneda, author of *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge*, was Peruvian born. Jimi Hendrix and Carlos Santana lent African American and Latin American influences to psychedelic rock. In psychedelic science, the African American psychiatrist Madison Presnell worked with Timothy Leary and Richard Albert on the psilocybin project.

<sup>53</sup> I examine the prohibiting effects of taboo in the reception and publication histories of Jane Dunlap's *Exploring Inner Space* (1961) and Constance Newland's *My Self and I* (1962) in chapter two.

institutional and public common senses, particularly in the modern Western world where hospitals, schools and judicial systems are designed to regulate and uphold social conventions of normalcy.<sup>54</sup> Part of our cultural dismissal of psychedelic subjects is in a scholarly bias against mysticism.<sup>55</sup> To write on spirituality and mysticism in contemporary criticism is, in James Elkins' words, enough to "cast me into a dubious category of fallen and marginal historians who somehow don't get modernism or postmodernism" (xi). Yet, might there be some value to psychedelics' mystic reenchantment of the world?<sup>56</sup> Made illegal by governments, deemed illicit by conservatives, pathological by medical professionals, yet persistently used and valued by many, psychedelics continue to occupy a troubled space in American culture.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> The jury is still out on the medical effects of psychedelic substances. Though laws criminalizing the sale, production and use of these drugs cited addiction, abuse and harmful psychological and physical effects as reasons for Schedule I classification, existing medical literature does not confirm the validity of these claims. According to the Controlled Substances Act and as enforced by the DEA, "Schedule I drugs, substances, or chemicals are defined as drugs with no currently accepted medical use and a high potential for abuse." Schedule I drugs are considered the most dangerous drugs with potentially severe psychological or physical dependence. LSD, marijuana, ecstasy and peyote are listed alongside the very addictive, physiologically harmful, and potentially fatal substances like Quaaludes and heroin. The medical literature reveals that most psychedelic substances, like LSD, peyote, MDMA ("Molly"), and ecstasy, have little to no addictive properties, have few long term physical effects, and are safer to use in moderation than alcohol or tobacco. There is renewed research attention to the beneficial therapeutic use of psychedelics in coping with anxiety, addiction and trauma from PTSD and terminal illness. This renaissance in scientific research on psychedelics is in part due to the advocacy work of the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS).

<sup>55</sup> As art historian James Elkins defines it "art is mystical, properly speaking, when it involves an intimate, personal or private connection with something transcendental" (106). Mysticism, as an intellectual tradition, criticizes the privileging of rationality, and values feeling, intuition and unexplainable phenomenon. See *On the Strange Place of Religion in Contemporary Art*.

<sup>56</sup> See Suzi Gablik's *The Reenchantment of Art* (1991).

<sup>57</sup> Tom Wolfe called the sixties "The Probation Generation! Not the Lost Generation or the Beat Generation or the Silent Generation or even the Flower Generation, but the Probation Generation, with kids busted right and left up and down the coast for grass, and all get off the first time, on probation" (322). The reactionist Drug War of the

The American psychedelic aesthetic is by no means tidy or consistent in its impulses and interests. The psychedelic aesthetic ridicules the modernist idolization of the machine age even as it celebrates emergent digital technologies, rejects the material consumerism of the post-WWII capitalist boon in favor of a return to natural materiality, and looks nostalgically back to the Romantic past while envisioning a transcendent aesthetics for the postmodern electric age. By the end of the 60s, the American psychedelic aesthetic, a product in part because of postwar economic boom, was repackaged for commercial Hollywood and put on sale the consumer marketplace. Roger Corman's *The Trip* (1967) and Dennis Hopper's *Easy Rider* (1969) work subversively within and outside the Hollywood system, while Tobe Hopper makes a weird little film in the hippie enclaves of Austin, Texas.<sup>58</sup> In a postmodern moment of recursiveness, at the end of *Easy Rider* Peter Fonda repeats The Merry Pranksters' elegy to the psychedelic sixties, "We Blew It."

Fonda's famous line is often repeated as a reading of the wasted failures of the sixties' revolutionary energies. However, I reject such an easy dismissal of the psychedelic sixties, pictures that reduce the decade's experimental energies to groovy good times or hedonistic self-destruction. I equally resist getting too swept up in romantic nostalgia. What is remarkable to me about this period and its diverse cultural outpouring is the emotive qualities of it all. There was

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1970s, 80s, and 90s has, like Prohibition during the 1920s, resulted in increased violent crime, new underground economies, mass imprisonment of young black and Hispanic men, and little impact on the amount of drug use. As we've seen over the last few years in marijuana reform, it is time for our society to reopen the conversation about drugs, about why we seek altered states and how we can pursue such use safely and responsibly.

<sup>58</sup> See chapter four for my discussion of *Eggshells* (1969) and other psychedelic films.

an excitement to the space age, a time when major revolutions in physics, mathematics, medicine, computer technology, network science, and engineering revealed ever more complex pictures of the universe.<sup>59</sup> Discoveries in quantum physics and the popularization of Freudian psychoanalysis insisted that the invisible and the unconscious had to be taken seriously. Like today's digital age, many Americans had to tacitly accept what they could not see or understand. They registered these paradigm shifts emotionally. In a nation still reeling from the atrocities of WWII, fearful at the threat of nuclear annihilation, and anxiously watching the televised violence of civil rights protests, Americans were drawn to pharmaceutical promises of emotional and spiritual transcendence.<sup>60</sup> Psychedelics were a healing sacrament for the postwar age suffering from prolonged post-traumatic stress,

the remembered background of economic collapse in the thirties, the grand distraction and fatigue of the war, the pathetic if understandable search for security and relaxation afterwards, the bedazzlement of the new prosperity, a sheer defensive numbness in the face of thermonuclear terror and the protracted state of international emergency during the forties and fifties, the red-baiting and witch-hunting and out-and-out barbarism of the McCarthy years. (Roszak 23)

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<sup>59</sup> Several notable innovators in science and technology including neuroscientist John Lilly, biochemist Kary Mullis, and physicist Richard Feynman admit that LSD and other psychedelics played a significant role in their intellectual discoveries. Steve Jobs credits LSD as one of the most important things he's done in his life. Might there be a connection between psychedelic insight and the ability to perceive new patterns and connection?

<sup>60</sup> Psychedelic literature, film and art tapped into societal desires for self-transcendence, the longstanding search for god in a material age, an impulse that can be traced back from traditions of American Transcendentalism, English Romanticism, Greek and Roman mythologies, and Eastern mysticism.

Psychedelic aesthetics, the literature, film and art of altered states, offered up a nation a beautiful, illuminating, sometimes terrifying, spiritual sacramental and cultural tool. If we were to boil the sixties' down to a single imperative, it would be to raise consciousness. The consciousness-raising ethos of the youth generation, led by feminist and Civil Rights activities, was further facilitated by psychedelic drugs. "The Youth Quake" was trembling with revolutionary energy. The counterculture introduced meaningful lifestyle alternatives, though, like Huxley said of the drugged state, "the change which actually took place in that world was in no sense revolutionary" (16). More widespread, the youth generation challenged the unified identity categories and systematic inequalities based on age, race, class, and gender enforced by residual Victorian and modern cultural formations in the home, hospital, school and state. The sixties represent a complex network of social and cultural energies; to neatly parse out a singular aesthetic tradition is inevitably reductive. The sixties were a reactive decade, and our cultural memory of that time remains emotionally charged. This project is my record of *feeling* my way through the psychedelic sixties, using such affective reading to emphasize the embodied nature of all intellectual work, a lesson that the American psychedelic aesthetic tries to teach its audience.

Like all literature, American psychedelic aesthetic is most centrally about reality, continually asking readers to gauge what is real through its presentation of the extreme edge lines of cultural commonsense. In its representation of distorted time and space, overloaded senses and heightened perception, psychedelic narratives bring audiences to the edge of their

accepted reality, implores them to daringly step over that metaphysical line, and asks them what they feel in that space. In its mosaic performances of human experience, the American psychedelic aesthetic makes visible the mediated spectacles that continually swirl around us in this digital age. In its alternative visions of self and community beyond “the electro-pastel world of Mom&Dad&Buddy&Sis in the suburbs” (35), psychedelic aesthetics inaugurate new paradigms of perception and thought that may contribute to the nascent next stage in human evolution.<sup>61</sup> Psychedelics and aesthetics are symbiotic evolutionary pairs. They pave the way for each other, allowing us to dream of ever new fantasies. As we open up this psychedelic canon, I ask you to consider with the words of Constance Newland, the pseudonym of the ever fascinating, but historically forgotten psychedelic writer and researcher, Thelma Moss,

It is well known that at first the works of these artists were ridiculed. Even after their work was accepted they were described as weird, grotesque, ‘way out.’ So they are, to our conscious minds. But once one has traveled way out to the antipodes of the mind, creations like Kafka’s cockroach, Goya’s ‘Dream of Reason,’ Blake’s ‘Tiger Tiger burning bright,’ Dali’s melted watches, Bosch’s visions of Heaven and Hell—these become reality, a reality which exists within us but beyond the reach of our conscious minds. This reality is now made accessible to us through a chemical agency, for our

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<sup>61</sup> The resurgence in psychedelic use, particularly among youth cultures, signals a new generation interest in the consciousness expansion. In *Darwin’s Pharmacy*, Richard Doyle suggests that embracing the psychedelic worldview might offer our contemporary society a necessary model for a more sustainable and humble relationship to our global ecosystem.

exploration and future understanding. This is for me the great significance of the LSD experience, which I hope to be able in some measure to communicate. (45)

## CHAPTER ONE

### A Trip with Aldous: The Postmodern Turn On

*If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite.*

–William Blake<sup>62</sup>

*In Blake's phrase, the doors of Vermeer's perception were only partially cleansed. A single panel had become almost perfectly transparent; the rest of the door was still muddy.*

–Aldous Huxley<sup>63</sup>

*It consists solely in his ability to render, in words or (somewhat less successfully) in line and color, some hint at least of a not excessively uncommon experience. The untalented visionary may perceive an inner reality no less tremendous, beautiful and significant than the world beheld by Blake; but he lacks altogether the ability to express, in literary or plastic symbols, what he has seen.*

–Aldous Huxley<sup>64</sup>

In 1953, Aldous Huxley took a dose of mescaline. The result was *The Doors of Perception*, a slim book named after a line of the Romanticist William Blake's visionary poetry. The book became a transformative aesthetic experience that challenged America's empiricist

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<sup>62</sup> *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790).

<sup>63</sup> *The Doors of Perception* 39.

<sup>64</sup> *The Doors of Perception* 38.

worldview and led audiences into the postmodern age. Researchers at the Imperial College London, in conjunction with The Beckley Foundation, are finding neurological evidence that supports Aldous Huxley's 1954 speculation that consciousness operates like a reducing valve, screening out sensory information that is not biologically essential.<sup>65</sup> In his widely influential essays on psychedelics, *The Doors of Perception* (1954) and *Heaven and Hell* (1956), Aldous Huxley builds on the provocative claims of C.D. Broad and Henri Bergson that the brain "protect[s] us" from a "mass of largely useless and irrelevant knowledge" and thereby limit our perception to "the carefully selected utilitarian material which our narrowed, individual minds regard as a complete, or at least sufficient picture of reality" (24).<sup>66</sup> When this filter is diminished via the ingestion of psychedelic substances like psilocybin, mescaline, and LSD, people report heightened sensory affects and euphoric feelings of self-transcendence and cosmic awareness, feelings which, studies have shown, may have longer term life-affirming effects.<sup>67</sup> Psychedelics

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<sup>65</sup> There are several past and ongoing studies on the effects of psychedelics on brain function and the therapeutic applications of these substances. Psychiatric and neurological researchers are increasingly reporting significant mental health benefits in the use of psychedelics for the treatment of anxiety, depression, addiction, and PTSD. In the last decade, psychedelic research has undergone a renaissance as government regulations of these controlled substances has loosened. For a study supporting Huxley's "reducing valve" theory, see Carhart-Harris, Robin L. et al. "Neural Correlates of the Psychedelic State as Determined by fMRI Studies with Psilocybin." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (2012). Web.

<sup>66</sup> Charles Dunbar (C.D.) Broad was an English philosopher interested in the epistemology of science and history. He is best known for *Scientific Thought* (1923) and *The Mind and its Place in Nature* (1925). Henri Bergson was highly influential in shaping Huxley's metaphysical thought. A French philosopher, Bergson was interested in intuition and the phenomenological experiences of time and memory. See *Memory and Matter* (1911), *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (1932), and *The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics* (1946).

<sup>67</sup> For a study of psychedelic's relation to spiritual growth and life-affirming experiences, see Griffiths RR, Richards WA, McCann U, Jesse R. "Psilocybin can occasion mystical-type experiences having substantial and sustained personal meaning and spiritual significance." *Psychopharmacology* (2006) 187: 268-83. For research on LSD's

inhibit the brain's sensory filters by decreasing cerebral blood flow and limiting activity in the connector hubs that regulate perception. The "Mind at Large seeps past the no longer watertight valve," Huxley writes, speculating that psychedelics allow in a wider and richer spectrum of sensory information that is always already present, but is rarely perceived through ordinary states of perception (26).<sup>68</sup> Psychedelics open up, in Huxley's mind, "world[s] of visionary beauty" (26), "the worlds which, to Blake, to Swedenborg, to Johann Sebastian Bach, were home" (14). Huxley's aesthetic and psychiatric curiosity in psychedelic perception form part of his larger project to "form a bridge between science and the general world" by breaking down disciplinary specializations and conjoining literary expression and scientific examination (*Moksha* 97).<sup>69</sup> Neurologists like David Nutt and Amanda Feilding have renewed scientific interest in Huxley's theory of mind, often citing his essays on the mescaline experience, *The Doors of Perception* and

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therapeutic value for the terminally ill, see Kurland AA, Grof, S., Pahnke, W. N., Goodman, L.E., "Psychedelic Drug Assisted Psychotherapy In Patients With Terminal Cancer." *Psychotherapeutic Agents for the Terminally Ill and Bereaved* (1973). For a study of the treatment of alcoholism with psychedelics, see Mangini's "Treatment of Alcoholism Using Psychedelic Drugs: A Review of the Program of Research," *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs* (1998) 30: 381-418.

<sup>68</sup> Rather than producing illusionary hallucinations as long assumed, psychedelics result in heightened perceptual awareness by reducing "the efficiency of the cerebral reducing valve" by blocking glucose enzymes (Huxley 26). As fellow psychedelic researcher and professor of religion Huston Smith recalls, "Aldous Huxley told me never to say that chemicals cause visionary experience; say that they occasion them" (Smith xvi-xvii). Huxley's deliberate language overturns a long held view in the scientific and popular view that these drugs create a false vision of reality. Huxley suggestively implies that psychedelic visions are always already around; we simply fail to see.

<sup>69</sup> One of Huxley's final publications was *Literature and Science* (1963) examines the overlaps and distinctions between these "two cultures."

*Heaven and Hell*, as influential.<sup>70</sup> Yet, it was the space of literature, not science, which provided Huxley the freedom from which to speculate on the nature of consciousness,

I was looking at my furniture, not as the utilitarian who has to sit on chairs, to write at desks and tables, and not as the cameraman or scientific recorder, but as the pure aesthete whose concern is only with forms and their relationships within the field of vision or the picture space. 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. (21-22)

Huxley passes over the privileged twentieth century position of the modern scientist, favoring instead the mode of the artist. Even with their numerous scientific citations and jargon, Huxley's essays are first and foremost literary treatises on aesthetic value, epistemological uncertainty, and the ontological understanding of reality. Aesthetics offered a sacramental, symbolic, and affective framework for interpreting the psychedelic changes in his visual perception and emotions. Art provides a vital language based in analogy, metaphor, and fantasy, allowing Huxley to communicate the "sacramental vision of reality" to readers (22). Art can also serve a

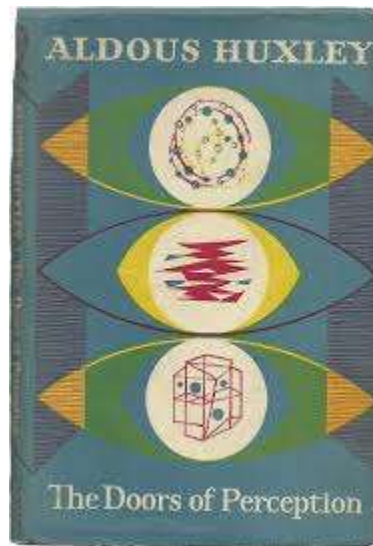
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<sup>70</sup> For more on Nutt and Fielding's neurological study of psychedelic consciousness, see The Beckley Foundation's website.

vehicle for others wishing to access the phenomenological experience of altered states. Huxley's psychedelic aesthetic gave mid-twentieth century readers a visual and textual modality for understanding the relativity, multiplicity, uncertainty, and significance of an emerging postmodern age. As psychedelic studies reemerge in our contemporary moment, Huxley reminds us of the necessary role of the aesthete in interpreting and reframing our scientific and common sense worldviews, and for creating new language for our new visions of the real. Working in the hazy divide between empirical reality and psychological fantasy, Huxley creates a psychedelic aesthetic that wedges a critical lever in the Enlightenment paradigms of the empirical certainty and capitalist progress and opens new space for pluralist realities.<sup>71</sup> The pivot is the figure of the reintegrated body-mind, a Huxleyian figure of a new affectively attuned, potentially transcendent postmodern subjectivity coming into being amidst the technological evolution, social upheaval, and psychic trauma of the Cold War age. Aldous Huxley used psychedelics to heal Americans and guide them into postmodernity.

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<sup>71</sup>Huxley's critique of capitalist labor and intellectual progress is reflected in his discussion of Thomas Aquinas that concludes *The Doors of Perception*, "Near the end of his life Aquinas experienced Infused Contemplation. Thereafter he refused to go back to work on his unfinished book. Compared with *this*, everything he had read and argued—Aristotle and the Sentences, the Questions, the Propositions, the majestic Summas—was no better than chaff or straw" (79).



**Figure 4: *The Doors of Perception* (1954)**

*The Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell* are cornerstones that mark the modern to postmodern turn. In two book-length essays, often published in a joint volume, letters, and lectures, Huxley provides an important postmodern record of the way a body-mind understands itself through (and beyond) language.<sup>72</sup> While postmodern poetics and theory did not saturate American universities until the 1980s, Huxley's 1954 psychedelic aesthetic was an important precursor to postmodern conceptions of ontological plurality and epistemological relativity that we later see in the work of Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Antonio Guattari.<sup>73</sup> In the

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<sup>72</sup> Huxley wrote primarily about mescaline in *The Doors of Perception*. In 1955, he tried LSD and wrote the follow up book *Heaven and Hell* (1956).

<sup>73</sup> The date of postmodern rupture is heavily debated among literary historians. Marianne DeKoven identifies the long sixties (1957-1973) as the period where postmodernism emerges in *Utopia Limited: The Sixties and the Emergence of Postmodernism*. For Andreas Killen, postmodernism arrived in 1973, as argued in *1973 Nervous*

tradition of the Continental modernisms of D.H. Lawrence and Henri Bergson, Huxley challenges the Cartesian dualities and Enlightenment positivism that remained pervasive in the mid-twentieth century scientific worldview and popular common sense. His pastiche aesthetic, skeptical epistemology, and phenomenological approach to psychedelics can be read as modernist in the aesthetic tradition of James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and Franz Kafka, and in the theoretical lineage of William James' multiverse, Henri Bergson's durations of time, and Martin Heidegger's becoming. One could argue that modernists like James Joyce and Virginia Woolf approach the kind of ecological and uncertain epistemology and pluralistic subjectivity that Huxley advocating for in his psychedelic praxis, suggesting more of continuity than rupture between modernisms. But, in the expansive space of psychedelic alterity, Huxley's thought does take a turn. Through mescaline, meditation and a dose of the Blakean past, Huxley recombines the ancient, Romantic and modernist pasts, and, through his essays of aesthetic pastiche, Huxley offers an early glimpse of postmodernism. In a recent essay tracing the antinomian influence of William Blake's Romanticism on the 1960s American counterculture, Jeffrey Kripal posits that "quite a bit (more than we acknowledge) of modern critical theory, and particularly of the kind that deals with religion and sexuality, has been a rationalized expression or perhaps cultural

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*Breakdown*. Responding to Killen, Brian McHale makes the more persuasive case for 1966 as the landmark Year One of postmodernism in "1966 Nervous Breakdown; or, When Did Postmodernism Begin?", *Modern Language Quarterly* 69:3 (September 2008).

sublimation of this same countercultural mysticism” (111).<sup>74</sup> I extend Kripal’s line of thought, arguing that Huxley’s turn to mysticism offered a more symbolically expansive language to describe the emergent sense of subjectivity developing in the postwar period. Huxley’s psychedelic aesthetic provided a representational modality for the embodied experiences of ontologically plural, perceptually flexible, epistemologically uncertain, socially bound, yet transcendently utopian postmodern subjectivities. In short, psychedelics in the 1960s taught a generation how to be postmodern.

*The Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell* combine autobiography and transdisciplinary scholarship to situate psychedelic experiences within a longer history of representational experimentation and philosophical thought. In its aesthetic approach, *The Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell* contest Enlightenment paradigms of disciplinary knowledge by offering an imaginative model for transdisciplinary scholarship, gleaning knowledge from disparate areas of religion, mysticism, psychiatric and neurological research to ancient oral traditions, painting and sculpture.<sup>75</sup> Sharing his work in venues ranging from scholarly tomes,

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<sup>74</sup> See Jeffrey J. Kripal’s “Reality Against Society: William Blake, Antinomianism, and the American Counterculture” in *Common Knowledge* 13.1 (2006), in which he discusses the influence of William Blake’s poetry and prophesy to countercultural figures Allen Ginsberg, Aldous Huxley and Theodore Roszak. Kripal defines antinomian as “against the law,” conceptualizing law in this case as the broader social and cultural institutions and common senses of an age. In Huxley’s case, scientific positivism, capitalist materialism, and rationalism were the nomians that Huxley reacts against.

<sup>75</sup> The use of the term, transdisciplinary, is deliberate. Trans- is a multidisciplinary approach that seeks dialogue from all disciplines as well as seeks knowledge outside institutionally recognized disciplines. For recent transdisciplinary theorization and practice, see the work of Basarab Nicolescu in *The Charter of Transdisciplinarity* (1994). Huxley rejected disciplinary boundaries, feeling the institutional categorization of knowledge into

lectures at M.I.T. to *Vanity Fair* and *Playboy*, Huxley pushed at high modernist pretensions in his multicultural pastiche and embrace of popular audiences. A product of an esteemed British family of scientists, Huxley understood the value in scientific thought, yet remained skeptical of Enlightenment rationalism, using his work to upset the governing empiricist and positivist paradigms of the capitalist technocracy. In doing so, he deconstructs faith in the possibility of epistemological totality, forwarding a model of knowledge that is always partial, limited, and locally bound. Deconstructing the singularity of empirical scientific perception, Huxley names, interprets and lends authority to a new visual modality. To borrow from visual theorist Nicholas Mirzoeff, by inaugurating a discursive practice of psychedelic vision, Huxley makes a claim “to a right to the real” (477). His psychedelic visuality presents the real as a process of material and immaterial becoming.<sup>76</sup> Huxley grounds his utopian vision of Eternity, the Absolute, the Mind at Large through in the “Not-Self,” a mobile mode of the psychically attuned and expansive body-mind. In the spirit of Kant and Hegel, Huxley’s psychedelic aesthetic offers a paradoxical transcendent utopia of becoming, “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”

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departments and specializations arbitrarily divided knowledge and prevented scholars from seeing the intersections between subject and object, science and art, human and non-human knowledge.

<sup>76</sup> Much like literary theorists’ treatment of realism, Nicholas Mirzoeff defines visuality as a representational mode with social and material consequences, “Confronted with this double need to apprehend and counter a real that does exist but should not, and one that should exist but is as yet becoming, countervisuality has created a variety of realist formats structured around such tensions” (477). See “The Right to Look,” *Critical Inquiry*. 37. 3 (2011): 473-496.

(Huxley 18). Huxley's psychedelic postmodern subjectivity could not be adequately expressed in literary realism's referential reliance on an empiricist Enlightenment worldview. Acutely aware of the inherent limits on, yet communicative necessity of language, Huxley turns to fantasy as an aesthetic mode with the symbolic torque necessary to communicate his new understanding of human subjectivity.<sup>77</sup> Through the combination of fantastic and realist aesthetics, Huxley finds language to revalidate the body as a source of knowledge. By unsettling the Victorian taboos and Freudian pathologies that devalued the positive potential of altered states, Huxley reinvests aesthetic, social and cultural value in intuitive and sacred experiences. He challenges the Western secularism of his modernist contemporaries by giving credence to Eastern and indigenous religious and mystic traditions and ultimately locating sacredness in the body's sensory, affective and cognitive power. Huxley forwards a utopian postmodern praxis that treats the body as a potential vehicle for transcendent consciousness beyond the materiality of everyday life. Unlike some psychonauts of the 1960s, Huxley's hope for psychedelics, however, remains skeptically critical, ever aware of the ideologies that bind subjectivity within society. He presents a post-utopian vision of human potential, locating radical possibility in altered consciousness even while recognizing the inherent complicity of living in late capitalism. Huxley believed such potential was already existent, though underdeveloped,

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<sup>77</sup> Despite humanity's desire to transcend the merely verbal and symbolic realm of language, Huxley understood we must always operate through language to "permit of inferential understanding or even of mutual empathy or 'feeling into'" among our "society of island universes" (12).

To be enlightened is to be aware, always, of total reality in its immanent otherness –to be aware of it and yet to remain in a condition to survive as an animal, to think and feel as a human being, to resort whenever expedient to systematic reasoning. Our goal is to discover that we have always been where we ought to be. (78)

He forwards a psychedelic praxis that promotes humility, continual learning, and empathy. In these many interventions, Huxley's psychedelic canon contributes centrally to the development of postmodern thought and its popularization in America during the long 1960s. The popular reception of his psychedelic aesthetic helped kindle the neoromantic, rebellious, consciousness-raising zeitgeist of the 1960s in America and abroad. Among psychedelic scholars, Aldous Huxley is essential reading. *The Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell* solidified the basic theme and form of the American psychedelic aesthetic, a literary and visual mode of representing altered states of perception that left an indelible mark on the 1960s. Yet, his psychedelic canon has received scant critical notice in American twentieth century and postmodern studies.<sup>78</sup> By adding Huxley's psychedelic literature and theory to the postmodern canon, we get a fuller

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<sup>78</sup> Though *The Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell* are my central texts, I use a cultural studies approach to Huxley's work, examining other essays, articles, lectures, and letters that Huxley wrote on the subject of psychedelics, focusing particularly on the last decade of his life (1953-1963). Michael Horowitz and Cynthia Palmer have compiled many of these essays in *Moksha: Writings on Psychedelics and the Visionary Experience* (1977). Huxley's final novel, *Island* (1962), imagines a utopian society that incorporates the use of psychedelics as a spiritual guide and therapeutic agent from childhood to final death rites.

picture than standard anthologies offer of the convergent forces that shifted writers away from modernist aesthetics and theory.

Reevaluating Huxley is especially important today in the contemporary resurgence in recreational psychedelic use and scientific research in psychedelics' medicinal value. The aesthetic and cultural study of psychedelics may offer untapped possibilities for advancing critical humanistic thought on the construction of subjectivity and reality. In his words, psychedelic studies were of central importance "for the light it may throw on such ancient, unsolved riddles as the place of mind in nature and the relationship between brain and consciousness" (10). Amidst contemporary debates on the social value of the humanities, Huxley's transdisciplinary, intercultural, and multigenre work is a vital reminder of the cherished space literature provides for aesthetic experimentation, theoretical speculation, cultural development, and social recognition. Beyond his literary and scientific contributions, Huxley opens up a necessary cultural conversation about the social recognition of alternative subjectivities. Huxley helps expand our language for human experience, offering up a psychic language that challenges the often narrow cultural, social and political categories we use to delimit individual and collective realities. Psychedelic expansiveness gives credence to the "places inhabited by the insane and exceptionally gifted" (13). Huxley suggests aesthetics could directly contribute to political and social recognition through their representational and communicable capacity, writing in *The Doors of Perception*, "The mind is its own place, and the

places inhabited by the insane and the exceptionally gifted are so different from the places where ordinary men and women live, that there is little or no common ground of memory to serve as a basis for understanding or fellow feeling” (13). Finding a language for the common ground between disparate people was a major imperative of Huxley’s psychedelic aesthetic, an imperative more broadly shared by the civil rights, women’s movements, and anti-war protests of the 1950s and 1960s. The psychedelic aesthetic has tremendous personal and social potential for those who have experienced such altered states and who have had their reality disavowed by the conformist institutions of the school, hospital and state and the overly rationalist paradigms they govern.

### The Humanist’s Experiment

*Thus it came about that, one bright May morning, I swallowed four-tenths of a gram of mescaline dissolved in half a glass of water and sat down to wait for the results.*

—Aldous Huxley<sup>79</sup>

The British born, American émigré novelist and social critic, Aldous Huxley was an unlikely hero for the psychedelic age.<sup>80</sup> In his early literary career, Huxley was a darling of the

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<sup>79</sup> *The Doors of Perception* 12.

<sup>80</sup> Though English born, Huxley was very influential in the United States. Huxley emigrated to the United States at the start of World War II, though he never received official citizenship by the United States government. Huxley and his wife Maria applied for citizenship in 1953 after living in the U.S. for fourteen years. Sybille Bedford recounts, “We were de facto Californians, and it seemed the proper thing to become de jure Americans” (531). Their application was indefinitely postponed due to Huxley’s declared pacifism, and they remained resident aliens. The Huxleys established themselves in Los Angeles. Reading Huxley’s involvement with Hollywood is another interesting example of his emergent postmodernism. He wrote a script for Disney’s animated *Alice in Wonderland*

1920s British avant-garde; his poetry and novels were ironic social satires of the educated elite from which he came.<sup>81</sup> Huxley's early style reflects the modernist pessimism of a Western civilization ravaged by wars and intellectual decay, as particularly seen in *Chrome Yellow* (1921), *Antic Hay* (1923), and *Point Counter Point* (1928). Though most remembered today for the dystopian *Brave New World* (1932), Huxley was highly prolific, publishing eleven novels, nine poetry collections, seven compilations of short stories, twenty-three essay collections, several dramas and screenplays, countless articles, lectures, letters, and even two children's books. He was a well-known public figure, appearing in print, on radio and television, and commenting on subjects from aesthetics, technology, world religion, nationalism, population growth to physiology. Early in his literary career, Huxley earned the respect of peers like D.H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, and Igor Stravinsky, who saw him as one of the best satirical voices

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(1951), but his version was rejected because the script was too philosophical and because, reportedly, Walt Disney could only understand every third word. Though Huxley lived predominately in California, with a brief residency in Cambridge, Massachusetts when the Distinguished Visitor Professor of the Humanities at M.I.T. in the fall of 1960. In the context of this psychedelic cultural history, Huxley's time in Cambridge is very significant as he was at M.I.T. while Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert were at Harvard University conducting studies on psilocybin and LSD. For an extensive biography, see Sybille Bedford's *Aldous Huxley: A Biography*. See also Joel Desyane's "Attention from Saskatchewan: Huxley, Osmond, and the Psychedelic History of The Doors of Perception and Island," *Aldous Huxley Annual*. 2 (2002): 181-206.

<sup>81</sup> Aldous Huxley came from two well respected Victorian families, the Huxleys and the Arnolds. From his familial line, Aldous was well connected in his native England. He was a favorite of Lady Ottoline Morrell who held salons for artists, writers and critics like Robert Fry, Katherine Mansfield, Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves, "and all the Bloomsburys," as Huxley calls them in an interview ("The Art of Fiction"). He was very close with D.H. Lawrence, though biographer Sybille Bedford observes that Huxley's choice in friendships drew notice, "one does realize that Aldous's most intimate friends, though men of high intelligence in their different ways and men of human quality [Lawrence of course stands entirely apart] were not the masters, the highbrows, the literary mandarins of his time, not, though he knew them all and was fond of many, Bloomsbury, not the Sitwells, not [Edward] Morgan Forster or Tom [T.S.] Eliot" (Bedford 1524).

of the age. Though he enjoyed a wide readership in the United States and England throughout his career, his critical reputation, according to Joseph Bentley, “plunged catastrophically during the last quarter-century of his life” (142). Though Bentley curiously adds, “the stylistic and structural causes of [Huxley’s] decline have never, it seems to me, been satisfactorily defined” (142). Bentley raises an interesting point here when we also consider the significant growth in Huxley’s audience in this same post-WWII period. Why did Huxley’s critical reputation decline as he gained a mass of new readers? Bentley suggests the drop in critical interest was a reaction to a shift in Huxley’s style,

under the influence of a congeries of insights too complex to deserve the simplistic label ‘mysticism,’ Huxley’s later novels changed radically in structure, tone, and style; they attempted unsuccessfully to merge and unify widely divergent areas of experience and thus created a formal discontinuity that can only be called an esthetic [sic] disaster” (142).<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> As Huxley’s interests turned to meditation, Buddhism, Hinduism, hypnosis and eventually mind-altering substances, many of his modernist contemporaries, like Thomas Mann, dismissed him as a mystic. The canonical legacy of Huxley’s psychedelic work suffered as Bentley, Milton Birnbaum, Peter Bowering, and other Huxley scholars dismissed or hid away these texts as an insignificant or misguided part of Huxley’s otherwise respectful literary career.

Bentley suggests that critics rejected Huxley's psychedelic aesthetic because he deviated too far from the modernist philosophy and aesthetics they cherished and he once espoused.<sup>83</sup> He was searching the Godhead in a secular age, turned from the reign of the Bloomsbury elite and towards Hollywood populism, and transcended social concerns amidst the battlegrounds of global imperialism. Huxley turned postmodern. The "stylistic and structural causes" of his critical decline *and* his monumental popular success are seismic evidence of the postmodern shift in twentieth century literature.

Despite his sometimes apocalyptic cynicism, Huxley was always searching, in the spirit of his famous great-uncle, the English poet Matthew Arnold, for 'sweetness and light.'<sup>84</sup> According to biographer Dana Sawyer, Huxley was "looking somehow to get beyond the door, to get beyond art, to the wellspring of art itself" (86). He was interested in the transcendent, the eschatological, and the metaphysical. However, Huxley was not an escapist aesthete. His investments in humanity's psychological and spiritual wellbeing stemmed from a deep concern of a political momentum toward totalitarian rule, overpopulation, and capitalist inequality.

Despite vast technological advancements that promised to be moving the world toward post-

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<sup>83</sup> George Woodcock in *The Dawn and the Darkest Hour: A Study of Aldous Huxley*, criticizes the later Huxley for his reliance on other's theories and for his eccentric choice in "masters": "Huxley continually reinforced his own thoughts with the authority of men who intellectually and as writers were his inferiors, and so over the years we watch a strange procession of gurus which include [Vilfredo] Pareto, W. H. Sheldon, F.M. Alexander, Gerald Heard, and even, at the end the American medium Eileen Garrett and the Canadian expert in psychedelic drugs, Humphrey [sic] Osmond" (143).

<sup>84</sup> See Matthew Arnold's first chapter "Sweetness and Light" in *Culture and Anarchy: An Essay in Political and Social Criticism* (1867-9).

scarcity, Huxley saw the West as spiritually ill, deprived of the metaphysical health and aesthetic vision that would keep those technologies progressing toward good. Observing the pre- and postwar milieus from his native England and then his new American home, Huxley remarks, “most men and women lead lives at the worst so painful, at the best so monotonous, poor and limited that the urge to escape, the longing to transcend themselves if only for a few moments, is and has always been one of the principle appetites of the soul” (*Moksha* 62). With the haunting memory of WWII, the threat of nuclear annihilation, national unrest on broadcast media, and the confining pressures of Cold War conformity, Americans of the postwar era sought temporary escapes in the form of alcohol, prescription pharmaceuticals, and the fantasies of television and film.<sup>85</sup> In this tense atmosphere, Huxley’s themes of self-transcendence resonated with Cold War readers by offering them the utopian hope of an alternative way of being.

Huxley’s psychedelic initiation began in 1952 when he read a psychiatric article on theory of mind by Dr. Humphry Osmond.<sup>86</sup> Learning of the “chemical changes” in the brain that opened up a “new vision of reality” during activities like sustained rhythmic breathing, yoga,

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<sup>85</sup> For an interesting overview of Huxley’s view on the Cold War threats of totalitarianism, overpopulation, and propaganda, see The Mike Wallace Interview with Aldous Huxley from May 18, 1958. This interview is available for view online through the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin. See also “Brave New World Revisited” (1958) in *Moksha*.

<sup>86</sup> Huxley cites two articles by Humphry Osmond in the early pages of *The Doors of Perception*, “Schizophrenia. A New Approach” by Humphry Osmond and John Smythies in the *Journal of Mental Science*. 98 (April 1952), and “On Being Mad” by Humphry Osmond in *Saskatchewan Psychiatric Services Journal*. 1.2 (September 1952). For more on Aldous Huxley’s partnership with Humphry Osmond, see Erika Dyck’s *Psychedelic Psychiatry: LSD from Clinic to Campus*. See also Joel Deshayes’s “Attention from Saskatchewan: Huxley, Osmond and the Psychedelic History of The Doors of Perception and Island.”

meditation, and fasting, Huxley began to speculate whether ingesting chemical substances “might open the door to comparable experiences” (Sawyer 153).<sup>87</sup> In April of 1953, Huxley wrote to Humphry Osmond, inviting him to visit Los Angeles with the suggestion that he might “bring a little [mescaline]; for I am eager to make the experiment and would feel particularly happy to do so under the supervision of an experienced investigator like yourself” (*Moksha* 31).<sup>88</sup> Osmond was seeking further “psychological material” on mescaline’s effects and Huxley

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<sup>87</sup> Huxley had already considered the possibilities of pharmaceutical and natural substances offering some temporary escape from consciousness. In 1931, he wrote “A Treatise on Drugs,” a brief review of Louis Lewin’s survey of psychoactive drugs, *Phantastica*. Huxley observes “the story of drug-taking constitutes one of the most curious and also, it seems to me, one of the most significant chapters in the natural history of human beings” (*Moksha* 4). He only wishes there was a mind-altering drug that did not have the addictive properties of drugs like opioids, morphine, heroin, cocaine and some amphetamines and anesthetics. In “Wanted, A New Pleasure” (1931), written seven years before LSD was synthesized in the lab, Huxley dreams, “If we could sniff or swallow something that would, for five or six hours each day, abolish our solitude as individuals, atone us with our fellows in a glowing exaltation of affection and make life in all its aspects seem not only worth living, but divinely beautiful and significant, and if this heavenly, world-transfiguring drug were of such a kind that we could wake up the next morning with a clear head and an undamaged constitution—then, it seems to me, all our problems (and not merely the one small problem of discovering a novel pleasure) would be wholly solved and earth would become paradise” (*Moksha* 9). In *Brave New World* (1932), Huxley imagines a society which tries to eradicate human misery through the daily ingestion of Soma, a “euphoric, narcotic, pleasantly hallucinant” drug with “all the advantages of Christianity and alcohol; none of their defects” (36). Huxley made clear that the Soma in *Brave New World* does not resemble the legendary, but unidentified Soma of Indian myth taken for religious practices. See Huston Smith’s essay on Soma in *Cleansing the Doors of Perception: The Religious Significance of Entheogenic Plants and Chemicals* (2000).

<sup>88</sup> Like all psychedelics, the effects of mescaline, a chemical derivative of the peyotl cactus, are highly dependent on the user, setting, and dosage. Increased sensitivity to color and light, a sense of the irrelevance of time and space, and feelings of euphoria and interconnection are commonly reported as relative constants in scientific and literary accounts. Mescaline was a legal substance until 1970 when the United States government passed the Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention and Control Act and prohibited internationally as a Schedule 1 drug in 1971. The spelling of mescaline had not been standardized in Huxley’s time. Huxley spells “mescalín” without an -e, a spelling that was somewhat common in Huxley’s time, though most writers and scholars would use the current spelling, mescaline by the 1960s, which I use as well throughout this dissertation. Mescaline was first synthesized from the peyote cactus in 1918.

was, in his own words, “on the spot and willing, indeed eager, to be a guinea pig” (Huxley 12).<sup>89</sup> The resultant pseudo-scientific experiment inspired Huxley’s first book on the subject, *The Doors of Perception* (1954), arguably the most influential aesthetic and theoretical statement on psychedelics in the twentieth century. I foreground this extended biography to highlight the aesthetic *and* scientific origins of Huxley’s literary treatment of mescaline, essential frames for understanding how and why the psychedelic aesthetic moves the literary into postmodernism.

*The Doors of Perception* (1954) solidified the form of the trip report, a subgenre of the psychedelic aesthetic that would be reproduced throughout the 1960s. Trip reports are autobiographical and rhetorical accounts that shares generic features of testimony, travel writing, and Freudian dream analysis. The narrative recounts Huxley’s mescaline experience during which he witnessed “what Adam had seen on the morning of his creation—the miracle, moment by moment, of naked existence” (17). In the course of the trip narrative, readers follow Huxley’s moves through a relatively mundane afternoon. A formalist account of the narrative action would go as follows: Huxley stares at a small vase of flowers, his bookshelves, his pant legs, and a garden chair; he flips through a book of paintings at a five-and-dime store and rides in a car through the hills of Los Angeles. The narrative events are, however, secondary to Huxley’s observations on his altered perception and consciousness. *The Doors of Perception* is about the

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<sup>89</sup> Humphry Osmond believed psychedelics had an illuminating power, “For myself, my experiences with these substances have been the most strange, most awesome and among the most beautiful things in a varied and fortunate life. These are not escapes from but enlargements, burgeonings of reality” (428). See “A Review of the Clinical Effects of Psychotomimetic Agents.” *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 66. 3 (1957): 418-434.

feelings of “grace,” “transfiguration,” “The Beatific Vision, *Sat Chit Ananda*, Being-Awareness-Bliss” that Huxley felt as he observed his everyday world under the effects of mescaline (18). Huxley combines first person narration with the expository form to situate his personal experiences within a larger philosophical and cultural framework of metaphysical significance. The combination of personal testimony, diverse cultural texts and scientific resources makes up the central form of the psychedelic narrative that we see repeated in the trip reports of Alan Watts, Carlos Castaneda, Thelma Moss, and Adelle Davis, to cite just a few examples.

### Compiling the Archive

From that first trip in 1953 until his death a decade later, Huxley built an extensive body of knowledge on psychedelic art, science and philosophy, continuously circulating articles, references, and leads in correspondence with Humphry Osmond, parapsychologist J. B. Rhine, Timothy Leary, Richard Alpert, Huston Smith and other psychedelic researchers. In 1956, after further mescaline trials and scholarly research, Huxley followed with another short book, *Heaven and Hell*.<sup>90</sup> Whereas *The Doors of Perception* is Huxley’s autobiographical account, *Heaven and*

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<sup>90</sup>*The Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell* were soon packaged together by publishers and, to this day, are most often appear in a single volume. Both titles are taken from William Blake’s “The Marriage of Heaven and Hell.” Blake’s poem narrates a conversation with Ezekiel in which the narrator discovers, “If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite.” Huxley repeatedly cites William Blake as an influence, as well as William Wordsworth’s “The Tables Turned” and “Expostulation and Reply” in his letters and lectures on psychedelics. Huxley compares his mescaline vision to what “the young Wordsworth saw” and described in “Ode on the Imitations of Immortality in Childhood”; a universe of inconceivable beauty in which all things are full of life and charged with an obscure but immensely important meaning” (*Moksha* 158). Eighteenth century Romanticism was fundamental to Huxley’s understanding of visionary experiences and the role of poetic expression in facilitating such states.

*Hell* documents the larger cultural archive of visionary experiences, citing the paintings of Van Gogh, Chinese landscapes, the poetry and illustrations of William Blake, medieval carnivals and religious festivals, and the practice of carving stones into jewels, as just a few examples of, what he would later call, psychedelic art.<sup>91</sup> In both texts, Huxley catalogues a cultural record of psychedelic, metaphysical, and other visionary experiences in order to validate the long historical tradition of humans seeking altered states of consciousness through various means.<sup>92</sup> Always a scholar, Huxley pays tribute to the existing, though minor, literature on psychedelic drugs, citing the work of Louis Lewin, Havelock Ellis, Erich Jaensch and Weir Mitchell in particular.<sup>93</sup> He was especially indebted to William James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, which was written after James's experimental inhalation of the anesthetic gas nitrous oxide. Aside from these sources, Huxley found the Western treatment of altered states and visionary experiences

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<sup>91</sup> Huxley did not adopt the term 'psychedelic' until 1956 after Humphry Osmond coins the term. In *The Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell*, Huxley uses adjectives like 'visionary,' 'profound,' 'significant,' 'non-ordinary,' and 'ecstatic' to describe psychedelic states of perception and consciousness.

<sup>92</sup> Huxley documents several methods of transcendence and altered states from psychedelic drug use, intoxication, fasting, sensory deprivation, self-flagellation, meditation, chanting, trance, and hypnosis. Huxley argues that cultural records indicate that people have sought these altered states since the beginnings of human civilization. For more on the history of drug induced altered states throughout human history, see Mike Jay's *High Society: The Central Role of Mind-Altering Drugs in History, Science and Culture* (2010).

<sup>93</sup> See Weir Mitchell's account of peyote in the *British Medical Journal* (1896), Havelock Ellis's "A New Artificial Paradise" in *The Contemporary Review* (1898), and Louis Lewin's *Phantastica* (1924). Later on, Henri Michaux published an account of his mescaline experience *Misérable Miracle* in 1972. As discussed in the introduction, notable writers like Thomas De Quincey, William James, Sigmund Freud, and W.B. Yeats documented their experiences with opium, ether, and cocaine, though their involvement with these drugs is mentioned only tangentially in the critical scholarship. Though opiates, narcotics and anesthetics share some properties with psychedelics, the overall nature of the experience is markedly different, as Marcus Boon discusses in his survey of drug literature *The Road of Excess: A History of Writers on Drugs* (2002).

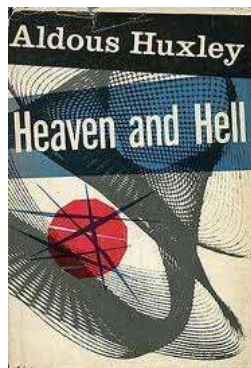
sorely limited. As I discuss in Chapter Two, the psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung and Jacques Lacan were very influential to generational interests in the unconscious and dream states. Huxley, however, felt Freudian discourse was pathologically reductive and thus spent little time on this psychoanalytic tradition in his psychedelic writing.<sup>94</sup> Huxley turned instead to Buddhist and Hindu traditions of meditation and asceticism to learn about psychic exploration in a non-medical context.<sup>95</sup> He found particular promise in the *Bardo Thodol*, or as it is referred to in its Western translation, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, a funeral text intended to guide the dying through states of living consciousness, death and rebirth. Huxley rejects the disciplinary divisions of the Enlightenment model, favoring instead an eclectic synthesis of Western and Eastern aesthetic and religious traditions, modern psychology and medicine. An avid reader, he draws from sources ranging from William Wordsworth, *Ramayana*, Socrates' *Phaedo*, Thomas Aquinas, Vaishnava painting, Sufi poetry, Persian music, to *The American Journal of Psychiatry*. Compiling an archive using a cultural studies approach reminiscent of

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<sup>94</sup>Recounting his first meeting with Huxley, Humphry Osmond recollects Huxley's disdain for Freudian analysis; during a meeting of the American Psychiatric Association, Huxley "sat there paying keenest attention, crossing himself devoutly every time Freud's name was mentioned. In *Brave New World*, the Savior was called "Our Ford," or as certain people for some unexplained reason preferred to call him, "Our Freud." Here was a congregation, including many pious Freudians, so Aldous was kept busy. Luckily my psychiatric colleagues were so absorbed by the incantations that no one noticed him" (35). Osmond's anecdote captures the humor that is present throughout Huxley's work; his intense intellectualism is often paired with an almost childlike playfulness. Huxley's respect of the child's imagination is most evident in his final utopian novel *Island* (1962).

<sup>95</sup> Huxley's lifelong interests in eschatology and personal transcendence led him to Eastern religious and meditative traditions, sources he began to incorporate in his Western based theories of art and reality. He produced an ambitious synthesis of the major Eastern and Western religions in *The Perennial Philosophy* (1945). Huxley practiced Vedanta meditation for many years after he was introduced to the practice by his friendships with Gerald Heard and Christopher Isherwood.

later contemporaries Roland Barthes and Raymond Williams, Huxley became one of the first cultural historians of psychedelic studies. His modernist synthesis of cultural and scientific knowledge becomes postmodern pastiche in his populist approach to genre. At one hand, we have Huxley as the Oxford-educated, Bloomsbury circle, member of the high cultural elite; on the other, we have Huxley writing for *Vanity Fair*, *Vogue* and *Playboy*. Huxley negotiated and helped efface the divides between high and low culture. He blends generalist and specialist references, gleans from diverse cultural sources, and reintegrates cultural and scientific knowledges, formal techniques that extend beyond modernist synthesis into postmodern bricolage.<sup>96</sup>



**Figure 5: *Heaven and Hell* (1956)**

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<sup>96</sup> I define bricolage, working from Claude Lévi-Strauss, as reusing old materials to solve new problems. Huxley borrows from a long and diverse archive of Eastern and Western religious, cultural and scientific sources to address the questions of perception and consciousness. See Lévi-Strauss's *La Pensée Sauvage* (*The Savage Mind*) (1962).

In many ways, Huxley's synthesis of marginal and dominant knowledge was thoroughly modernist. His interest in the East springs from the same in-vogue primitivism popular in 1920s literature and art. Unlike some of his contemporaries, Huxley does not treat Eastern culture as a fetish object. His approach is more postmodern in that he treats alternative cultures as equally valuable, yet equally flawed and partial sources of knowledge. Many of his Western contemporaries, like the novelist Thomas Mann, dismissed Huxley's synthesis of diverse cultural sources as misguided "mysticism," a term, that in the 1950s and today, carries the negative connotations of naïve spirituality and unabashed cultural pastiche. Others, like Robert C. Zaehner, Oxford Professor of Eastern Religion and Ethics, felt Huxley's advocacy of psychedelics' spiritual value was blasphemous, offering an illusionary shortcut to religious grace.<sup>97</sup> Huxley was often criticized for speaking in areas he was not an "expert" in.<sup>98</sup> He was often invited to speak at psychiatric and biological conferences, a privilege he in part gained by his famous Huxley name, but also from his wide ranging, transdisciplinary scholarship. His social-cultural approach challenged the autotelic "L'art pour l'art" philosophy propagated by New Criticism during this period. Though Huxley securely establishes the aesthetic origins of

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<sup>97</sup> See Zaehner, Robert C. *Mysticism, Sacred and Profane: An Inquiry Into Some Varieties of Praeternatural Experience* (1957).

<sup>98</sup> In his biography on Huxley, Dana Sawyer speculates that the negative reviews of Huxley's work were in part a response to Huxley's somewhat dismissive attitude toward the academic establishment. Nicholas Murray similarly notes that Huxley was the kind of "wide-ranging intellectual [who] acknowledge[ed] no disciplinary barriers, nor [felt] the need to kow-tow to the appointed custodians of this or that area of knowledge," which today "if not extinct is certainly an endangered species" (Murray 2). George Woodcock says of Huxley's varied influences, "one senses a Peacockian intelligence at work" (143).

psychedelic epistemology, his attempt to merge art and science was concerting for many literary modernists who were protective of art's disciplinary terrain. As we will see, Huxley adopts *and* deconstructs modernist scientific approaches in his literary treatment of psychedelics, finding ultimately that the literary and scientific dependence on realism is at odds with the kinds of emergent and alternative knowledge that psychedelics reveal.

### Pathological Paradigms

Huxley's compilation of psychedelic knowledge registers the emerging paradigm shifts in science and aesthetics occurring in the mid-twentieth century. Though he ultimately uses the literary form to present psychedelics as a subject of inquiry, Huxley drew from psychiatry and pharmaceuticals to establish a scientific context of credibility. Mescaline and LSD were pharmaceutical compounds, synthesized in a laboratory, and used in clinical research. Psychiatric research on psychedelics in the 1950s was clinically based, informed by a model of rational, empiricist and positivist scientific inquiry that comes in direct tension with the aesthetic and subjective nature of psychedelic experiences, as I will show in Chapter Two. Huxley felt a duty to serve as a bridge between the arts and sciences. He was well connected to the scientific circles of his day and followed the latest pharmacological, psychological, behavioral and ethological research.<sup>99</sup> Despite his affinity for science, Huxley found much to abhor in the

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<sup>99</sup> Huxley's amphibian interest in the arts and sciences comes to no surprise considering his family tree. His father Dr. Leonard Huxley was a teacher, editor and writer, and his mother Julia Arnold was the niece of English poet Matthew Arnold and sister of novelist Mrs. Humphry Ward, who was "a kind of literary godmother" to Huxley

scientific worldview. Huxley rejected scientific approaches that treated the body as segmented, portioning up the holistic body-mind into as a series of discrete organs, subject to examination, or, in the Freudian tradition, dividing the mind into pathological sites in need of analytic treatment.<sup>100</sup> In correspondence with Harvard researcher Timothy Leary, Huxley lamented, “You are right about the hopelessness of the ‘scientific’ approach. These idiots want to be Pavlovians not Lorenzian Ethologists. Pavlov never saw an animal in its natural state, only under duress. The ‘scientific’ LSD boys do the same with their subjects. No wonder they report psychoses” (Forte 107).<sup>101</sup> Huxley advocated the study of human and animal life by naturalist observation attending to subjective states like the ethologist Konrad Lorenz, rather than treating behavior as a series of trained reflexives like Ivan Pavlov.<sup>102</sup> His brother Julian, an evolutionary

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(“The Art of Fiction”). He was the grandson of evolutionary scientist T.H. Huxley, who was known as Charles Darwin’s bull dog. Aldous’ eldest brother Julian Huxley continued in the family business, publishing widely on evolutionary biology. Peter E. Firchow examines the intersecting work of these two brothers in “Aldous and Julian: Men of Letters, Men of Science.” *Aldous Huxley Annual* 4 (2006): 205-230.

<sup>100</sup> When *The Paris Review* asked about his position on Freud, Huxley responded, “The trouble with Freudian psychology is that it is based exclusively on a study of the sick. Freud never met a healthy human being—only patients and other psychoanalysts. Then too, Freudian psychology is only concerned with the past. Other systems of psychology, that concern themselves with the present state of the subject or his future potentialities, seem to me to be more realistic” (“The Art of Fiction”).

<sup>101</sup> Letter to Timothy Leary from June 2, 1961. While a visiting professor at M.I.T in 1960, Huxley served as an advisor to Timothy Leary’s Harvard Psilocybin Project. Leary was a Research Professor in Harvard University’s Center for Personality Research at the time. Leary and Huxley were “working out a nonclinical, supportive, yet objective and safe framework for this kind of experimentation” as Ralph Metzner explains in “From Harvard to Zihuatanejo” (Forte 157). For a follow up study of Leary’s study of psilocybin on recidivism rates in the Concord Prison Experiment, see Rick Doblin’s “Dr. Leary’s Concord Prison Experiment: a 34-year follow-up study.” *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs* (1998) 30: 419-426.

<sup>102</sup> In 1963, Aldous Huxley’s brother Julian Huxley published “Lorenzian Ethology” in the journal *Ethology*, a tribute to the fellow “inveterate bird watcher” and evolutionary biologist Konrad Lorenz for “rejecting the

scientist, warned of the emerging “computermorphic” tendency in behaviorism, a model that treats behavior as logical, artificial, and programmable, equating human subjectivity to “the status of elaborate computers” (Julian Huxley 402).<sup>103</sup> Both Huxleys tried to deconstruct science’s operating myths of objectivity and its dependence on experimental controls in their writing and research. A Lorenzian ethologist of psychedelics, Aldous tries to develop a more expansive mode of observing and validating subjective human experiences within natural environments. Psychedelic studies, in Huxley’s view, require an epistemological model that can withstand the rigor of scientific scrutiny, but that does not deny the complex subjectivity of its objects of study.

In order to open space for psychedelic subjectivities, Huxley needed a new model of scientific vision. The Enlightenment model promoted a singular, localized vantage point, the objective view that is perceived through the observant human eye, but ideally one that is unbiased by subjective emotion.<sup>104</sup> In contrast with the prevailing scientific myth of a singular

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reductionist approach and insisting on taking emotion and other subjective phenomena into account, he has helped prepare the way for transcending the mind-body conflict in an integrated and truly monistic approach” (Julian Huxley 409). Lorenz was known for observing animal behavior in its natural state rather than in the artificially controlled environment of the laboratory.

<sup>103</sup> One brother a man of literature, the other a biologist, the talented Huxleys were jointly invested in restoring the study of subjective states in the sciences and arts. Julian Huxley writes, “In recent years, the development of cybernetic theory and of efficient computing machines has led to what (until someone coins a philologically more respectful term) I can only call a computermorphic tendency, demoting man and higher animals to the status of elaborate computers, and paying no attention to the fact of subjective awareness” (“Lorenzian Ethology” 402).

<sup>104</sup> Jonathan Crary provides a compact summary of the continuation of the Enlightenment model of vision into modernity. See *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (1990).

objective view, Huxley represents psychedelic perception as multiple, flexible and expansive. Mescaline shifts ordinary perception through changes in scale and intensity, like the “magical close ups” Huxley describes in *Heaven and Hell* (168). The scientific orders of space and time become secondary to the more aesthetic dimensions of color and light: “Colors are more important, better worth attending to, than masses, positions and dimensions” (27). “Mescaline raises all colors to a higher power and makes the percipient aware of innumerable fine shades of difference, to which, at ordinary times, he is completely blind,” Huxley observes (27). Huxley was very interested in the construction of perception, in part, because of his own limited eyesight. At age sixteen he developed keratitis, a severe form of eye infection, that left him “substantially blind” – “forced to depend on braille for reading, a guide for walking, and a typewriter for writing,” as archivists Michael Horowitz and Cynthia Palmer document in *Moksha*, their collection of Huxley’s letters and essays on psychedelics.<sup>105</sup> Though he “considered his disability irreversible” (xv), Huxley partly restored his vision through the Bates Method of eye exercises.<sup>106</sup> Here, Huxley’s personal discipline over his body reflects his

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<sup>105</sup> Thin, often frail and ill, and nearly blind, Huxley was frequently confined to his home throughout his life. Huxley’s poor bodily health suggestively implies the biographically embodied roots of his lifelong interest in transcendental states of consciousness outside of the human body. In an interview with *The Paris Review*, Huxley recalls, “I started writing when I was seventeen, during a period when I was almost totally blind and could hardly do anything else. I typed out a novel by the touch system; I couldn’t even read it.” Horowitz and Palmer cite Huxley’s early poems “The Defeat of Youth” (1918) and “Leda” (1920) as evidence of Huxley’s bitterness over his diminishing eyesight (xv).

<sup>106</sup> The Bates Method is a series of eye exercises developed by William Horatio Bates. Huxley trained in the Bates method under Margaret Corbett and later wrote *The Art of Seeing* (1942) in which he details his experiences using this method and its effects on his eye sight. Huxley never fully restored his vision, relied on magnifying glasses to

remaining modernist, even Fordist, faith in man's mastery over nature. By the time he wrote *The Doors of Perception*, Huxley would begin to view the body with more awe, seeing it as less controllable and predictable. Psychedelics even seem to enable the perception of non-human or beyond-the-body point of views; users commonly report the feeling of hovering above their body. Offering a vision seemingly beyond the material body, psychedelics give "the telescopic and the microscopic at a single glance" (176). Vision becomes a sensory affect in flux, relative to the state of the body and the subject of observation. By emphasizing perception's relativity through its shifting sense of scale and proportion, Huxley disrupts the medical standardization of visual acuity. Huxley's work raises many questions about how scientific knowledge and institutions regulate the body and normalize subjectivity within dichotomies of diseased and well, mad and sane.

For many in the mid-twentieth century, there was a profound disconnect from any sense of the sacred. Faith in a higher power withered away under Darwinian progress. The scientific telescope had focused up a little too close; the body became a static and devalued object of rationalist scrutiny. The capitalist technocracy threatened to reduce humanity to objects to be engineered.<sup>107</sup> In *Brave New World*, Huxley prophesized that scientific materialism,

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read, and often memorized his speeches in full so that he would not have to read from the page. In her memoir of their life together, *This Timeless Moment* (1968), his second wife Laura Huxley writes that his blindness may have been exaggerated in the public imagination.

<sup>107</sup> In his foundational synthesis of the 1960s, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and its Youthful Oppositions* (1969), Theodor Roszak provides a definition of the American technocratic

rationalism, and technological progress, if left unchecked, would strip humanity of its aesthetic curiosity and spiritual faith. Huxley believed the Enlightenment worldview was destructively normative, stripping humanity of its affective, intuitive and sacred qualities in the name of rationalism. In the same vein as Huxley, Herbert Marcuse, and R.D. Laing, Theodore Roszak locates the roots of personal alienation in the scientific worldview, “the capacity of our emerging technocratic paradise to denature the imagination by appropriating to itself the whole meaning of Reason, Reality, Progress and Knowledge will render it impossible for men to give any name to their bothersomely unfulfilled potentialities but that of madness” (xiii). Definitions of reality that are too narrowly bound to rationality will ultimately bracket off what reason cannot categorically understand, thus leaving out a great deal of human and non-human phenomena and relations. Huxley tries to give language to those “unfulfilled potentialities” through his psychedelic aesthetic; he does this most compellingly through the revalidating of the imaginative aesthetic and sacred qualities of human experience.

In a letter to Timothy Leary in February 2, 1962, Huxley dreamed of psychedelics as a healing sacrament for the secular alienation of modern America, “The sacramentalizing of common life, so that every event may become a means whereby enlightenment can be realized, is therapy not merely for the abnormal, it is above all a Therapy for the much sickness of

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worldview that remains pervasive today. The technocracy, “the mature product of technological progress and scientific ethos,” is far more than a power structure, it is “the expression of a grand culture imperative, a veritable mystique that is deeply endorsed by the populace” (xiv).

insensitiveness and ignorance we call ‘normality’ or ‘mental health’” (Forte 109). As a writer, Huxley must use language to promote this sacramental process. He borrows from Western and Eastern, ancient, Romantic, and indigenous cultural languages to represent sacred experiences in a secular age. Yet, the sacred, much like the sublime, is notoriously resistant to language’s conceptualization. In *Cleansing the Doors of Perception: The Religious Significance of Entheogenic Plants and Chemicals*, psychedelic theologian Huston Smith defines the sacred by the inclusion of three factors: sacred experiences are 1) beyond our control, 2) beyond our ability to describe, and 3) invoke some sense of greater significance and meaning. Smith’s definition of the sacred easily extends to Huxley’s descriptions of psychedelic experiences. To capture the sacred psychedelic experience, Huxley must admit to the inherent limits of his language use, yet, still invoke the spirit of these unnamable, yet felt phenomena in a manner that affects readers’ imagination and ideally creates some mutual space of recognition.

Huxley’s most radical contribution to postmodernism may be in the reintegration of the sacred. In Huxley’s psychedelic worldview, the great totems, science and religion, were not on opposite poles of a spectrum running from secular to sacred. Rather, Huxley treated science and religion as equally valid and necessary cultural myths used to explain human experience. Though the sacred is a cultural construction itself, Huxley believed the sublime nature of the

sacred challenged the narrative processes of ideological myth making.<sup>108</sup> Art historian and visual theorist James Elkins suggests sacred or mystic experiences unsettle the Enlightenment progress narratives by drawing attention to the “sustained and focused energy” of the present moment, rather than valuing future progress (211).<sup>109</sup> Huxley tries to reintegrate the affective knowledge of the intuitive body-mind into a present-focused understanding of reality. Like James Elkins’ today, Huxley’s work teaches readers how to value the sacredness of the human body in all its perceptual senses, affects and cognition.

Not everyone was ready to accept Huxley’s claim of pharmaceutical grace and sacred knowledge. R. C. Zaehner gave *The Doors of Perception* a scathing review perhaps sealing its fate among orthodox academic circles. Huston Smith situates Zaehner’s dismissal within the context of paradigm shifts, reading anti-psychedelic attitudes as “a current counterpart of the seventeenth-century theologians’ initial refusal to accept the evidence from the Copernican revolution” (24). *The Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell* created a modest seismic shift in the modernist Enlightenment paradigm. Huxley’s psychedelic worldview was radical in the 1950s and remains so today because it challenges the American technocratic society’s most

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<sup>108</sup> In *On the Strange Place of Religion in Contemporary Art* (2004), art historian James Elkins forwards a similar view of the numinous or mystic in art (106). Elkins defines numinous as “the sudden, overwhelming, and nonverbal presence of the godhead, surpassing all comprehension or understanding: the immediate revelation of holiness” (105).

<sup>109</sup> Elkins writes in *Pictures and Tears: A History of People Who Have Cried in Front of Paintings* (2001), “There’s a strange state of mind involved, in between the picture’s world and your own world. Michael Fried, the art historian who wrote on ‘presentness’ and ‘grace,’ calls the state ‘absorption.’ Bertrand Rougé thinks of it as crossing over a bridge into the painting’s world” (211).

cherished myths of realist certainty, materialist objectivity, and scientific progress. Concluding *The Doors of Perception*, Huxley gives equal weight to rationality and intuition, “Systematic reasoning is something we could not, as a species or as individuals, possibly do without. But neither, if we are to remain sane, can we possibly do without direct perception, the more unsystematic the better, of the inner and outer worlds into which we have been born” (77). Huxley recognized the need for scientific discourse to help legitimize the study of altered states within American society. Yet, he also acutely understood how scientific paradigms limited the perception of human subjectivity by foreclosing the body as a reliable source of knowledge. Through his psychedelic essays, Huxley demonstrates the limits of rationalism and reveals the ways realism operates as the literary expression of this same scientific rationalism. By challenging the modernist scientific and realist literary paradigms and upsetting the empiricist assumptions of these dominant worldviews, Huxley can be seen as a precursor of postmodern epistemology in the tradition of Thomas Kuhn, Michel Foucault and Bruno Latour. Huxley’s epistemological treatment in *The Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell* exposes the invisible pervasiveness of Enlightenment scientific ideologies, these unquestioned value systems propagate, in Roszak’s words, “assumptions about reality and its values become as unobtrusively pervasive as the air we breathe” (8). Huxley’s pluralistic and deconstructive language play was an anecdote to the poisonously singular ‘name or be named’ realism of the McCarthy era.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Huxley’s feelings towards McCarthyism are illustrated in Humphry Osmond’s recollection of their initial

## The Limits of Realism

*We are forever attempting to convert things into signs for the more intelligible abstractions of our invention. But in doing so, we rob these things of a great deal of their native thinghood.*

– Aldous Huxley<sup>111</sup>

*The Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell* are as much about describing the visionary experiences of mescaline as they are about the problems that arise when representing the borders of the known and the unknown, and the unsanctioned, the unrepresented. In order to open up communicable space for psychedelic knowledge, Huxley must first challenge the primacy of scientific and psychological realisms in the American literary and scholarly canon. Realism, as a literary mode of representing social experience, is useful to establish precise boundaries, limits and categories. Realism operates under Enlightenment assumptions of rational knowledge, observable phenomena and the utility of language.<sup>112</sup> This is not to say that realist writers just “passively record the world outside,” as Amy Kaplan stresses in *The Social Construction of*

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meeting at the American Psychiatric Association conference: “We were standing in the foyer outside the main hall when Aldous’s voice cut through the hubbub like a knife-blade, ‘But, Humphry, how incredible it is in a Marxist country like this...’ It was 1953 at the height of the McCarthy era. Marxist was a diabolical word in the city of the angels” (*Moksha* 34). Huxley’s émigré status gave him a critically distant perspective on American political life. More on Huxley’s political activity can be found in Sybille Bedford’s admirably comprehensive biography, *Aldous Huxley: A Biography* (1974).

<sup>111</sup> *Heaven and Hell* 92.

<sup>112</sup> See Pam Morris’ *Realism* (2003).

*American Realism* (1988), “they actively create and criticize the meanings, representations, and ideologies of their own changing culture” (6-7). Throughout much of his oeuvre, Huxley uses psychological and social realisms to critique the ideologies of the Western bourgeois, as seen in his dystopian and utopian models of society, *Brave New World* and *Island* respectively. The materialist world remains a touchstone for Huxley, a foundation he relies on to reassure readers of their mutually shared Enlightenment-based worldview. In *The Doors of Perception*, details of Huxley’s home, his clothing and manners are necessary reminders of the empirical reality of the psychedelic event. He uses this realist foundation in the form of domestic details, scientific literature and naturalist and zoological metaphors to establish credibility within a recognizable worldview. Despite his skepticism about scientific methods, Huxley saw himself as “naturalist of the mind—who must gather his data before we become true zoologists of the mind” (*Moksha* 59). As a naturalist of the drug state, Huxley carefully observes and records visionary phenomenon in order to establish a systematic taxonomy of altered states.<sup>113</sup> By situating psychedelic experiences within realist and scientific worldviews, Huxley gives psychedelic subjects more credibility, context and wider circulation.

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<sup>113</sup> In “Zoological Taxonomy and Real Life,” Hamet Ritro traces the role of British naturalists in establishing knowledge about the new and unknown. Ritro observes that “besides establishing a natural order, a well-conceived zoological system could help define and dignify the place of both the discipline and its adherents in the human intellectual order” (235). See *Realism and Representation: Essays on the Problem of Realism in Relation to Science, Literature, and Culture*, ed. George Levine (1993).

While realist aesthetics have utilitarian value in facilitating communication across social spheres, this overly rationalist representational mode can become restrictive in the face of emergent knowledge. Jean-François Lyotard demonstrates in *The Postmodern Condition* how institutionalized systems of scientific knowledge use realist language to create “constraints [which] function to filter discursive potentials, interrupting possible connections in the communication networks: there are things that should not be said” (17). Huxley acutely understood how institutions restrict available languages and meanings. In *Heaven and Hell*, he argues that the capitalist, technocratic and educational systems of the 1950s have created a constraining “mental climate” “unfavorable to the visionary and the mystic” (149). The scientific faith in empiricism and rationalism did not leave legitimate space or credible language for intuitive, aesthetic and spiritual experiences. Or, in the words of Huxley, “in the currently fashionable picture of the universe there is no place for valid transcendental experience” (149).<sup>114</sup> His psychedelic perception attempts to revision the world as more ecological, networked, relative and uncertain. Huxley develops a postmodern epistemology that could not be reflected in the Enlightenment ideals of empiricism nor was adequately captured in modernist realist aesthetics.

Huxley’s attempt to give value and meaning to unorderable, unexplainable and illicit visionary experiences brought him to limits of his own Western scientific and spiritual

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<sup>114</sup> Predicting his own fall from critical esteem, Huxley goes on to say, “Consequently those who have had what they regard as valid transcendental experiences are looked upon with suspicion as being either lunatics or swindlers. To be a mystic or a visionary is no longer creditable” (149).

knowledge. Representing the perceptual, affective details of psychedelic phenomenon raised a particular challenge for Huxley, as these states of consciousness are notoriously non-verbal. “During the experience,” Huxley explains, “you’re not particularly interested in words, because the experience transcends words and is quite inexpressible in terms of words” (“The Art of Fiction”).<sup>115</sup> Names no longer fit the expansive perceptual realities Huxley experiences under mescaline, “Garden furniture, laths, sunlight, shadow –these were no more than names and notions, mere verbalizations, for utilitarian or scientific purposes, after the event” (Huxley 53). Psychedelics disrupt Western linguistic and scientific systems of classification by presenting affective experiences that have not, as yet, been sufficiently recognized or are systematically denied by medical and legislative bodies.

In the postmodern spirit, Huxley reflexively acknowledges the inherent failures, yet continued necessity of his language use. “Words are uttered, but fail to enlighten,” Huxley reflects, “The things and events to which symbols refer belong to mutually exclusive realms of experience” (13). Naming visionary and intuitive phenomena, in Huxley’s view, robs the experience of its fullest significance since the act of naming places the experience within a narrow and arbitrary order of constructed value. Furthermore, language constricts our ability to

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<sup>115</sup> Though Huxley believed that, during the psychedelic experience, “the whole notion of conceptualizing what is happening seems very silly,” “*after* the event, it seems to me quite possible that it might be of great assistance; people would see the universe around them in a very different way and would be inspired, possibly, to write something about it” (“The Art of Fiction”).

perceive the more expansive “world of unlimited experience” (*Moksha* 29). The constriction of perception is inevitable in Huxley’s mind since,

To formulate and express the contents of this reduced awareness, man has invented and endlessly elaborated those symbol-systems and implicit philosophies which we call languages. Every individual is at once the beneficiary inasmuch as language gives access to the accumulated records of other people’s experience, the victim in so far as it confirms him in the belief that reduced awareness is the only awareness and as it bedevils his sense of reality, so that he is all too apt to take his concepts for data, his words of actual things. (Huxley 23-24)

He acknowledges the constructiveness of the ideologies that govern notions of reality. “What we ordinarily call ‘reality,’” as Huxley defines it, “is merely that slice of total fact which our biological equipment, our linguistic heritage ... and our social conventions of thought and feeling make it possible for us to apprehend” (*Moksha* 101).<sup>116</sup> To see past an ideologically limited worldview would require a radical change in our biological, linguistic and environmental relationships.<sup>117</sup> Huxley does locate, however, hope for expansive perception through the

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<sup>116</sup>This statement is reminiscent of Kant’s analogy of “rose-colored glasses” which he uses to suggest a priori preconditions that govern our perception of possible experience.

<sup>117</sup> Huxley was simultaneously cautiously hopeful and deeply cynical about science’s ability to alter our biological sense of reality through pharmaceutical and genetic manipulation. Though he saw great potential in psychedelics for expanding the mind’s power, he feared the unethical use of pharmaceutical agents by states in warfare and mind-control. See “Brave New World Revisited” (1958) in *Moksha*.

manipulation of language. Huxley does not treat reality as a singular or stable concept; “The past is not something fixed and unalterable,” Huxley reflects (Huxley 171). As a writer, Huxley felt his duty lay in altering human potential through his use of language. “We must learn how to handle words effectively,” so that we can “preserve and, if necessary, intensify our ability to look at the world directly and not through that half opaque medium of concepts, which distorts every given fact into the all too familiar likeness of some generic label or explanatory abstraction” (74). Here, Huxley illustrates the lived dimensions of language and its mediating effects on perception. To be a writer, Huxley told *The Paris Review* in 1960, “one has [to have] the urge, first of all, to order the facts one observes and to give meaning to life; and along with that goes the love of words for their own sake and a desire to manipulate them” (“The Art of Fiction”). He used his position as a public intellectual and advocate to put out a call for a language that would change the way the public spoke about visionary states, perception and reality through literature.<sup>118</sup>

Psychedelics required a new language; language expansive enough to recognize these altered states of consciousness, but also language familiar enough to be communicable across a wide readership. In the 1950s and today, drug use and other visionary experiences carries many negative associations. In his last novel, the utopian *Island* (1962), which depicts a society where

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<sup>118</sup> While he admits that he “frankly” does “not have enough talent for the task,” he hopes “maybe some future Shakespeare will arise with an immense command of language, able to take our existing English, and somehow, by some miracle of poetry or miracle of poetic prose, render this picture of a continuum” (166).

psychedelic use is encouraged as a means of intellectual and spiritual education, Huxley considers the baggage of language:

What's in a name? ....Answer, practically everything. Having had the misfortune to be brought up in Europe, Murugan calls it dope and feels about it all the disapproval that, by conditioned reflex, the dirty word evokes. We, on the contrary, give the stuff good names –the *moksha*-medicine, the reality revealer, the truth-and-beauty pill. And we know, by direct experience, that the good names are deserved. Whereas our young friend here has no firsthand knowledge of the stuff and can't be persuaded even to give it a try. For him it's dope and dope is something that, by definition, no decent person ever indulges in. (*Island* 165-66, emphasis in original)<sup>119</sup>

Huxley's psychedelic texts worked to combat readers' negative associations with drugs by documenting the long cultural history of their use within sacred and intellectual contexts.

Huxley initially struggled for a name for substances like mescaline, mushrooms, peyote, and

LSD. He and his colleague Dr. Humphry Osmond were dissatisfied with the terms commonly

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<sup>119</sup> Huxley describes *Island* (1962) as “a rather peculiar kind of fiction. It's a kind of fantasy, a kind of *reverse Brave New World*, about a society in which real efforts are made to realize human potentialities” (“The Art of Fiction”). *Island* is a critical utopia in that Huxley recognizes that any modern utopian vision of society is ultimately compromised by late capitalism. *Island* was not as aesthetically successful as *The Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell* in representing psychedelic experiences. As Gorman Beauchamp remarks, “Huxley's autobiographical account of his initial experiences with mescaline in *The Doors of Perception* carries, by contrast, far more conviction, a much greater sense of authenticity than Farnaby's fictional one, this despite the fact that the two experiences are often parallel” (Beauchamp 68).

used in the 1940s and 50s, ‘psychotomimetics’ and ‘hallucinogenic,’ because of the association with psychoses, schizophrenia, and false illusions. They eventually settled on psychedelic, meaning mind-manifesting, to emphasize the sensory and affective revelations that are made manifest by these altered states.<sup>120</sup> Naming, as Kathryn Hume suggests, “officially fits a phenomenon into the network of known relationships; it gives one a sense of mental control over that phenomenon” (193). Psychedelic, as a term and an area of public interest, would spread out rapidly thanks to Huxley’s accessible style and popular appeal. Though perfect representation of such states is an inherently impossible task, Huxley’s attempt to rename, refashion and reach out for new languages helped give voice to a generation of psychedelic visionaries and their experiences.

In his attempt to name, Huxley encounters a linguistic paradox. How can Huxley, a man of letters, promote “the non-verbal humanities” which he calls the “almost completely ignored” “arts of being directly aware of the given facts of our existence” (Huxley 76)? Throughout *Doors* and *Heaven and Hell*, Huxley pays special attention to visual expression in painting, sculpture and the plastic arts, providing a vast encyclopedic archive of references for readers to meditate on after completing his text. Huxley embraced the paradox, acknowledging in

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<sup>120</sup> Osmond and Huxley considered a number of alternatives: “phereoin, ‘to make visible or manifest,’” “phaneros, meaning ‘manifest, open to sight, evident,’” “phanerothermes,” “psychophans,” and “phaneropsychics” (*Moksha* 107). It was Osmond who suggested psychedelics, though Huxley, misreading the spelling, would often use the term ‘psychodelic’ (107). Osmond’s term prevailed as it was “uncontaminated by other associations,” particularly psychoses (107). In their exchange of letters, Osmond penned a couplet to remind Huxley, “To fathom Hell or soar angelic, Just take a pinch of psychedelic” (107). It is important to note that this naming process occurs through poetic language, as we shall see in the following discussion of the fantastic.

postmodern fashion the limitations of his own epistemological certainty and dismantling linguistic and scientific faith in realism to capture any absolute truths. Huxley sidesteps this paradox by simply recognizing the need for humility in the face of knowledge:

the man who comes back through the Doors in the Wall will never be quite the same as the man who went out. He will be wiser but less cocksure, happier but less self-satisfied, humbler in acknowledging his ignorance yet better equipped to understand the relationship of words to things, of systematic reasoning to the unfathomable Mystery which it tries, forever vainly, to comprehend. (Huxley 79)

In Huxley's view, we must always continue to name, but remain humble in the face of our inherent limitations. Huxley's call for humility runs counter to the positivism of scientific inquiry. Huxley asks his audience of predominately white, educated Americans to recognize their ignorance of "the non-human otherness of the universe" (96). And, in such a request, Huxley asks his readers to step over into the realm of fantasy.

### The Possibilities of Fantasy Aesthetics

*From this long but indispensable excursion into the realm of theory, we may now return to the miraculous facts—four bamboo chair legs in the middle of a room.*

—Aldous Huxley<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> *The Doors of Perception* 28.

By considering Huxley's scholarly attempts to name, classify and categorize visionary phenomenon, we begin to see how writers of the psychedelic aesthetic use language in two modes, one of containment, boundary marking and consistency, the other of expansion, transaction, and relativity. Huxley employs scientific, psychological and literary realisms to establish stable categories of material reality from which to gain readers' trust through the acknowledgement of shared static knowledge. Huxley defines parameters of space and time to establish a foundation for his readers' given reality first. For example, Huxley uses realism to describe the setting of his mescaline experiment in his Los Angeles home in May 1953. He, then, uses the generative mode of fantasy to stretch those same given definitions. Gillian Beer suggests that realism's representational effectiveness diminishes when its subject lies outside a society's common sense knowledge; "realism is stretched further when its topic is the unseen, the unheard, the unregistered: that which lies beyond the reach of our unaided senses" (195). Fantasy enables Huxley to speak from multiple contested zones of knowledge, the tight, yet moveable spaces between scientific knowns and psychedelic unknowns, between the homogeneous rationalism of science and state, and the intuitive, yet unverified, knowledge of mystic prophets and visionary poets. In the paradoxical, yet necessary space of naming the unnamable, Huxley turns to fantasy, a symbolic mode of language that is more expansive in its attempt to record seemingly impossible human experience. The psychedelic worldview outlined in *The Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell* challenges the psychological realism popular in the twentieth century domestic fiction, a realism that takes for granted Enlightenment faith in

psychological behaviorialism, evolutionary biology and technocratic capitalism. Trying to represent supernatural light and metaphysical awe, Huxley stretches realism so far that he reaches over into fantasy. In *Do Metaphors Dream of Literal Sleep?* (2010), Seo-Young Chu defines fantasy as a literary mode dependent on readers' cognitive processes, placing realism and fantasy on "a spectrum whose two limits are 'referents wholly accessible to cognition' and 'wholly estranging referents.'" One end of the spectrum is populated by concrete objects highly susceptible to understanding and amendable to representation....The other end of the spectrum is occupied by referents virtually unknowable, referents that all but defy human language and comprehension" (Chu 6-7). Fantasy is defined in large part by our experience with unfamiliar and estranging modes of cognitive perception and comprehension.

Metaphors are a necessary formal component in fantasy and, in turn, form the building blocks of Huxley's psychedelic aesthetic. "It is difficult," Huxley admits, "it is all but impossible, to speak of mental events except in similes drawn from the more familiar universe of material things" (*Heaven* 84). Metaphor allows Huxley to "express very forcibly the essential otherness of the mind's far continents, the complete autonomy and self-sufficiency of their inhabitants" (84). The inhabitants Huxley references here are visions of heightened lights, colors, auras, and other forms of energy. The metaphoric, symbolic mode of fantasy, borrowed from the associated romantic, utopian, and surrealist traditions, is essential to describe the unusual, seemingly impossible phenomenon of psychedelic experiences. These metaphors are

not merely symbolic “picturesque language,” they are used to describe “exceedingly improbable” yet real visionary states and regions of mind (84). Realism allows him to capture the “Old World,” the “continent of familiar cows and horses” whereas fantasy can describe the “New World” “mental equivalent of Australia” inhabited by creatures as unfamiliar to American readers as “the wallaby and the platypus” (84, 85). Huxley uses these animals that are typically unfamiliar or exotic to American audiences to metaphorically suggest phenomenon of an even stranger nature. Huxley uses geographic exploration as a metaphor for psychic discovery, “Like the earth of a hundred years ago, our mind still has its darkest Africas, its unmapped Borneos and Amazonian basins” (83). Using suggestive imagery rather than definitions, Huxley evokes the imaginative mode of fantasy to invite readers to fill in the gaps and complete the meaning making as they encounter strange events and unfamiliar knowledge.

Huxley’s success in representing psychedelic experiences relies on these estranging shifts in reader modality.<sup>122</sup> The psychedelic aesthetic is best defined as a modality, a mode of perceiving and representing experience at the edge of one’s knowledge.<sup>123</sup> Theorists of the literary fantastic Darko Suvin, Kathryn Hume, Frederic Jameson, and others have treated fantasy

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<sup>122</sup> In his foundational work, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, Tzvetan Todorov defines the fantastic by readers’ hesitation about the reality of the narrative as readers encounter seemingly supernatural, unusual, or ‘unreal’ phenomenon in the world of the text. This moment of critical hesitation is significant, Todorov argues because it causes the readers to consider the “referential relations” between the aesthetic site and the ‘real’ world. The fantastic’s “tautological function” invites readers to critique the constructedness of the narrative’s reality, a moment that develops critical facilities for examining the nature of their own quotidian reality.

<sup>123</sup> Fantasy, like all aesthetics, is in the words of R.D. Laing a “modality” with “its own validity, its own rationality” (31).

as a mode of perception, a worldview that is markedly different from a society's empirical worldview commonsense. Huxley captures the fantastic other worldliness of psychedelic states; it is "a holiday out of space, out of time, in the eternity of sleep or ecstasy, in the heaven or the limbo of visionary phantasy. 'Anywhere, anywhere out of the world'" (*Moksha* 4). The root of psychedelic use, he observes, comes from this desire for self-transcendence from one's normative reality. The fantastic "illuminates such relations" through a "radically or significantly different formal framework" populated with alien characters, home to improbable events or placed in "a different space/time location" (Suvin 18). In Huxley's case, the fantastic is "Eternity in a flower, Infinity in four chair legs and the Absolute in the folds of a pair of flannel trousers" (Huxley 35). Much like surrealist poetics, psychedelic aesthetics produces estrangement through juxtaposition of unlikely combinations; here the mundane materials of everyday domesticity (flowers, chairs, trousers) are juxtaposed with the awe-inspiring metaphysics of infinity. Huxley asks readers to observe of details of ordinary materiality while fathoming the Absolute. These seeming impossible ecstatic visions, achieved through metaphoric language, have the potential to temporarily estrange readers as they question the fantastic textual presentation of reality against their conventional realist worldview.

Huxley's alternative framework tries to produce a shift in readers' values, especially as he introduces a non-human mode of perceiving reality. In the case of psychedelics, fantastic estrangement works to transport readers to a realm of non-human significance, where ordinary

objects signify their own meaning outside of human verbal conceptualization. In the psychedelic worldview represented in *The Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell*, the world is rich with supernatural color and light, endowed with metaphysical significance, a realm where the divisions between subject and object dissolve, and where space and time cease to matter. Huxley attempts to uproot his audiences' "rather dim and drab" "world of everyday experience" by presenting a disruptive vision of reality, one that is far more expansive than the one "we ordinarily re-create...in our own drearily human image" (Huxley 92). The fantastic mode is more explorative than definitive, operating toward expansion rather than containment. Huxley is particularly interested in how value systems are reassessed in the psychedelic mode. Under the influence of mescaline, he observes a shift in values, particularly in relation to constructed notions of time and space. "Place and distance ceased to be of much interest," and there was "an even more complete indifference to time" (Huxley 20, 21). Huxley found his "mind was perceiving the world in terms of other than spatial categories," perceiving instead "in terms of intensity of existence, profundity of significance, relationships within a pattern" (20). While realism relies on the mechanisms of space and time to frame narrative texts within a discrete, manageable worldview, psychedelic fantasy is a modality that values "being and meaning" over "measures and locations" (20). In psychedelic fantasy, Huxley revalidates perceptual and affective experience within a metaphysical symbolic order. Watching the garden flowers "glo[w] with living light" made ordinary spatial and temporal dimensions seem "beside the point" (20). The distance between object and subject collapses as readers are confronted with

“the forms of folded drapery ...so strange and dramatic that they catch the eye and in this way force the miraculous fact of sheer existence upon the attention” (33-34). Huxley uses these potentially estranging moments of reader reception to reorient readers’ conventional modes of meaning making and value. By staging fantastic moments of readerly doubt, where readers challenge their sense of reality and potentially adopt alternative visions of the real, Huxley creates a meta-narrative space for readers to test postmodern theories of ontological knowing and epistemological certainty.

Despite its cultural associations with the absurd, surreal, and seemingly impossible, fantasy should not be mistaken as absent of meaning or value. *The Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell* help readers reintegrate estranging psychedelic experiences by providing experiential and relational modalities of being through fantasy language. R.D. Laing argues that fantasy is “always experiential and meaningful, and, if the person is not dissociated from it, relational in a valid way” (31). The transpersonal was a growing interest in postwar psychology. Transactional and Gestalt psychology treated the body and mind holistically by considering the relations between cognitive processes, rather than treating mental processes as distinct pathologies as was common in Pavlovian behaviorism and Freudian psychoanalysis.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Transactional psychology recognized the changing dynamics of cognitive processes in human interaction with others and in their social environment. Eric Berne popularized the approach in *Games People Play* (1964), which considers the patterns of transactions that occur between people in everyday life. Gestalt therapy, associated with the Berlin School, considered how information taken in by senses was pulled holistically by the mind to form a larger global construct that people perceived as reality. Their shared acknowledgment of relational dynamics is of especially interest here, though these two approaches are distinct traditions and should not be collapsed.

Fantasy's affective, metaphoric language better captures the relational dynamics of consciousness than realism. The realist tenants of space and time become irrelevant in psychedelic fantasy. Instead, the affective, sensory and bodily relation of self to other objects becomes essential: "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 the certain sense were 'they') being my Not-self in the Not-self which was the chair" (Huxley 22). Huxley upsets the realist certainty of the Enlightenment Self by positing the self as a perceptive state of becoming rather than a materially distinct and stable entity.

By challenging conventional realisms through the perceptual alternatives of fantasy, the psychedelic aesthetic poses an antinomian threat to the modernist orthodoxies of science and psychology that rely on such realisms to maintain their linguistic and perceptual dominance in the social sphere. Huxley's attention to the affective body, sensory landscape, and transcendent mind disrupt Enlightenment myths of objectivity and rationality. The expansiveness of the psychedelic aesthetic provides a temporary escape from the bounded language of realism, creating a fantasy aesthetic that invites readers to imagine pluralities of being, supernatural light, and sacred experiences. But, it is crucial to note, psychedelic fantasy is not an illusion or hallucination. Psychedelic experiences are affectively and experientially real, and, as such, must be validated in the domains of art *and* science. Like string theory and dark matter, the existence

of psychedelic experiences presents a disruptive paradox to the still influential nineteenth century notions of materialism. Huxley's psychedelic aesthetic reinstalls a space for the sacred in the age of rationalism. The nearly universal integration of scientific methods and ideologies into everyday life concerned Huxley, who, like Michel Foucault, saw science and its resultant technologies, as systems of discipline and control. Huxley believed art could offer an alternative path to enlightenment by giving value back to the body and its relational affects.



### Sacred Affects

*This given reality is an infinite which passes all understanding and yet admits of being directly and in some sort totally apprehended. It is a transcendence belonging to another order than the human, and yet it may be present to us as a felt immanence, an experienced participation.*

—Aldous Huxley<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> *The Doors of Perception* 77-78.

*Allow yourself the most intimate and naïve encounter, and then dissect it into knowledge of historical value.*

–James Elkins<sup>126</sup>

Literary expression provides the poetic space necessary for validating the affective knowledge of the body, giving senses and emotions meaning beyond their purely biological and evolutionary function. Huxley opens a space for valuing transcendent, yet embodied subjectivity. Huxley adds a postmodern dose of the intimately and subjectively personal, revalidating the body as a source of knowledge, even as he acknowledges that this knowledge is inherently limited and locally bound. Joseph Bentley once dismissively called Huxley “The Zoologist of Fiction,” because “on virtually every page of those early novels the scientific or scatological image intrudes into contexts of romance, spirituality, or esthetic high seriousness” (143). Bentley’s epithet is actually quite fitting. Huxley’s mixture of “exalted spirit and vile flesh” in *The Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell* is a necessary synthesis as he attempts to map out an inclusive body-mind ontology that validates the sacred and secular, the aesthetic and scientific (Bentley 143).

The perceptual door once opened holds the possibility for increased bodily and mental awareness and control as demonstrated by the ancient practices of meditation and yoga. Valuing sensory awareness is a major part of any meditative practice. Huxley, who studied under the guru Prabhavananda in the Vedanta tradition alongside his lifelong colleague Gerald Heard,

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<sup>126</sup> *Pictures and Tears* 213.

closely associates meditation and psychedelics; their joint purpose is to rejoin human awareness back into the sensory body. Psychedelics, as Huxley explained to Leary, should be used “in the context of this basic Tantrik idea of the yoga of total awareness,” to reintegrate the mind with the body, “leading to enlightenment within the world of everyday experience” (Forte 109). “The ultimate yoga,” Huxley writes, “being aware, conscious even of the unconscious, on every level from the physiological to the spiritual” was “the highest possible ideal—enlightenment achieved” (108). Literature was Huxley’s tool for teaching the art of “constant awareness” and for training readers to be more amenable to alternative modes of knowing (108).

Huxley gives language to a set of new perceptive coordinates in his treatment of psychedelic embodied experiences. “If the experimentation with drugs has left its mark on everyone, even nonusers,” as Deleuze and Guattari reflected in 1980, “it is because it changed the perceptive coordinates of space-time and introduced us to a universe of microperceptions in which becomings-molecular take over where becomings-animal leave off” (Deleuze 248). This perceptual estrangement becomes reintegrated into a sense of a holistic mind-body in moments of sacred recognition, “By exhibiting common things in an uncommon light, its flame makes manifest the living mystery and inexplicable marvel of mere existence” (174). Psychedelic aesthetics offers an experiential collage of heightened senses, synchronized layers of affect experience, a temporary space for healing the mind-body that has become fragmented by technocratic environments. Current psychedelic research underlines this point; shifts in

perceptual frames appears to have longer term healing effects on consciousness and behavior through the user's revelatory recognition of their local body within greater universal experiences.

*The Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell* are postmodern aesthetic syntheses that reintegrate sacred affective and bodily experiences within mid-twentieth century cultural and social life. If postmodernism is, as Brian McHale posits, "a poetics of ontological plurality," Huxley provides a postmodern poetics for psychedelic ontology, in all its plurality, relativity and paradox (410). Huxley's model of subjectivity is perhaps most closely aligned with the postmodernist ontology later developed by Deleuze and Guattari, "The self is only a threshold, a door, a becoming between two multiplicities" (Deleuze 249). Psychedelics provide an experiential basis for Deleuzian theories of the body of assemblages, durations, and relations beyond the materially bound body.<sup>127</sup> The psychedelic modality refigures human existence into "the ultimate regions of a Continuum inhabited by unnameable waves and unfindable particles" (248). Huxley's valuation of affective experience sought to ground metaphysical abstractions

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<sup>127</sup> Psychedelics even gave Huxley a language for human experience in the afterlife. The effects of psychedelics are felt in the body, even as these substances can invoke feelings of being beyond or outside the body. From his earliest poetry, we can trace Huxley's lifelong interest in eschatological destiny. Huxley passed away on November 22, 1963, the same day that president John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas. In his final hours, dying from laryngeal cancer, Huxley asked his wife Laura to give him an intramuscular injection of LSD. It is reported that Laura read excerpts of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* to him in those final hours to put him at ease and guide him into the process of dying. In this text, Huxley finds language for treating death as another stage of consciousness rather than an endpoint. Timothy Leary and other psychedelic researchers would translate and adapt the book to serve as a guide during psychedelic sessions. See *Moksha*. Recently, researchers at John Hopkins University have used psychedelics substances like MDMA and psilocybin to help terminally ill patients cope with end-of-life anxiety. Psychedelics helped these patients see their individual material lives as only small and temporary parts of a larger universal order, a revelation that allowed them to let go of their fear of death.

and paradoxes into lived human experience. Aesthetic experimentation provides a liminal space between accepted and new knowledge, allowing one to live in and outside of language.

Huxley's primary attention is to the perceiving body-mind as a gateway to temporarily transcendental experiences. By representing embodied states of direct perception, unsystematic intuitive consciousness, psychedelic literature may offer vehicles for expanding readers' aesthetic and spiritual perception of reality. Psychedelics and postmodernism intersect in the lived human experience, and Huxley's text invites readers intimately into this phenomenological space. Uncertainty, relativity, disruption, conditionality, plurality, cosmic awareness, and synchronicity are more than theoretical concepts in *The Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell*, they are Huxley's embodied reality.

In many ways, Huxley saw psychedelics as the utopian hinge to a radical alterity. Some critics accused Huxley of escapism because of his pacifist stand during World War II and his discussion of spiritual matters at time when many of his Marxian and Freudian contemporaries, like Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Lionel Trilling and Hannah Arendt, attended to secular questions of political subjectivity, power structures, and capitalist injustice.<sup>128</sup> This critique is

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<sup>128</sup>Part of the escapist critique comes from Huxley's declarations of pacifism during the wars and his emigration to America at the beginning of WWII. We can see this residual war-time judgment in Harold Watts' comment that "Huxley sometimes washes his hands of current and burning questions and retires to studies that are at a distance from lacerating battles. But at other moments, Huxley speaks as a committed man—as committed, that is, as a person of his gifts and insights can be" (Watts 153). Huxley did not view drug use as a pure escape since these experiences were only temporary and partial. But more importantly, Huxley wanted people to use psychedelics to actually reengage in their world. Huxley believed that self- or what he called eupsychic transformation was needed to spark larger societal change. He was quite critical of people who sought escape through drug use, or through

unfairly leveled when we take texts into account texts like “Brave New World Revisited,” where Huxley forebodingly traces the political and technological imbalances of late capitalism and its alienating effects on humanity. Psychedelics were the lever that could lift consciousness temporarily beyond the Marxist power structures. When we look at the breadth and depth of his literary and critical work, we see a man seriously devoted to the ethical and intellectual questions of his day. Aesthetics offer an imaginative space of critical reflection and intuitive insight that the scientific laboratory could not. Huxley marked out the limits of the scientific worldview and makes a compelling case for the role of the arts in marking out new knowledge. Huxley felt that “in the exploration of the vast and mysterious world of human potentialities the great artists, visionaries and mystics have been trailblazing pioneers” (“Culture and the Individual”).

Huxley saw aesthetics as a potential gateway to metaphysical vision. Yet, he recognized there was no “generalization one can make” on the relationship between psychedelics and creativity (“The Art of Fiction”). In an interview, Huxley once remarked that “for most people it’s an extremely significant experience,” though he adds, “experience has shown that there’s an enormous variation in the way people respond to lysergic acid” (“The Art of Fiction”). The connection between psychedelics and creativity, seemed to Huxley, more indirect, aesthetic and

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constant meditation like his long-time friend and colleague Gerald Heard was known to do. Dana Sawyer comments that “Huxley believed that only a coward would want to escape and only a Pollyanna could escape. Though he had his faults, he was neither of these” (Sawyer 130).

spiritual inspiration resulting from a temporarily expanded mode of perception.<sup>129</sup> Though he devoted his life to the utopian promise of the arts, the psychedelic experience left Huxley with the feeling that the arts were inherently limited: “Art, I suppose, is only for beginners, or else for those resolute dead-enders, who have made up their minds to be content with the *ersatz* of Suchness, with symbols rather than with what they signify, with the elegantly composed recipe in lieu of actual dinner” (Huxley 30). Huxley’s claim here might go too far. He seems to posit that art could only offer educational lessons, whereas direct experience can provide enlightenment. But, how does one distinguish between art and direct experience. Can constant awareness of literature and art lead one down the path to enlightenment? Huxley, for one, refused to call himself enlightened. His personal motto remained “Aun Aprendo,” “I am still learning.”<sup>130</sup>

Believing psychedelics offered some key to the human potential, Huxley wanted to inspire others to acknowledge and, perhaps, try out these expansive modes of consciousness. Initial reviewers of *The Doors of Perception* accuses Huxley of being unscrupulous, reprinting in major newspapers and magazines that Huxley was advising LSD to all. However, Huxley was

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<sup>129</sup> As Huxley told *The Paris Review*, “I don’t think one can sit down and say, ‘I want to write a magnificent poem, and so I’m going to take lysergic acid.’ I don’t think it’s by any means certain that you would get the result you wanted—you might get almost any result” (“The Art of Fiction”).

<sup>130</sup> According to David Bromer, “Huxley first saw the phrase in a drawing by Goya at the Prado in Madrid.” He used this phrase as the title of a commencement address at The Happy Valley School in Ojai, California in June 14, 1951, telling the students “‘it represents an old, old man, bent double with age and infirmities, tottering along with the help of a staff. Under it is scrawled the caption: AUN APRENDO – I am still learning’” (9).

limited in his drug advocacy.<sup>131</sup> As interest in psychedelics grew in the 1960s, Huxley was increasingly cautious in his psychedelic advocacy, believing discussions of these drugs be kept in the obscurity of high-brow academic journals until scholars have reached a more complete understanding of their affects. In part, he wanted to limit psychedelic use to scholars and cultural elites, those who had the education and experience that would prepare them for these visionary experiences. His psychedelic aesthetic stresses the *heavenly and hellish* quality of these states.<sup>132</sup> This elitist model of psychedelic use would be trumped by Timothy Leary and Ken Kesey's populist tactics of psychedelic proliferation. Huxley's educational and spiritual framework for psychedelics would splinter and multiply throughout the 1960s, as we will see in the example of Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters discussed in Chapter Three.<sup>133</sup> But, Huxley's faith in human potential remains his lasting legacy on psychedelic studies. Believing humanity was on the cusp of evolving, developing further capacities of consciousness, empathy, and global

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<sup>131</sup> Huxley made pains to distinguish between psychedelics and other popular pharmaceuticals of his day, comparing mind-numbing narcotics and tranquilizers like Milton and Equanil, "the Happiness Pill, as its users affectionately call it" to "The Soma of Brave New World" (*Moksha* 98). "These Happiness Pills exert a double action; they relax the tension in striped muscle and so relax the associated tensions in the mind" (98). According to 1960s historian David Farber, "In 1965, doctors wrote 123 million prescriptions for tranquilizers and 24 million prescriptions for amphetamines" (19). See Farber's "The Intoxicated State / Illegal Nation: Drugs in the Sixties Counterculture" in *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and '70s* for a social history of drug use.

<sup>132</sup> "Suddenly I had an inkling of what it must feel like to be mad," Huxley writes, "the fear, as I analyze it in retrospect, was of being overwhelmed, of disintegrating under a pressure of reality greater than a mind, accustomed to living most of the time in a cosy world of symbols, could possibly bear" (54-55).

<sup>133</sup> Alexander Shulgin traces Huxley's career long interest in pharmaceutical manipulation of consciousness, the "panacea-drug called Soma (Christianity without tears, morality in a bottle)" in *Brave New World* (1932) with "which must be contrasted with his later creation Moksha (a process of education and enlightenment)" in *Island* (1962) (*Moksha* xvi).

awareness, psychedelics gave Huxley hope for human resilience in the face of the technocratic and capitalist ills that vexed him so. As the final words in the last appendix of *Heaven and Hell* read, “the robots are nothing if not versatile” (185).

Against the technocracy’s TV’s and refrigerators in every home vision of progress, Huxley provides an alternative projection for human potential beyond, what he calls, the “Sears-Roebuck catalogue” picture of “the conventionally ‘real’ world” as imagined in mainstream American literature and media (*Moksha* 30). By writing about psychedelics, Huxley could offer some possible “conduits through which some beneficent influence can flow out of that other country into a world of darkened selves, chronically dying for lack of it” (Huxley 44). For Huxley, the stakes could not be higher; psychedelics represented the future of human potential. Huxley’s psychedelic theories would inspire many in the 1960s, particularly fueling the Human Potential movement. If modernism celebrated the self for its authentic individuality, its participation in the collectives of family, nation and race, the postmodern self was a not-self, a composite identity relative and diffuse, existing both within and beyond the material body. Humanity is a “multiplicity, a becoming, a segment, a vibration” as Deleuze and Guattari posit (252). Huxley believed psychedelics helped push humanity a rung up on the evolutionary ladder. *The Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell* are full of hope, dreaming of a psychedelic “world of miracle and beauty and divine mystery when experience is what it is always ought to be” (Forte 109). Psychedelics gave new modes of expression for the flexibility

and open mind necessary to embrace postmodernism in its paradoxes and uncertainty. As William James put it, when altered states of consciousness forced one to face “the identification of contradictories, passing from the less to the more abstract,” the result was “terminating either in a laugh at the ultimate nothingness, or in a mood of vertiginous amazement at a meaningless infinity” (James, “Subjective Effect”). Laughter in face of paradox, the limits of humanity in the face of infinity, the uncertainty of the self in an age of self-reliance: these psychedelic themes would become the foundations of the emergent postmodernism of the American 1960s.

### The Domestication of Psychedelic Studies

*At the beginnings of a literature, the concern with a domestication of the amazing is very strong... Their stories are a syncretic travelogue and voyage imaginaire, daydream and intelligence report. This implies a curiosity about the unknown beyond the next mountain range (sea, ocean, solar system), where the thrill of knowledge joined the thrill of adventure.*

– Darko Suvin<sup>134</sup>

By reconsidering Huxley’s contributions to psychedelic aesthetics in *The Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell*, and in his many essays, lectures and letters on the subject, we are reminded that psychedelics are not simply naïve pursuits, hedonistic escapes or destructive pleasures. Aldous Huxley’s *The Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell* are essential ur-texts

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<sup>134</sup> *The Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* 4-5.

of the American psychedelic aesthetic and gave affective, experiential language to express emerging postmodern subjectivities. Huxley achieves the psychedelic aesthetic through the innovative synthesis of transdisciplinary knowledge, the combination of literary realism and fantasy to represent new and previously unknown experiences in a familiar light, and the use of body-based, sensory and affective language to reinvest the sacred in a secular age. In privileging the fantastic in a period where Enlightenment rationality reigned, by paying attention to the affective body at the height of rationalism, Huxley provides a more expansive language for American readers to understand the complexities of psychological experience. In his pastiche approach, Huxley borrows from Romanticism, fantasy, surrealism, Biblical and religious texts and other visionary literatures to express and give value to intuitive, sensory and affective experiences. Whereas realism allows Huxley to communicate socially sanctioned scientific knowledge and cultural common senses, the literary mode of fantasy gives language to the non-verbal, affective qualities of human and transpersonal consciousness. Huxley is a figure who starts in modernism and glimpses the postmodern turn to come. As such, his work provides an illuminative test case of the formal and thematic shifts that occurred in aesthetic practice and philosophical thought in mid-twentieth century literature. For example, Huxley's early modernist style of self-assured irony and parody is replaced by a postmodern contingency, humbled by what he does not know even as he attempts to trace out the new. By grounding theoretical frameworks like semiotics, epistemology, and ontology to lived experiences and representing these experiences in vivid personal and historical detail, Huxley helped proliferate

postmodern ideas of the self, perception and reality to mid-twentieth century English-language audiences in an accessible and popular style.

Huxley was deeply committed to reinvesting the value of the humanities at a time when that value of humanistic inquiry was challenged by the rise of the scientific technocracy. The trial of the humanities recurs again; what answer might Huxley provide for us today? He is a model of successful transdisciplinary research. He merges high and low genres, draws from Eastern and Western literary and scientific canons, and situates himself at both the margin and center of academic knowledge. His synthesis of disparate disciplines offers more flexible orders of value than the orthodoxy of the mid-twentieth century technocracy. Huxley's psychedelic worldview is antinomian in its challenge of the American technocracy's "most unimpeachable mythology" (Roszak 13), the myth of scientific objectivity and the dominant discourse of psychological realism. *The Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell* gesture towards emergent postmodern theory by reinvesting aesthetic value in the bodily experience, embracing epistemological plurality, relationality, and relativity, deconstructing monolithic truths, and playful integrating the universal into the individually located, diverse self. The psychedelic values these works espouse, cosmic awareness, global interdependence, relativity of time, space, and identity, come into direct tension with modernist faith in scientific truth, material progress, and human independence. If Huxley is only remembered for writing *Brave New World*, we get a

very incomplete picture of this important transatlantic writer that does not reflect the substantial contributions he made to twentieth century British and American literature and philosophy.

In Huxley's long view, psychedelics were a potential vehicle for long-term peace, a mission he believes urgently in his life long quest to seek some outside to human misery and violence. A reminder contemporary scholars, legislators and public figures ought to keep in mind when determining the place of psychedelic use within our current moment. Like so many others in the 1960s, Huxley dreamed of a new utopia. He saw psychedelics' potential in educational reform, advising "one should make use of all the available resources—the best methods of formal teaching and also LSD, hypnosis (used, among other things, to help people re-enter the LSD state without having recourse to a chemical), time distortion (to speed up the learning process), auto-conditioning for control of automatic processes and heightening of physical & psychological resistance to disease & trauma etc etc. . . ." A man not often lost to words, Huxley's etceteras signal the nearly infinite potential he saw in psychedelics' application to scientific and cultural study. His example is especially necessary today as we increasingly face emerging new knowledge in human consciousness, technology and molecular, atomic and galactic discovery. Through his inquiry into the nature of psychedelics and their aesthetic and spiritual significance, he popularized some of the major tenants of postmodern subjectivity, epistemology, and ontology for American audiences. A metaphysic, phenomenologist, social commenter, and populist, Huxley used the psychedelic experience to teach a postmodern

worldview meant to be *lived* in the body, not just remain in abstractions. Aldous Huxley gave Americans a psychedelic praxis for the postmodern age.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Empathetic Reform: Women's Accounts of LSD Therapy

*Since taking the drug and reading other people's reports of their experiences, I stand in awe of this thing we call the mind. What is in my mind, I am convinced, is essentially in yours and in that of every other individual. For this reason the following chapters seem to me to be not merely about myself but about every person who lives. At times LSD taps a universal knowing in much the same way an oil drill may tap a vast underground field which has existed for millions of years. One could almost say lysergic acid gives a glimpse into the very soul of man.*

– Jane Dunlap<sup>135</sup>

*At the end of that first session, I knew that I had traveled deep into the unconscious, a realm which I had not really believed existed. At the end of the nine sessions, over a period of nine weeks, I was cured of my hitherto incurable frigidity. And at the end of five months, I felt that I had been reconstituted as a human being. I have continued to feel that way ever since.*

– Constance A. Newland<sup>136</sup>

At the very end of the 1950s, two American women, Thelma Moss and Adelle Davis, arrived at psychologists' offices and waited for their first administration of lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD). Under the influence of this pharmaceutical compound derived from the rye fungus ergot, Adelle Davis transformed into a flying Pegasus, and Thelma Moss became a clam at the bottom of the ocean. After her "body was shaken by a terrific force" that "indicated the

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<sup>135</sup> *Exploring Inner Space* 18.

<sup>136</sup> *My Self and I* 47.

beginnings of a new life,” Davis “became a magnificent feminine Pegasus” with “huge wings of snow-white feathers” and “opalescent hoofs...of iridescent mother-of-pearl” (55). Moss’ experiences were more Freudian in nature, “I had been a Venus without arms with only swirling water where her genitals should be. I had been a baby in a basket, with the head of an adult” (181). The women were guided through multiple psychedelic drug experiences by therapists and psychiatric researchers. Legal at the time, but largely confined to pharmaceutical labs and research centers, LSD was used in therapeutic studies to explore its effects on consciousness. Researchers found LSD especially helpful for individuals coping with trauma, addiction, anxieties and psychoses. In a drugged altered state, Davis discovered spiritual peace; Moss found sexual release.<sup>137</sup> They recorded their experiences taking LSD in therapeutic settings for psychiatric research studies, and later published their first-person accounts under pseudonyms. Adelle Davis’ *Exploring Inner Space* by Jane Dunlap was published in 1961, with Thelma Moss’ *My Self and I* by Constance Newland appearing the following year. To clarify, from here on, I will use the names Davis and Moss to refer to their historical personages, and Dunlap and Newland to refer to the respective pseudonym narrators of *Exploring Inner Space* and *My Self and I*. Newland’s narrative is haunted by sadomasochistic fantasies, images of Freudian condensation and displacement, and brief brilliant interludes of “pure Energy,” a sense of “All-

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<sup>137</sup> Newland entered the study to cure, what she calls, her sexual frigidity. LSD therapy proved beneficial, “For the first time in my life, I had achieved a genuine vaginal orgasm. Under a drug, yes. In a fantasy, yes. But that did not matter. The fact was that I had been cured of a frigidity which I had believed to be incurable” (18).

knowledge, [a] miraculous realm where I wanted to linger and linger—” (209). Dunlap’s experiences were more ecological in theme; she becomes “the throbbing ameba; the tiny green-tipped hope; the brave little amphibian” gradually evolving to “primitive men of every sort” throughout human history, then transcending to the galactic scale of planets of “swirling pastel mists, like transparent veils made of near-microscopic jewels” (Dunlap 35, 36, 57).

In my own reading, I am struck by how Dunlap and Newland’s psychedelic narratives are at times fantastic, surreal, and sublime, yet also highly realist, scientific, and reportedly factual. This chapter considers readers’ affective engagements with these texts’ rhetorical and aesthetic forms, and seeks to tell a story of cultural reform of consciousness and identity through a history of reception. I take as a given that when aesthetics structure readers’ affective engagement, narrative forms can impact the cultural reception of new ideas and forms. Newland and Dunlap’s narratives are structured to change the minds of their readers about drug taboos. Their accounts ask readers to acknowledge the existence and value of wondrously alien, and perhaps somewhat frightening, realities. Dunlap and Newland’s psychedelic narratives achieve these multidimensional, seemingly paradoxical readerly affects through the strategic combination of realist and fantastic representational modes. *My Self and I* and *Exploring Inner Space* were early originators of the trip report, one of many literary genres in the emerging psychedelic

aesthetic.<sup>138</sup> Like travelogues, *My Self and I* and *Exploring Inner Space* take readers on a trip, but they travel through the vehicle of psychedelic metaphors and explore the land of the complex extrasensory mind.

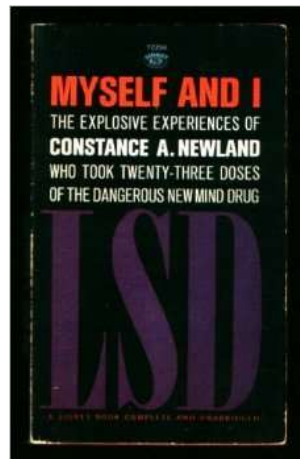
In the words of psychedelic researcher Dr. Harold Greenwald, books like *My Self and I*, represent “unprecedented firsthand account[s] of the still uncharted regions that we too glibly refer to as the unconscious.”<sup>139</sup> Dunlap and Newland craft transformative experiences of narrative self-reflection, using metaphor as a hinging device that both familiarizes and estranges readers’ ordinary sense of reality. Through alternating modes of readerly recognition and estrangement, their psychedelic narratives construct affective platforms through which readers can empathize with alternative worldviews and identities. With themes of self-awakening, love, and global empathy, the psychiatric reports *My Self and I* and *Exploring Inner Space* add to our cultural understanding of the consciousness-raising rhetoric, transpersonal relations, and, what Richard Doyle calls, the “ecodelic” zeitgeist that emerged in the 1960s. Furthermore, through these women’s narratives, we see how psychedelic aesthetics unsettle our disciplinary boundaries

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<sup>138</sup>Richard Doyle provides an excellent overview of the genre of the psychedelic trip report and its rhetorical strategies in *Darwin’s Pharmacy: Sex, Plants, and the Evolution of the Noösphere* (2011). I consider the trip report to be one of many genres that employs the psychedelic aesthetic.

<sup>139</sup> See Harold Greenwald’s “Foreword” to *My Self and I*, ed. Constance Newland (New York: Signet Books, 1962), p. 7.

and disrupt our epistemological confidence, while offering a postmodern model of pluralistic subjectivity, epistemological humility, and empathetic ontology.



**Figure 6: My Self and I (1962)**

Today, both books are out of print, rare to find, and barely accounted for in the literary and historical scholarship of the period. The legacies of these psychedelic memoirs are fraught with layers of taboo and authorial remove.<sup>140</sup> These books were called escapist, “far-fetched,”<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>140</sup>The reception history is further complicated by confusion regarding the official title of Constance Newland’s *My Self and I*, which was printed and reviewed alternatively as *Myself and I* and *My Self and I*. A Signet Third printing from 1962 includes two spellings: *Myself and I* on the paperback cover, and *My Self and I* on the inside title page. I take *My Self and I* as the intended title, particularly given one of Newland’s closing remarks: “at long last, My Self and I had become one” (210).

“kaleidoscopic and confusing.”<sup>142</sup> Literary in their language, scientific in their subject matter, these narratives confounded many readers’ disciplinary, generic and stylistic expectations. Yet, reviewers like Richard Crocket of *The British Journal of Psychiatry* praised their rich fantasies, “expressed in vivid and individually stylized terms.”<sup>143</sup> In the words of one reviewer, these works presented a “fascinating glimpse beyond our present medical horizons.”<sup>144</sup> Others saw psychedelics as a threat, fearing these books would hasten the spread of mind-altering substances. “The book is definitely not for the kiddies,” *New York Times* reviewer Francis J. Braceland advised readers.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>141</sup>Francis J. Braceland, “Through Fantasy to Serenity,” *New York Times*, Aug 12, 1962

<sup>142</sup>Nathan Kline, “The Mind on the Wing,” *New York Times*, May 14, 1961.

<sup>143</sup>Richard w. Crocket, “Reviews: Exploring Inner Space. Personal Experiences under LSD-25,” *British Journal of Psychiatry*, May 1962, p. 386.

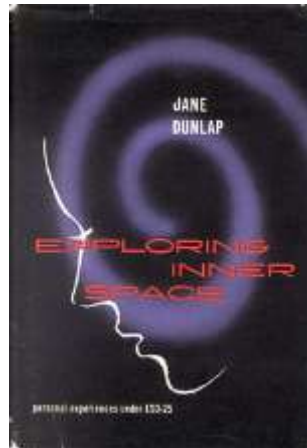
<sup>144</sup> See “Display Ad 99 – No Title,” *New York Times*, Dec 7, 1962.

<sup>145</sup> From Braceland’s review of *My Self and I*. Braceland, “Through Fantasy to Serenity” (above, n. 3).

Braceland's warning reflects the uneasy ground of the early 1960s. Their psychedelic narratives tap into the generational debates regarding gender and racial equality, global anti-imperialism, and ecological justice, social and cultural tensions which emerged out of the tense reaction chambers of the Cold War era. Like Erika Jong and Adrienne Rich would do in the 1970s, Dunlap and Newland use their narratives to work through their anxieties about love, sex, and motherhood; their angst about the institutions of marriage and religion; and their fears of nuclear and ecological death and destruction. These narratives yield radical perspectives on the immanent and interconnected nature of reality that challenge American myths of domesticity, scientific progress, and human independence. Their revelations take part in the sixties' global generational challenge to the Enlightenment norms of the past and inspire pluralist perspectives on human experience. Though they took LSD within legal psychiatric contexts, Dunlap and Newland take authorial risks by acknowledging their LSD experiences in the public sphere. Published in the early 1960s, mostly marketed to white male psychiatric researchers and a white female reading public, the initial audiences of these books were not yet part of the psychedelic culture that would eventually characterize the decade.<sup>146</sup> Their books laid down the foundation for the more receptive audiences that later psychedelic artists, like Ken Kesey and Carlos Castaneda, would enjoy. Newland and Dunlap take these risks of reader miscomprehension, and subsequent poor reception, in the spirit of reform.

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<sup>146</sup>Drug use and mental illness remained taboo in the general population, and even more so for racial and ethnic minorities who would take an even greater social risk in showing an interest in these non-normative activities and subcultures. A white reading public may have enjoyed more privilege in their freedom of literary taste, whereas the conventions of taste for marginalized groups were more narrowly constricted by social pressures to conform.



**Figure 7: Exploring Inner Space (1961)**

*My Self and I* and *Exploring Inner Space* are narratives of reform; the subject of their social challenge is the nature of human consciousness itself. Published amidst the civil rights movements, the feminist awakening, and the censorship of Cold War politics, their life narratives contribute to the heavy rhetorical debate in American society about whose voices are given expression and on what subjects. Contemporaneous works of reformist literature like Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Rachel Carson's ecological plea in *Silent Spring* (1962) and the civil rights speeches of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. employ similar rhetorical strategies of familiarization, estrangement and recognition to invite audiences to empathize with foreign perspectives. Dunlap and Newland's accounts of psychedelic selfhood transgress the literary, scientific, and cultural conventions of the post-war period, and introduce postmodern models of embodied subjectivity that challenge readers' rationalist faith in the Cartesian body and Enlightenment reality. While thematically, Newland's *My Self and I* is about women's sexual expression and female identity, and Dunlap's *Exploring Inner Space* delves into the spiritual basis of compassion and community, they share formal structures that aim to cultivate readers' affective awareness and empathy. Even though these texts are, by necessity, as

individualized as the authors' psychedelic trips, they participate in contemporaneous aesthetic and epistemological debates about how narrative practices govern our notions of quotidian, material reality. As literary and scientific accounts, their narratives critique existing scientific and cultural knowledge on human consciousness, a cognitive shift that necessitates a similar breach from standard narrative conventions of life writing.

Narrative is especially tricky with psychedelics. How does one express the sublime awe, beauty and terror of a LSD trip? In the 2008 issue of *Configurations*, Jodie Nicotra highlighted the central paradox of psychedelic aesthetics, "How is it possible to adequately represent the feelings or experience when the very organ of representation (i.e., ordinary consciousness) has been erased?"<sup>147</sup> Nearly all writers and scholars of the psychedelic aesthetic remark on the ineffable nature of these drugged experiences. However, more attention is needed to how, given these constraints, some writers indeed accomplish such representations, and how readers respond to these apparently inexpressible psychological experiences. Through the case of Moss and Davis, and their pseudonym selves Newland and Dunlap, I argue that writers must strategically blend realist and fantastic modes to represent their psychedelic experiences in a rhetorically effective manner. *My Self and I* and *Exploring Inner Space* rely on authenticating scientific prefaces and quotidian realist details to construct a familiar ground for readers, while simultaneously disrupting those readers' normative sense of reality through fantastic metaphors that represent the seemingly unreal visions and feelings experienced in drugged altered states. Realism acts as the narrative bait and hook, while fantasy scoops readers out of the water. Their

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<sup>147</sup>See Jodie Nicotra's "William James in the Borderlands: Psychedelic Science and the 'Accidental Fences' of Self," *Configurations*. 16 (2008): 199-213.

texts invoke senses of awe and terror through fantastic metaphors that bridge the known and the unknown. Their novel use of metaphor introduces initially unfamiliar, yet meaningful knowledge to readers, estranging readers from their habitually bound perspectives. Drawing from the known to situate the unknown, metaphor produces an altered space of estrangement and recognition. Newland and Dunlap engage readers' empathy through the disruptive, yet receptive readerly affect produced by metaphor. These sublime affective responses, invoked within domestic, white, post-war American settings, draw readers into empathetic understanding with unfamiliar altered states of consciousness.<sup>148</sup> Metaphor's empathetic mode is used strategically in the psychedelic aesthetic to help readers understand subjectivities they may initially dismiss because of ignorance, fear or prejudice. *My Self and I* and *Exploring Inner Space* reassure readers of a shared reality through realist representations of everyday life, and estrange readers from habitual states of perception through fantasy. By employing affective modes of recognition, estrangement, and empathy in this way, Moss and Davis' narratives are representative examples of the broader psychedelic aesthetic, a transdisciplinary multimedia modes of perception that can lead readers to new critical spaces of literary and scientific reform.

In particular, I examine how readers' affective responses are built out of the aesthetic modes of realism and fantasy, in order to trace how meaning is made between readers and texts within the psychedelic aesthetic. In their innovative combination of realist and fantastic literary approaches, *My Self and I* and *Exploring Inner Space* can be usefully seen through the

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<sup>148</sup>This literary mode of reform played an especially important role in widening the perspective of white readers, who, at the time, were feeling the pressure to expand their awareness of others, particularly due to the civil rights movements and the globalizing forces of post-WWII American capitalism. To help understand the racially or gendered other, we need to accept the possibility of a state of consciousness alternative to our own. The psychedelic aesthetic aims to represent and reproduce such altered states of consciousness.

framework of American postmodernism and its challenge to the Enlightenment project. Yet, Moss and Davis' contributions to the traditions of twentieth century American literature and science have not been acknowledged. Even within the psychedelic canon, Moss and Davis have only received marginal reference. With the prohibition of many psychedelic drugs in 1966, the voices advocating for psychedelic knowledge became equally delegitimized. While the legacies of canonical figures like Aldous Huxley, Alan Watts, and Ken Kesey survived, the contributions of these women have fallen out of our historical accounts of the period. Situated at the cusp of a generational shift in psychological and cultural awareness, Thelma Moss (Constance Newland) and Adelle Davis (Jane Dunlap) show how women writers of the 1960s carved out space for new modes of self-expression, new perspectives on subjectivity and reality, and new epistemologies of scientific and literary knowledge. Their work challenges blind faith in scientific objectivity, advocates for a more flexible notion of subjectivity, inspires research in psychiatry, botany and neuroscience, and introduces new rhetorical strategies for inspiring transformative reformist energies in readers.

### The Clinical Trial: Psychedelic Set and Setting

Psychedelic therapeutic research began shortly after Albert Hofmann's discovery of the drug's psychedelic properties in 1943. Research studies rose significantly in number in the late 1950s, hitting a peak in the early 1960s before nearly all psychedelic research was stopped with the prohibition of LSD in 1966.<sup>149</sup> Researchers initially treated the substance under a

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<sup>149</sup>For a fuller history of psychedelic research, see Erika Dyck's *Psychedelic Psychiatry: LSD from Clinic to Campus*.

psychotomimetic model assuming that the drug mimicked the perception of those with psychoses like schizophrenia.<sup>150</sup> Gradually researchers, like John MacDonald and James Galvin, found that schizophrenics did not have visual hallucinations of the variety experienced under LSD, but, even today, the public has difficulty separating psychedelics from these negative connotations.<sup>151</sup> Yet, many investigators immediately saw LSD's potential to unveil repressed memories, trigger unconscious brain activity, and open up new states of perceptual awareness. LSD provided a promising glimpse into the still uncharted brain.

In their history of psychedelic research, Martin Lee and Bruce Shlain trace out the two major schools of LSD therapeutic research during the 1960s. One branch, the psycholytic approach, was led primarily by Dr. Ronald Sandison. Thelma Moss, who participated in a psycholytic study, had Sandison contribute the introduction to *My Self and I*. Adelle Davis (Jane Dunlap) participated in the other major branch, psychedelic therapy, popularized by Dr. Oscar Janiger. The differences between these therapeutic models lie primarily in their end motive, along with slight variations in their execution. Sandison's psycholytic or "'mind-loosening' approach" involved the administration of low to moderate doses of LSD as an aid to routine psychoanalysis (Lee 55). Psycholytic therapy took place over repeated sessions in which LSD was used to "speed up the process of psychoexploration by reducing the patient's defensiveness and facilitating the recollection of repressed memories and traumatic experiences" (55-56). In the course of the psycholytic study, Newland worked through repressed memories of sexual trauma

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<sup>150</sup>A *New York Times* article from 1957 reflects the misinformed public perception on LSD due, in part, from insufficient research: "Investigators have known since 1947 that a single injection of a chemical named LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide) produces temporary insanity resembling schizophrenia in human volunteers, but so far it has not been determined how the chemical affects the brain" ("Clams and Insanity: Experiments May Shed Light on Schizophrenia," *New York Times*, March 3, 1957, p. 177.)

<sup>151</sup>See Martin Lee and Bruce Shlain, *Acid Dreams: The CIA, LSD, and the Sixties Rebellion* (1985), p.51.

caused by an enema she received when she was very young. Each session, she was given a few “small blue pills, no larger than saccharine tablets, which I swallowed down with some water out of a paper cup – a prosaic passage into the unconscious” (Newland 48). While psycholytic therapy dealt with participants’ neuroses and anxieties, psychedelic therapy examined the creative processes of reality formation. Dunlap participated in a research study with Dr. Oscar Janiger, whose psychedelic therapeutic approach “was geared toward achieving a mystical or conversion experience. The procedure involved high dosages of LSD, precluding any possibility that the patient’s ego defenses could withstand psychic dissolution” (Lee 56). Dunlap’s goal in LSD therapy was to expand her spiritual awareness. As psychedelic researchers Oscar Janiger, Ronald Sandison, Robert Davidson and Harold Greenwald saw it, therapeutic use of LSD could open up more flexible states of consciousness that were “thought to be conducive to healing deep-rooted psychological wounds” (56). Both therapeutic approaches worked through an “unfixing of perceptual constants” as “the subject’s habitual reality ties are suspended” (56). LSD therapy helps patients bypass filters of repressed memory and invite healing introspection through the distanced state of perception the psychedelic substance enables. Many have suggested that a single session of LSD therapy could replace several years of intensive psychoanalysis.

Erika Dyck suggests that at its root, psychedelic research challenged the scientific community’s faith in objective empiricism.<sup>152</sup> Scientists found that their third-person observations of participants on LSD could not adequately account for the internal psychedelic

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<sup>152</sup> In her history of psychedelic research, Dyck demonstrates how psychedelic researchers challenged “contemporary trends in psychopharmacology” that focused on “pharmaceutical research that increasingly embraced methodologies designed to enhance objective measures and reduce subjective ‘distractions’” (47).

experience.<sup>153</sup> Instead, researchers needed participants to describe their experiences themselves, often recorded the following day since many participants were unable to verbalize their experiences while under the influence of LSD.<sup>154</sup> As LSD became linked to creativity, writers and artists were increasingly recruited for these research studies because they were seen as better equipped to describe the unfamiliar and highly subjective perceptions and feelings they experienced.<sup>155</sup> These participant reports were used by researchers to trace out patterns in psychedelic effects and as evidence for further inquiry. In the case of Adelle Davis (Jane Dunlap) and Thelma Moss (Constance Newland), their reports were so engaging that researchers like Robert Davidson asked them to publish their “experiences, partly as a scientific document and partly as an inspiration to people who still believe in the intrinsic spiritual power within the universe” (10).<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Dunlap summarizes the barriers and limits of scientific observation, “When research is being done on a drug whose effects are physical, these effects can be studied by measuring the blood pressure, analyzing body fluids, and similar techniques. If the drug affects the mind, however, about the only way its effect can become known is by having hundreds of persons describe what happened to them while under its influence. The problem, therefore, becomes partly one of finding persons capable of writing full and accurate descriptions. Many people find it difficult to express what they have seen and felt. For example, an alcoholic, given LSD, was asked to write a report of his experience. He complied, but it contained only four words: ‘God, what a binge!’” (12).

<sup>154</sup> Researchers recruited writers for psychedelic studies in the hopes that these individuals would be more capable of recording their subjective experiences in a clear and communicable fashion. Dunlap attributes her status as a writer to her participation in the LSD study, “Probably it was because I am an author that I was eventually allowed to have the drug. On each occasion, I too was asked to write a report the day following the experience, while memories were still fresh. These reports, written as accurately as I could possibly make them, form the next eleven chapters of this book” (12). Dunlap also explains the writing process, “The entire day after each experience I spent at the typewriter, getting down material as fast as I could. I happen to have a fairly good memory, which no doubt helped, but to me an LSD experience is so vivid it would be impossible not to have perfect recall” (16).

<sup>155</sup> Janiger used the psychedelic therapeutic model to study the relationship between aesthetic perceptions and creative artistic ability after he “noted that many of his patients reported vivid aesthetic perceptions frequently leading to a greater appreciation of the arts” (Lee 61).

<sup>156</sup> See Robert Davidson’s introduction, “A Psychologist Explains,” to Jane Dunlap’s *Exploring Inner Space: Personal Experiences under LSD*-25.

Adelle Davis and Thelma Moss came to LSD therapy out of curiosity and skeptical hope for psychological growth. They left behind vivid psychedelic texts that charge readers to critically reflect on literary and scientific practice. Yet, there is only scant mention of these women in the documented history of psychedelics.<sup>157</sup> Short biographical entries on Davis and Moss can be found in social registers of important women of the period, but no extensive study of their work or lives exists.<sup>158</sup> Davis and Moss were part of the feminist new wave of women pursuing advanced education and high profile careers in the postwar era, navigating literary and scientific communities, publishing and speaking across the country. Their LSD accounts are curious appendages to already rich and interesting lives, particularly because both women chose to write under penname and did not publicly admit authorship of the works. It is important to note that while Moss and Davis wrote under pseudonyms, men writing in the psychedelic aesthetic did not.<sup>159</sup> As women, Moss and Davis felt the pressures of taboo and the social risks of self-expression more acutely, a sentiment reflected in the opening pages of *My Self and I*, where Constance Newland announces, “What follows is an intimate, perhaps too intimate, account of my travels and travails under LSD therapy” (47). Despite the intimacy, or because of it, Moss withholds her personal historical identity through the figure of Newland. Their pseudonymous identities allow Moss (Newland) and Davis (Dunlap) to assume what Thomas DeGloma calls in

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<sup>157</sup> Davis and Moss are briefly mentioned in Cynthia Palmer and Michael Horowitz’s slim anthology of women’s writing on drugs *Sisters of the Extreme: Women Writing on the Drug Experience* (2000), and in Jay Steven’s historical account of psychedelic research and culture, *Storming Heaven: LSD and the American Dream* (1987). Theodore Roszak references Jane Dunlap’s *Exploring Inner Space* in a footnote in *The Making of a Counter Culture*, cryptically remarking that “a small sampling of which should be enough to scale down anyone’s evaluation of psychedelic promise” (299).

<sup>158</sup> See Barbara Sicherman and Carol Hurd Green, eds. *Notable American Women: The Modern Period: a Biographical Dictionary* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980) p. 180.

<sup>159</sup> Psychedelic writers Aldous Huxley, Ken Kesey, Timothy Leary, Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs, and Alan Watts all wrote under their given names.

his study of awakening narratives, a “distinct, temporally situated self” that allows them to engage with their psychedelic experiences at a distance (520).<sup>160</sup> While these pseudonyms enable their publication, this anonymity may also be the cause of these women’s forgotten status in our histories; the need for pseudonym revealingly marks the tightly bound space for women’s self-expression, particularly on taboo subjects like drug use and mental health.

Under the pseudonym Jane Dunlap, Adelle Davis mentions little about her personal life and career in *Exploring Inner Space*, though she is described in the preface by Dr. Davidson as “a household word,” “a woman of fearless opinions, well read, intelligent, and above all a warm human being” (3).<sup>161</sup> Davis was, in fact, a well-known nutritionist and early advocate for organic food and vitamin supplements who published a number of popular health guides in her own name.<sup>162</sup> In 1959, she entered a research study on the effects of LSD on creativity with Dr. Oscar Janiger.<sup>163</sup> After the study, Davis collected her accounts in *Exploring Inner Space: Personal Experiences under LSD-25* (1961) published under the name Jane Dunlap. *Exploring Inner Space* brings readers into Dunlap’s private drugged subjectivity, drawing them along a journey

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<sup>160</sup> See Thomas DeGloma, “Awakenings: Autobiography, Memory and the Social Logic of Personal Discovery,” *Sociological Forum* 25:3 (2010): 519-540.

<sup>161</sup> Davidson refers to her as “the Jane Dunlap” (emphasis in original), reflecting that he knew the historical Adelle Davis prior to their meeting.

<sup>162</sup> Adelle Davis’ book-length publications include *Optimum Health* (1935), *You Can Stay Well* (1939), *Vitality Through Planned Nutrition* (1942), *Let’s Cook it Right* (1947), *Let’s Have Healthy Children* (1951), *Let’s Eat Right to Keep Fit* (1954), and *Let’s Get Well* (1965). She was also the author of numerous articles, interviews, as well as appeared on numerous television and radio programs. *Exploring Inner Space* is her only known work published under pseudonym.

<sup>163</sup> Dunlap became interested in psychedelics after reading Robert Gordon Wasson’s *Life* magazine article “Seeking the Magic Mushroom” (May 13, 1957). This article influenced Aldous Huxley, Timothy Leary and many others. Dunlap recalls her response to this first encounter with psychedelic aesthetics, “He and his wife ate some of the mushrooms, saw beautiful scenes and colors, and felt rich emotions. As I read, I was overcome with an envy which refused to disappear” (11).

of spiritual awakening. While on LSD, Dunlap embarks on a religious quest, seeking mystical enlightenment. Dunlap alternately transforms into a series of reptilian creatures evolving in the primordial marshes, a Pegasus exploring the outer galaxies, a silkworm munching on mulberry leaves and spinning silks to beautify the globe. She travels as a drop of water through underground caverns, and turns into a boa migrating from Eastern Asia into India. She watches on as Jesus, Mohammad, and Gautama Siddhartha grow through adolescence, discover their gifts, and become spiritual leaders. Through her psychedelic experiences, Dunlap feels tremendous psychic growth and finds new “changes in my sense of values,” a rise in her “creative urge,” and greater compassion for herself, her relationships, and a general love for “every person who lives” (202-203). In sharing *Exploring Inner Space*, Dunlap hopes to spread awareness about psychedelic research and the significant impact its therapeutic applications can have on people’s spiritual, creative, and communal lives.

Born Thelma Schnee, Moss lived a richly varied life with contributions across the arts and sciences. In the 1940s and 50s, Moss was a theatre actress, one of the founding members of the Actor’s Studio, and a playwright.<sup>164</sup> She earned her doctorate in psychology at the University of California Los Angeles in the early 1960s, and became a medical psychologist and parapsychology researcher at UCLA’s Neuropsychiatric Institute. Moss would become one of the leading experts on paranormal psychology and developed public interest in Kirlian photography.<sup>165</sup> Her shift from the arts to the sciences can be explained, in part, by her

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<sup>164</sup> See David Garfield’s *A Player’s Place: The Story of the Actor’s Studio* (New York: Macmillan, 1980).

<sup>165</sup> For Thelma Moss’ work on paranormal psychology and Kirlian photography, see her publications *The Probability of the Impossible: Scientific Discoveries and Exploration in the Psychic World* (Los Angeles: J.P. Tarcher, 1974) and *Body Electric: A Personal Journey into the Mysteries of Parapsychological Research, Bioenergy and Kirlian Photography* (Los Angeles: J.P. Tarcher, 1979).

involvement in psychedelic research. In the late 1950s, she volunteered in a psycholytic study of LSD, “propelled by a strong unconscious motive” and inspired by the “glimpse of the ‘new creation’ as described by Mr. Huxley” in *The Doors of Perception* (19). Moss ingested LSD twenty-three times under the supervision of psychiatrists. Through this experimental therapy, she hoped to cure her sexual ‘frigidity,’ which she describes “as prevalent as the common cold—and just about as incurable” (18). Her account of psychedelic self-awakening was a bestseller, particularly popular among college co-eds. Whilst under the influence of LSD, Newland becomes “a murderess, a teardrop, a purplish foetus” (94). She feels she “became – literally— a closed up clam at the bottom of the sea, the music of a violin, Botticelli’s ‘Birth of Venus,’ an evil fur thing, a scared sperm; and in one magnificent episode, it was as if I had become the very Energy that exists before it is translated into Matter” (20). Resistant to face her sexual anxieties, Newland’s trips are fraught with psychic impasse. She fights against fantasies of sexual torture and pleasure, interspersed with interludes of “buzzing black” stillness which represent the blockages of traumatic memory. Each experience leaves her “drained, devastated,” but ultimately “exhilarated” (78). Newland discovers new forms of sexual expression and self-love, forging a feminist identity that ultimately transforms both her mental state and lifestyle. In the epilogue, Newland gives readers a before and after picture:

before the LSD experience, I was a writer of foolish fiction, going through rounds of casual parties and people, having an unsatisfactory liaison with a man who did not want me, and more or less ignoring my children. Today I am a graduate

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student of psychology, without a man but without the frantic need for one,  
enjoying hugely my roles of mother and middle-aged college girl. (214-5)

Echoing the self-actualization and empowerment tropes of mid-twentieth century feminism, LSD brought Newland's life "new savor, new meaning—and new mystery" (215).<sup>166</sup> Newland shares her personal story to advocate for psychedelic therapy's psychological and social value; psychedelics offered her coping strategies for dealing with the anxieties of the nuclear age and a pivotal alternative to postwar American domesticity.

Dunlap and Newland's reports went from the clinical laboratory, read by psychiatric researchers, to paperbacks available in bookstores across the nation. Read by scholars, university students, and those interested in psychology, drugs, and the varieties of altered states brought about by trance and meditation, the audience was a mix of the initiated and uninitiated. Reviewers in 1962 understandably raised some doubts about the audiences for these texts; Richard Crocket from *The British Journal of Psychiatry* admits that "it is difficult to discern who will read this book with advantage," citing *Exploring Inner Space* as "something of a case record" for psychiatrists (386). Dr. Ronald Sandison has a broader vision; *My Self and I* is "equally interesting to the therapists," "and also to a great diversity of professional and lay people."<sup>167</sup> These reviews and the publishers' marketing of the books suggest *My Self and I* and

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<sup>166</sup> We could trace the lineage of these tropes of self-awakening and feminist realization historically to modernist novels" like Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899) and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925). These tropes were central to the rhetoric of consciousness-raising groups in the United States during the 1960s like the New York Radical Women's group, founded by Shulamith Firestone and Pam Allen. The consciousness-raising novel solidifies as a genre in the early 1970s with Erica Jong's *Fear of Flying* (1973), Joanna Russ' *The Female Man* (1975), and the poetry and prose of Adrienne Rich. Elaine Showalter catalogues major figures of feminist writing in the 1960s and 70s in *A Jury of Her Peers: American Women Writers from Anne Bradstreet to Annie Proulx* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2009).

<sup>167</sup> See Ronald A. Sandison's "Introduction" to *My Self and I*, p. 15.

*Exploring Inner Space* were read by a predominantly white, college educated audience who were interested, yet skeptical about psychedelic use. Francis Braceland wants to define the audience for *My Self and I* more narrowly, cautioning *New York Times* readers that this book is not for children or “even for sweet girl graduates,” instead suggesting “it would do best in clinical or in sophisticated non-professional hands.”<sup>168</sup> Braceland attempts to bar female readers from psychedelic subjects. His discriminating remarks reflect the conformist gender relations and shifting cultural landscape that Dunlap and Newland’s narratives entered in the early 1960s. As their LSD accounts were hitting bookstores, researchers studying psychedelic substances were under increasing scrutiny by the government, particularly as news spread that these drugs were being used outside clinical settings. *My Self and I* and *Exploring Inner Space* are designed to educate readers on “psychiatry’s newest drug.”<sup>169</sup> Newland and Dunlap place their LSD use securely in the legitimate scientific realm, as evidenced by their testimonials to accuracy, the texts’ formal introductions by medical experts that authenticate the narratives and explain the drug’s scientific context, and the supplementary research in the appendixes and bibliographies. Simultaneous to the time of their publication, a number of congressional sessions were held to hear testimony on the potential uses and risks of these drugs. In 1962, Congress passed a drug amendment that restricted clinical pharmaceutical trials, and, in 1966, classified LSD as an illegal substance. *My Self and I* and *Exploring Inner Space* try to educate white audiences who were, at the time, the normative authorities in the U.S., holding a majority share in the social power to publicly sanction or dismiss new ideas, images and lifestyles. Newland and Dunlap’s

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<sup>168</sup>See Francis Braceland’s “Through Fantasy to Serenity” *New York Times*. May 14, 1961.

<sup>169</sup> See Display Ad 99 – No Title.” *New York Times*. December 7, 1962.

texts are more than escapist confessions of drug use as some reviewers suggested. In challenging white commonsense, *My Self and I* and *Exploring Inner Space* contribute to the larger movements of reform, advocacy, and public education during the American sixties.

### Phase I: Recognition

Dunlap and Newland, like other writers working in the psychedelic aesthetic, face a crucial question; how does one represent the new and unfamiliar in a way that readers can still relate? Dunlap and Newland must convey knowledge, perceptions, and experiences that lie at the intersection of the scientific and the fantastic, the real and the seemingly unreal. They are attempting to utter the unnamable, to “report seeing colors never seen, sights never experienced, sounds never heard” (Moss 306).<sup>170</sup> By responding to this mimetic task, Dunlap and Newland confront the cultural taboos that surround altered states and reveal the limits of language’s communicative power. Dunlap and Newland’s discursive positions were constrained by the conventional literary practices of life writing in the mid-twentieth century. The autobiographic form before World War II privileged the narration of a clear, consistent self. Yet, the psychedelic experience, which disrupts, dissolves and reintegrates one’s sense of self, stood at odds with the trope of the knowable self at the heart of modern American autobiographies of the Benjamin Franklin variety. American literary realism can sometimes take the discursive perspective of the white educated male as a given, a position difficult to mimic and adopt by women, minorities and others in marginalized social positions, particularly when speaking about non-ordinary states of perception, consciousness, and reality. To represent experiences at the borders of the

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<sup>170</sup> See Thelma Moss’ *The Probability of the Impossible: Scientific Discoveries and Explorations in the Psychic World* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1974) p. 306.

commonly known, writers from the margins must simultaneously adopt the dominant language and subvert it through the use of alternative languages. Dunlap and Newland sought out language that could represent states of consciousness that lie outside scientific and commonsense knowledge, ultimately finding the words in Freudian and Jungian discourse and the aesthetics of fantasy.<sup>171</sup> Newland and Moss borrowed from the psychoanalytic and mental health rhetoric that was buzzing in the postwar period, circulating “the phrases...learned in the doctor’s office” which increasingly “became more and more prominent in plays, paperbacks, cocktail conversations, and even at PTA meetings” (Newland 22). They use this familiar cultural and scientific discourse to not only accurately report their experiences, but also defend the legitimacy of their perspectives by turning psychology’s rhetoric of disorder and illness into a language of heightened awareness and compassion. In their innovative use of scientific rhetoric, literary realism and the American autobiographic form, Newland and Dunlap create spaces for reader recognition. Their authenticating rhetorical devices and quotidian details of domestic life reassure readers of their authorial reliability and the verity of their psychedelic subjects.

Both *My Self and I* and *Exploring Inner Space* are framed by authenticating prefaces and introductions by medical professionals in order to situate their psychedelic knowledge within familiar contexts for readers and thereby build more receptive audiences. In these prefaces, psychologists and doctors attest to the credibility of the authors, verify the historical reality of the

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<sup>171</sup> Newland has mixed praise for Freud, “Several other men in history, then, had come upon one or another wellspring of the unconscious, but it was Freud who deliberately drilled through the bedrock of consciousness to find its vast underground ocean, an ocean rather like the Atlantic Ocean of the Middle Ages: unexplored, uncharted, and thought to be inhabited by indescribable monsters waiting to destroy those who ventured too far into its depths. Freud ventured, explored—and came upon some of these indescribable monsters which he described in terms that have become as familiar in this our twentieth century as radar and television and supersonic satellites. I refer, of course, to those fulsome phrases sibling rivalry, Oedipus complex, castration anxiety, latent homosexuality, etc.” (29-30).

psychiatric studies, and promote the validity of their psychedelic experiences for skeptical readers. The prefacing documents, authored by credentialed researchers, further the reformist strategies of these accounts as their “strategy of authentication functions hand in hand with the narrative’s strategy of reform” (Stepto 235).<sup>172</sup> Written by white educated men, these introductory sections reflect the still dominant, overly rationalist Enlightenment worldview and are thoroughly realist in language use and narrative structure. Other psychedelic accounts written by men in the 1960s do not contain these prefatory materials; it was the female voice that required this legitimizing move.<sup>173</sup> I adapt Robert Stepto’s reading of the authenticating machinery in slave narratives to explain the function of the doctors’ prefaces and appendixes in *My Self and I* and *Exploring Inner Space* in regulating the restrictive space of psychedelic testimony.<sup>174</sup> The introductions and prefaces mediate readers’ encounter with the texts, and attempt to orientate readers in favorable and receptive positions to their testimonies. Ronald Sandison and Harold Greenwald, authors of Newland’s introduction and preface, believe they have, what Stepto calls, “authenticating duties to perform,” lending their social credibility as recognized medical experts to Moss’ testimony (228). Sandison, who is introduced by Greenwald as “the prominent authority on the use of LSD,” gives *My Self and I* “the stamp of

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<sup>172</sup> See Robert Burns Stepto’s “I Rose and Found My Voice: Narration, Authentication, and Authorial Control in Four Slave Narratives.” *The Slave’s Narrative*, Ed. Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

<sup>173</sup> At least in the minds of Moss and Davis’ publishers, Harcourt, Brace & World and Signet Books.

<sup>174</sup> In using Stepto’s framework, I do not mean to suggest that the position of white women in the mid-20th century can be equated to the disenfranchised status of black slaves. However, fruitful comparisons can be made as we consider the role of realist literary devices in authenticating marginalized subjects and subjectivities. Newland and Dunlap occupy a privileged position as white authors, though they are discredited by their gender, their admission to drug use, and their association with mental illness.

authenticity” (15).<sup>175</sup> Greenwald also verifies Newland’s sanity, describing her as “well balanced, adjusted, or emotionally mature” and “an already efficient, able member of society” (8).<sup>176</sup> Greenwald stresses Newland’s abilities and testifies to her sanity. Davidson introduces Dunlap similarly, describing her glowingly as “a woman sparkling in vitality and good humor, refreshingly direct and sincere in her manner” (3).<sup>177</sup> In both cases, the doctors reference the women’s good standing in public, their maternal identities, their emotional maturity, and their literacy, providing a litany of verification to accredit their narratives and convince skeptical readers. The doctors use these authenticating moves to distance the women from the public perception of the “raging schizophrenic” and the “severely crippled neurotic” often associated with pharmaceutical and psychiatric research of that time (Greenwald 8).

At times, these authenticating prefaces cross over into a patronizing tone, reflective of women’s marginalized, yet changing, status in American letters and science.<sup>178</sup> While the doctors generally portray the women in favorable terms, Dunlap and Newland are nevertheless described as neurotic, anxious, sexually and spiritually deprived. Given that newspapers referred to LSD as “the insanity-producing drug,” contemporaneous readers likely judged Dunlap and Newland as mentally ill or even as drug addicts because of their participation in these psychiatric

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<sup>175</sup> See Sandison’s “Introduction” to *My Self and I*. These strategies of authentication work both ways. Dunlap refers back to Dr. Davidson’s introduction and appendix in her own narrative to release her from commenting in areas that she perceives she lacks expertise, “Since the study of consciousness-changing drugs is certainly not my field, I leave the history of the drug, its derivation, its similarities to better known substances, and its possible uses to him” (12).

<sup>176</sup> See Greenwald’s “Foreword” to *My Self and I*. Greenwald’s comments echo a common societal view of women in the postwar period as neurotic, ill adjusted to modern life, chronically fatigued and depressed. The so called “housewife fatigue” was treated with popular tranquilizers like Milton and Equanil.

<sup>177</sup> See Davidson’s “A Psychologist Explains” introducing Jane Dunlap’s *Exploring Inner Space*.

<sup>178</sup> In his review of *Exploring Inner Space*, Richard Crocket remarks that Dr. Davidson’s introduction has an “initial mildly melodramatic style [that] perhaps panders unnecessarily” (386).

studies.<sup>179</sup> While Davidson describes Dunlap as an “already well integrated individual” in his introduction, reviewers discredited her, suggesting she was a delinquent mother for seeking out a drug-induced escape (10). Greenwald calls Newland the “very model of the frozen, ruthlessly efficient American career woman” (7). Framed first by scientific male voices, the women must then testify on their own behalf, employing similar rhetorical moves to assert their legitimacy as sane persons and capable writers as they anticipate public reaction. Newland describes herself as a “loving mother and a law-abiding citizen,” living the “high life professionally and socially” (19). Dunlap stresses her own emotional and intellectual maturity, as well as her physical well-being, even using her exercise routine of “daily swimming, frequent ice skating, and a not-too-bad game of badminton” as evidence of her fit body and mind (13). Newland and Dunlap return to these personal details of everyday domestic life throughout their accounts to help reassert their credibility and relative normativity. These authenticating devices help to broaden the visible horizon for readers; by placing psychedelic experiences into the domestic sphere, readers, particularly women, are more apt to trust in and empathize with the narrative positions within the text. Evoking culturally familiar female identities and social contexts is essential to maintain readers’ faith as Dunlap and Newland’s psychedelic testimonies become increasingly fantastic and strange. This mode of authentication is an important stage in psychedelic aesthetics, and particularly essential for marginalized writers, as readers require some shared foundation in reality from which they can then encounter and accept the fantastic New.

The introductory materials, appendixes and bibliographies not only authenticate the scientific validity of the narratives, but also speak to the literary and aesthetic merit of the accounts.

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<sup>179</sup> See “Science Notes,” *New York Times*, Dec 1, 1957.

Sandison stresses the novelty of the genre, calling *My Self and I* “the first complete case history describing this treatment to be published, and it is significant that the author is not a therapist but a patient.”<sup>180</sup> Greenwald also notes that “usually the nether regions of our own private infernos have been described for us by the comparatively cold scientific objectivity of the psychoanalyst,” and Newland’s contribution is “one of a small but growing list” of “first-person human account[s]” of the unconscious mind (Greenwald 7). Though the doctors clearly inscribe these books as scientific and medical resources, Sandison also elevates *My Self and I*’s literary value, calling it “a most valuable contribution to world literature” (15). Greenwald feels that “as valuable as the descriptions of this new therapy may be,” *My Self and I*’s “real contribution” is as “a literary document dealing in emotional, not clinical, terms with the major themes of life, love and hate” (8). Sandison praises Newland’s aesthetics; “fortunately she is a gifted and imaginative woman whose account of her experiences during the LSD sessions carries the reader swiftly on through a series of psychological discoveries to a climax of unity and awareness of self” (15). Dunlap is praised for the “eloquently” and “remarkably colorful descriptions of her rich fantasies” (15). By highlighting the scientific and literary value of these texts, the doctors help gain the interest and trust of the widest net of readers.

These extensive introductory materials help Dunlap and Newland construct a common reality amongst receptive readers by showing the views they have in common, despite their estranging psychedelic subjects. Newland, Dunlap, and the researchers all stand on highly charged ground as they confront public biases against drug use, psychotherapy, and mental illness. In order to gain readerly trust and develop narrative empathy, the authors and researchers must attest to the

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<sup>180</sup> Sandison is somewhat inaccurate in his claim that *My Self and I* is the “first” account of this kind since *Exploring Inner Space* came out a year earlier in 1961. See pg. 10 of Sandison’s “Introduction” to *My Self and I*.

scientific neutrality of their discursive positions. Though all the authors display a generally favorable attitude toward LSD and other psychedelic substances, they are careful expressing these positions. Newland makes “no grandiose claims for LSD therapy as the one and only way to help, and carefully refrains from recommending it” indiscriminately (Greenwald 8). Newland, Dunlap and the researchers stress that psychedelics should be used in clinical settings under proper guidance, a position in tension with the growing recreational use of LSD in the 1960s. In the introduction to *Exploring Inner Space*, “A Psychologist Explains,” Davidson first stresses the scientific validity of the account, “Essentially, Miss Dunlap’s book is a report. It is part of a research study ... Miss Dunlap volunteered to be a subject in a scientific experiment. Her duty as a subject was to take, under proper psychiatric supervision, a clinically tested medication, lysergic acid diethylamide, and then to report back to the experimenters exactly what her response to this medication was” (4). These doctors acknowledge the preconceived attitudes that some readers will carry to the text, and thus they address these prejudices up front. When Sandison remarks, “the author of *My Self and I* demonstrates clearly how intensely we hang on to well-tried conscious beliefs,” he is challenging readers to shed their own resistances (12). Greenwald acknowledges skeptical readers directly, “It will perhaps be easy for many readers of this book to close their eyes to the searing light Mrs. Newland casts on her own personal inferno by dismissing her as ‘disturbed’ or ‘crazy’ or ‘sick.’” (8). He characterizes these readers as emotionally immature, saying they are “not ready to bring her kind of courage to the task of self-inspection” (8). He contrasts these projected bad readers with an empathetic model for more receptive and flexible readers. Newland hopes her personal narrative may help readers imagine “a reality which exists within us but [is] beyond the reach of our conscious minds” (45). *My Self and I* and *Exploring Inner Space* ask readers to imagine the affective and bodily experiences of

drugged states for themselves. In her later work as a psychedelic researcher, Thelma Moss would reflect on this empathetic mode, “Sometimes, people suddenly acquire access to a different realm of mind, as in a psychedelic drug experience, when they seem to experience in detail events of other persons in other eras, as if happening to themselves” (Moss 349). As readers inhabit the emotional life of another through aesthetics, they may feel empathetic, a powerful and potentially transformative event that allows readers to expand their personal worldviews through the temporary adoption of another’s affective and cognitive position.

From the beginning, Newland and Dunlap acknowledge the difficulty of representing their subjective psychedelic experiences. As Dunlap exclaims, “the colossal egotism of anyone who thinks he can write an LSD report! It can’t be done, not with all the languages in the world!” (166). Ineffability is one of the central tropes of the psychedelic trip report, as Richard Doyle notes in *Darwin’s Pharmacy* (2011). Despite this representational difficulty, Dunlap and Newland wanted to share their knowledge and profound experiences with LSD therapy to support further psychedelic research. In order to make their representations understandable to readers, they needed to create a shared affective base for readers to relate to. Readers are drawn to affective maps similar to their own, seeking aesthetic representations that help structure their experiences in the world. These authors facilitate readers’ affective recognition by drawing on culturally shared contexts from which to communicate their subjective experiences meaningfully. Newland invokes psychological experiences familiar with her intended readers, citing daydreams as an universally experienced phenomenon of hallucination and doubled identity, “Who among us has not, at one time or another, daydreamed something to the effect that he is eloping with his ideal woman, or that he is the first astronaut to land on Mars, or that he

is pitching a no-hit game in the World Series—*while at the same time* he hears, and obeys, the call to dinner?” (36, emphasis in original). Using this example of daydreaming to show how the ordinary mind “operates on two levels of consciousness simultaneously,” Newland connects unfamiliar psychedelic experiences with common altered states like daydreams, meditative trances, and fever hallucinations (36). Dunlap compares the affective structures of the psychedelic altered state to the aesthetic experience; LSD is “like going to a movie which is so dramatic and emotionally packed that it claims every instant of your attention” (15). Likening the unfamiliar to the familiar, Dunlap and Newland use earth-bound images and commonplace experiences to capture their readers’ attention, open up space for recognition, and maintain their affective engagement.

Producing shared meaning and eliciting empathetic relations between readers and narrators are essential functions in the psychedelic aesthetic, particularly when the narrators’ experiences are commonly considered illegible, insane, deviant, and unspeakable. Along with Kathryn Hume, I share the “primary assumption . . . that *literature is significant as a meaning-giving experience*. Both author and audience, in different fashions, receive corroboration for their standards of meaning, or find new frames of values” (Hume 27). Dunlap and Newland finely tune the multiple registers of value through their appeals to readers. Dunlap and Newland are very concerned with providing meaning to readers as they present the seemingly irrational visions and profound waves of emotion they experienced under LSD. Newland apologizes for her possible incomprehensibility; she promises readers that “there is an underlying meaning behind these chaotic happenings,” even though “what follows will seem like the wanderings of a lunatic in a labyrinth leading to nowhere” (94). During her first trip, Dunlap feels an intense variety of

emotions that at first “seemed to lack meaning,” but “then came an inward knowing that a deep meaning lay hidden in the experience” (56). The women gradually teach readers how to make meaning within the psychedelic narrative, first through the recognition of the familiar and then with the acceptance of the unknown. The authors prepare readers for the particularly affective and embodied aesthetic experiences their narratives offer. Dunlap describes her psychedelic experience as so “soul-shaking” that it “can be quite disturbing, even to a reader” (18). These narratives are so “overwhelmingly rich and emotionally kaleidoscopic” that Dunlap advises readers, “it [is] best to read no more than a chapter at a time and allow at least a day to pass before starting the next” (18). Dunlap guides her readers’ engagement, asking them to spend some time meditating on each psychedelic vision before moving to the next trip. By teaching readers to carefully reflect on their aesthetic experiences, Dunlap and Newland hope to prepare receptive and reflective audiences for their estranging, yet transformative psychedelic narratives.

## Phase II: Estrangement

*Then the drug swept me once more from the shores of reality...*

-- Jane Dunlap<sup>181</sup>

The representational task of psychedelic accounts raises an important aesthetic question: how do we represent the unknown? Radical new knowledge must be expressed through association to familiar contexts. By likening one object to another, the symbolic strategies of metaphor and simile help previously unrepresented phenomena find expression. Metaphor is an especially useful mode for orientating readers to alternative realities. Newland and Dunlap

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<sup>181</sup> *Exploring Inner Space* 44.

employ metaphoric modes of critical engagement to give some readers an axis outside their conventional worldviews. This metaphoric mode attempts to reproduce the cognitive shifts characteristic of psychedelics, which Martin Lee and Bruce Shlain describe as a kind of critical estrangement, “Stripped of his censorious attitude, the subject might experience a catharsis in a detached and heightened state of awareness, allowing him to retain his insights after the effects of the chemical subsided” (42). Within this space of detached, yet heightened awareness, Newland and Dunlap orient their readers to new psychic phenomenon and knowledge? As Aldous Huxley does in *Heaven and Hell* (1956), Newland borrows conventional travel metaphors to gradually introduce readers to psychedelic experiences, “LSD is not, of course, the only route to the unconscious. Techniques such as dream interpretation or free association or slips of the tongue have been likened to the routes taken by a covered wagon, trekking its way across a continent to reach the ocean of the unconscious. LSD offers a non-stop jet flight.”<sup>182</sup> Newland compares herself, and the leagues of psychedelic researchers she will later join, to the classic explorers of land, space and mind, noting how at first people laughed at Columbus, Newton, the Wright Brothers, Einstein and Freud. People are hesitant to embrace the new, because

Most people, like good scientists, want proof of what they are asked to believe. People did accept the fact that the world was round (in spite of evidence of their eyes) when a man sailed due west, kept sailing west, and arrived right back where he started from, still sailing west. They even accepted the preposterous claim that

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<sup>182</sup> Newland’s examples here echo some of major social and scientific developments and paradigm shifts of the twentieth century. She weaves together examples from Freudian and Jungian psychoanalysis, globalization, and the space race to contextualize psychedelic knowledge within the emergent postmodernism of the 1950s and 60s (42).

the invisible can become visible when they saw events that were happening halfway around the world appear on their television sets. (24)<sup>183</sup>

Newland challenges readers' trust in the empiricism and positivism of the Enlightenment project and asks readers to invest faith in bodily intuition and imagination. Bringing readers to the horizon of the known, Newland and Dunlap set their readers off on psychedelic journeys beyond rationalist discourse and outside the conventional orders of space and time. As the LSD narrative begins its estranging effect, Dunlap and Newland gradually transport readers into another realm, a temporary alternate reality with an elastic sense of time and place. Newland feels "it is as if one enters a region where the past and the present coexist; where time, as we know it, has no existence" (42). Dunlap, and her fellow participant Helen, feel subject and object relations dissolve, experiencing "a kindred conviction," "too strong for argument" that "we are living in eternity" (45). By breaking from realism's quotidian subject-object relations, "distance and time markers," these narratives enter the fantastic aesthetic mode (Hume 21).<sup>184</sup> In contrast with the scientists' highly realist introductions, the women's LSD narratives bring readers into fantastic realms where the ordering principles of time, space, and rational causality

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<sup>183</sup> Newland continues, "the idea of an unconscious mind is a relatively new one, and new ideas are often derided. People laughed at Copernicus and Columbus and Darwin and Van Gogh and the Wright brothers. They probably laughed when the first cave man grunted his discovery of starting a fire by rubbing two sticks together. They probably would have laughed at Einstein could they have understood him. And why should they not have laughed? Suppose Columbus had asked you, a practical businessman, to finance an expedition across the Atlantic Ocean in order to reach India, a country you knew lay in the opposite direction? Patently Columbus belonged to the lunatic fringe who believe the world is round. Anyone with eyes in his head could see that the world is flat. As for the Wright brothers? Pitiful, in a ridiculous way of course, trying year after year to lift a heavy machine into the air. Anyone with common sense knew that nothing heavier than air could rise. All you had to do to prove it, as Newton had done, was to watch an apple fall from a tree" (23-4).

<sup>184</sup> Time, space, and subject-object relations often govern our scientific and common sense understanding of reality. Using narrative breaks in time and space as an example, Kathryn Hume defines fantasy as "any departure from consensus reality, an impulse native to literature and manifested in innumerable variations, from monster to metaphor. It includes transgressions of what one generally takes to be physical facts such as human immortality, travel faster than light, telekinesis, and the like." See Hume's *Fantasy and Mimesis*.

no longer hold. Fantasy, as an aesthetic mode, depends on readers' conception of the real. In his foundational definition of the fantastic, Tzvetan Todorov argues that "the fantastic is based essentially on a hesitation of the reader...as to the nature of an uncanny event. This hesitation may be resolved so that the event is acknowledged as reality, or so that the event is identified as the fruit of imagination or so the result of an illusion; in other words, we may decide that the event is or is not" (157). The psychedelic aesthetic presents readers with a paradox; readers must trust the narrative's empirical reality even as they confront seemingly impossible psychic phenomenon outside of realist time and materialist certainty. In this moment of critical hesitation, readers must judge whether to read psychedelic accounts as real and literal within the world of the text, or as a product of fictional imagination. Readers should not dismiss psychedelic phenomena as a fiction if they accepted the authenticating scientific material that frames these texts and validates the reality of Moss and Davis' therapeutic experiences. In accepting the textual reality, readers' conventional understanding of reality is disrupted and then expanded by Newland and Dunlap's engaging representations of multisensory perception, out of body experiences, and mobile and pluralistic subjectivity. Dunlap "floated bodiless and weightless" in one of her trips, with "the conviction that I no longer existed" (152, 162). Her perception is heightened and vividly synesthetic as "the gay, happy music of the instruments became shifting, brilliant lights and colors, and the spectrum became music of great purity and delight" (62). Their narratives challenge readers' rationalist construction of reality and provide readers expansive postmodern frameworks for understanding subjectivity, identity, and reality.

With each therapy session and subsequent new chapter, their accounts grow increasingly fantastical, as do their metaphors. Newland feels she alternately becomes "a whirlwind, the

labyrinths of Hades, a Black Mass, the cave of Gorgon, monsters of Hieronymus Bosch (to mention only a few)” (38). Though these images can be read as metaphoric, symbolic of emotions Newland repressed after receiving a “too strong, too hot” enema as a child, Newland does not use these images simply allegorically (244). She feels she is literally transfigured during the psychedelic experience. Newland’s images are literal representations of her embodied, affectively and cognitively real experiences during the psychiatric research study. Dunlap’s transformation is literally embedded in the body. In her hours as a flying Pegasus, Dunlap “attempted to reach for a facial tissue, but my hand was doubled into a fist simulating a hoof and try as I might, I could not open it. Suffice it to say both that an LSD-induced characterization is entered into wholeheartedly and that it is extremely difficult to pick up anything with a hoof, even one of mother-of-pearl” (57). These women are experiencing more than just visual hallucinations; the affective, perceptive, and sensory experience is physiologically and psychologically real. The metaphors they produced out of the psychedelic states should not be off-handedly dismissed as an “unproductive...array of paranormal manifestations” as one reviewer did in the *New York Times*.<sup>185</sup> As Dunlap, Newland and the researchers attest over and over, their visions, emotions, and revelations occurred as represented in the reports. Readers must be trained to read these women’s fantastic psychedelic experiences as real, otherwise they risk invalidating real human experiences, a misrecognition that has cultural, social and political consequences for those who experience altered states of perception. Residing on the line between realism and fantasy, representing some real, but seemingly impossible perception of human experience, the psychedelic experience is fundamentally estranging and transformative.

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<sup>185</sup> See Nathan Kline’s “The Mind on the Wing.” *New York Times*. May 14, 1961.

To make sense of these experiences, Newland and Dunlap provide important psychedelic affective maps, using metaphor as the bridge between familiar emotions and new knowledge.

### Phase III: Empathy

Citing recent scholarship on the evolution of emotions, Jane Thraillkill provocatively suggests that “while the cultural significance of feelings, along with rules about displaying them, may fluctuate over time, the actual corporeal architecture of emotional experience—almost universal to members of a species, and often highly similar across species—has evolved so slowly over the course of millennia as to be, in the limited timeframe of human history, practically stable” (15).<sup>186</sup> If we agree with Thraillkill here, that there is a nearly universal affective structure underlying human experience, emotion emerges as an essential rhetorical tool for connecting readers across a variety of cultures, races, classes and nations. Newland and Dunlap bring readers into the drug experience through, what Jonathan Flatley calls, an “affective map,” “a narrative or representation of a particular structure of feeling” that “seek[s] to produce a particular kind of affective experience in readers, and at the same time to narrate this very experience” (7). By focusing on the “exaggerated emotions, characteristic of the first LSD experience,” Dunlap builds an affective bridge between the text and readers (Dunlap 54).

Dunlap hopes readers understand, or merely desire, the “vibrant aliveness, an inexhaustible

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<sup>186</sup>Dunlap connects her overwhelming sense of the ‘universal’ to Carl Jung’s theories of archetypal patterns and the collective unconscious, “Dr. Jung’s belief that every person retains race memories came into my mind. Although I had formerly held a perhaps-so-what attitude toward the theory, to me it was now fact. Indeed it could be none other than true; the thousands of feelings I had experienced could not have been contained in a bit of drug smaller than a grain of sugar. Nor had they been gained from my life experiences. Emotions cannot be learned from reading books or attending schools or church services. Furthermore I was convinced that race memories are retained by every person; and that it was these remembered emotions which all too frequently show themselves in what we recognize only as crimes and wars” (45-46).

energy, and a keen appreciation of the beauty of the music, my surroundings, and myself” that she felt on psychedelics (54). In the prefatory material, the doctors similarly highlight the affective power of the narratives, telling readers that they will experience “the paralyzing fear and the murderous rages that we all harbor within us,” and “with excitement,” “share the author’s oft-terrifying, sometimes amusing journey of self-discovery (Newland 7-8). In their attention to the emotions of awe, terror, immanence, spiritual awakening and transcendence, psychedelic writers give value to non-rational emotions and intuitive bodily knowledge.<sup>187</sup> Feelings of “peace, harmony, carefreeness, and joy of rhythm and movement” are “blended” together, “the composite resulting in ecstasy” (Dunlap 54). By giving language to these sublimely affective experiences, Dunlap and Newland teach readers to make meaning out of emotional phenomena at the edge of their conventional worldview.

Feelings of empathy, interconnection, and immanence, or the “ecodelic” awareness, as Richard Doyle eloquently terms it, are recurrent features in psychedelic experiences. Dunlap and Newland represent the embodied, “enmeshed” “perception of ... the terrestrial and extraterrestrial ecology” and provide an experiential framework for the “transpersonal, even transhuman interpellation” of psychedelic experiences (Doyle 20, 26). “All plants, animals, and humans alike have much the same feelings you and I have,” Dunlap writes, “for the first time in my life, I became aware of a wonderful oneness existing between all living things, whether plant,

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<sup>187</sup> Though I focus on the redemptive emotions of empathy and love in Dunlap and Newland’s LSD trips, I must stress that experiences of terror are commonly recurring features of psychedelic experiences. Dunlap attributes this terror to our instinct to protect our individual ego, “The fear of letting go can amount to genuine terror which I suspect is universal. I felt this terror each time I had the drug and even developed it into the theme of my fourth experience” (16).

animal, or human, whether prehistoric, historic, or present” (47-48).<sup>188</sup> Newland and Dunlap vividly represent their feelings of ecological and transhuman interconnection in order to engage readers’ empathy for the personal and social inequalities of the era. Empathy is an especially rich approach for looking at psychedelics, because the empathetic process replicates the kinds of ontological and epistemological transformations experienced during psychedelic use. In *My Self and I* and *Exploring Inner Space*, empathy is a rhetorical device used to mediate readers’ investment in the textual worldviews. I borrow D. Rae Greiner’s rubric to define empathy as a feeling of living inside the mind of another, while treating sympathy as a mode of living alongside.<sup>189</sup> Greiner persuasively shows how realist novels invite readers’ sympathy through familiar details of domestic life and character dialogue. As we have seen, realist sympathy is employed in Dunlap and Newland’s authenticating devices to reassure readers of a shared reality. Like Greiner, I align sympathy with a realist mode of representation, and empathy with the symbolic mode of fantasy. In realist sympathy, readers have no impetus to leave their own perspective and inhabit another’s. In the psychedelic aesthetic, however, receptive readers must dishabituate their ordinary perspective, leave familiar vantage points and peer out upon new psychedelic vistas, a necessary process of Othering that forms the foundation for empathetic engagement.

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<sup>188</sup> As a white woman of some privilege, it is easy for Dunlap to say that affective experiences are shared across humankind. Dunlap’s idea of a universal emotional web is somewhat naïve, but at the same time, could contain some validity as we learn more about the fundamental affective functioning of the brain.

<sup>189</sup> See D. Rae Greiner’s “Thinking of Me Thinking of You: Sympathy Versus Empathy in the Realist Novel.” *Victorian Studies*. 53: 3 (2011): 417-426.

Psychedelic aesthetics involved multiple stages of reception: readers are estranged from singular and static conceptions of self, familiarized with alternative perspectives, and discover shared maps of emotion and subjectivity. As readers increasingly recognize parallels between the fantastic narrative and their empirical worldview, they may develop significant empathetic connections to the narrators and texts. Dunlap and Newland stress their own heightened sense of empathy while on LSD in order to invoke a similar ecodelic mode in their readers. Dunlap “became every variety of more highly evolved man, feeling with astonishing keenness and even accuracy, I suspect, what each must have felt” (Dunlap 37). She was “all beggars, palms outstretched and bodies emaciated, miserable and wretched; all givers of alms, arrogant and disdainful; all galley slaves, their breaking backs feeling the lash of the whip” (38).<sup>190</sup> Her feeling is not simply sympathetic concern; their pain becomes her pain as she is drawn into the psychedelic affective map. She describes the affective experiences of the diverse subjectivities she inhabits,

I was a tiny black baby, happily nursing at the pendulous breast; its mother, holding the infant with exquisite tenderness; a Chinese coolie, hunger gnawing at my guts; a pre-science scientist, immensely proud to be the first to discover that babies resulted from intercourse; a Korean woman with aching back, weeding a rice paddy; ... Nero's slave girls being fed to the eels, writhing with the terror and pain they must have suffered. (37)

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<sup>190</sup> Of course, we must recognize that Dunlap occupies a privileged position as a white woman and her empathetic claim, while sincere, remains problematic given the tense racial relations of the 1960s.

Dunlap's somewhat cringe-worthy identifications across race, class and historical lines are, of course, problematic given her privileged position as a white, educated woman; she can only partially and temporarily inhabits these culturally constructed identities through her psychedelic experience. What is important here is how psychedelic narratives construct affectively rich metaphoric maps to encourage readers to see outside their own identity and imagine the affective experiences of another. Newland similarly invokes readers' empathy through the shared struggles and joys of feminist self-discovery. Newland reconciles her estranged sexual, intellectual, and domestic identities as she develops the reflexive ability to see herself at a distance. Writing *My Self and I* enables Moss to form an empathetic connection with her own repressed self. She shares her ecstasy as she "united the two conflicting parts of my being. No longer would one part of me punish and reject the other," "at long last, My Self and I had become one" (Newland 210). Using affect to bridge multiple subjectivities, within and outside of the self, Dunlap and Newland construct an aesthetic foundation for empathy.

In this empathetic aesthetic space, Dunlap and Newland share thematic lessons of ecological evolution, compassion and universal love, imperatives that would inform the reformist energies of the 1960s. In his preface to *Exploring Inner Space*, Davidson remarks that many who experiment with LSD "have been significantly and permanently changed by the realization of a kind of divine love which they found within themselves," leaving the experience "unquestionably much more capable of loving than they had been previously" (8-9). Dunlap feels enriched by her transpersonal solidarity; she "seemed to be any person who had ever lived, a nameless representative of humanity, and yet a composite of all persons" (45). For Newland, the LSD experience renews her sense of human belonging; "I felt that I had been reconstituted as a human being" (47). Like psychedelic advocates Timothy Leary and Ram Dass (Richard

Alpert), Davidson identifies love as essential to not only the LSD experience, but to human survival itself; “the inability to love is now being recognized as the root of the major tragic sicknesses of our day, whether manifested in international affairs, economics, interpersonal relationships or psychosomatic illnesses of individuals” (Davidson 8-9). The affective experiences of love, empathy, and ecodelic understanding are central to the reformist aims of these psychedelic narratives. This close “attentiveness to our emotional responses to experiences, aesthetic and otherwise,” Jane Thrailkill contends, “helps to provide ground for—even as it sustains the need for—human collaboration and communication” (16). Through these tropes of love and interconnection Dunlap and Newland’s texts most successfully engage their readers and elicit the desired empathy necessary for their collaborative projects of reform. Dunlap and Newland use emotion as a “powerful reformist tool,” creating a rich ecology of empathetic responses that help further their reformist agendas (Thrailkill 30).

### Recovery and Reform

Reform arises from cultural utterances that disrupt a society’s unquestioned common senses. In this case, reformist disruption comes through the literary vehicle of the psychedelic account. “Emotion words have force,” Catherine Lutz suggests, “it is to attempt to character and to *move events*, not merely or even mainly to map them” (11).<sup>191</sup> Psychedelic literature is often glibly called escapist. But, what if we looked carefully at the emotional escape routes psychedelic aesthetics offer? *My Self and I* and *Exploring Inner Space* are narratives about transcendence beyond the materially embodied self; they are aesthetic vehicles on a trip into new

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<sup>191</sup> See Catherine Lutz’s *Unnatural Emotions: Everyday Sentiments on a Micronesian Atoll and Their Challenge to Western Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 11.

realms of awareness. If we, as readers, go along on such a trip, we may discover a hinge from which to see ourselves at a distance. An estranging sense of self-distance is fundamental in the psychedelic aesthetic, which aims to create the critical pivots necessary for the work of reader reflection, education and activism. Published as the FDA began to halt most psychedelic research studies, Newland's *My Self and I* and Dunlap's *Exploring Inner Space* are not about escapism, but are real calls for reform.<sup>192</sup>

Though Dunlap and Newland ask readers to reassess their opinions on psychedelics, to keep open minded about the subject, and to legally, financially, and publicly support psychedelic research, they have an even larger humanitarian mission in mind. Dunlap, in particular, posits an ethical challenge to readers. During one session, she has, with “an awe which was almost overpowering,” “a momentary glimpse of what man would eventually evolve into, of the heights he would sometime reach, and of development as yet unimagined” (45).<sup>193</sup> Dunlap reads the shifting cultural and social paradigms of the post-WWII generation as an inevitable stage of humanity's evolutionary development. She especially asks white American readers to recognize the common humanity shared between persons “of every nationality and faith,” of “every person who lives in the world today” (184). Dunlap's call to treat “flaxen, brown, and black” with equal respect demonstrates the shared values that overlapped psychedelic cultures and the social justice

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<sup>192</sup> Matthew Oram considers the impact of this amendment on LSD research in “Efficacy and Enlightenment: LSD Psychotherapy and the Drug Amendments of 1962,” *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 68:2 (2012 ) Aug 16. [Epub ahead of print]

<sup>193</sup> Dunlap's ecological worldview is contrasted with Newland's more local approach. Newland “purposely limited [her]self to the therapeutic aspects of the LSD experience, treating principally of the personal unconscious mind.” (45). Newland, like Dunlap and Huxley, acknowledges the metaphysical stakes of psychedelic research, and acknowledges that while her limited focus is “essentially the examination and resolution of a neurotic problem,” “LSD offers far wider fields of exploration in that domain which has been variously called the ‘mystic,’ the ‘integrative,’ and the ‘transcendental.’ But this is too amazing a province, too little comprehended as yet, to be included here” (Newland 45).

movements of the early 1960s (183). While Dunlap's humanitarianism may seem hyperbolic at times, "feeling that it was literally impossible not to love every person who lives," her reformist plea for greater societal understanding provided a liberal position for white readers to identify with as they tried to position themselves in relation to the civil rights activism and globalizing forces of the 1950s and 60s. Psychedelic literature provides a narrative platform for readers to imagine alternative realities; this ability to live within the drugged mind of another extends readers' capacity to empathize with alternative racial, sexual, gendered perspectives and identities. Through ecodelic modes of engagement, psychedelics, in Richard Doyle's words, tap into "the core of human evolutionary experience" and develop "the ethos and practices of experimentation" necessary for social change (18). Dunlap and Newland summon psychedelics' evolutionary energies and lend them voice through their intimate and experimental narratives.

Studying narratives like *My Self and I* and *Exploring Inner Space* lends scholars critical insight into the contested narrative space of the mentally, socially, and politically marginalized. In their textual bravery, Dunlap and Newland create important moments of recognition for readers who may see their own, otherwise misunderstood, subjective realities given legitimacy in print. Their narratives helped solidify the genre of the trip report within the psychedelic aesthetic and gave voice to the emerging subculture around psychedelics and other altered states. Dunlap and Newland use affect as "a way of charting cultural contexts that might otherwise remain ephemeral because they haven't solidified into a visible public culture" (Cvetkovich 48).<sup>194</sup> Their psychedelic fantasies register the ephemeral cultural tensions and postmodern zeitgeist that would characterize the long decade we know as the sixties. By introducing new perspectives on

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<sup>194</sup> See Ann Cvetkovich's *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Culture* (2003).

psychological reality, spiritual and sexual exploration, female experience, and scientific discovery, Dunlap and Newland break from traditional paradigms of language and science that too narrowly circumscribed their identities as women, lovers, spouses, mothers, writers, and, most significantly, as fellow humans. Through the fictional Constance Newland and Jane Dunlap, the historical Thelma Moss and Adelle Davis, we can see how women's access to discursive legitimacy was limited and negotiated in mid-twentieth century life writing. Their texts show us how white male authorities marginalized 'irrational' and 'unusual' experiences by narrowly framing them within a rational scientific worldview, granting the female drugged subjectivity voice only through the male authenticated realist text. Though their voices are constrained by the available languages of life writing, Dunlap and Newland still find productive space for self-representation and reader engagement. With the aid of LSD, they forge new relations to their bodies and minds that challenge the patriarchal, rationalist, and homogenous worldviews of Cold War American culture. Their psychedelic experiences open them to alternate modes of female identity; their transformative accounts of female sexuality and identity carve out new narrative space for sixties' feminist rhetoric. By giving voice to alternative subjectivities and communities, psychedelic aesthetics helped fuel the 1960's civil rights, feminist, and ecological movements.

Newland and Dunlap's psychedelic testimonies and their accompanying authenticating documents demonstrate the multiple meanings psychedelics took on in the late 1950s and 60s. Public consensus on psychedelics was as unsettled in Moss and Davis's time as it is today.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> Like Aldous Huxley, Newland was cautious in her psychedelic advocacy, "In doing research, I have found no evidence at all that LSD, properly administered, is harmful in any way. Nor did I personally experience any ill effects from the drug, either physically or mentally. Indeed, quite the reverse. Notwithstanding these facts, and in spite of my own remarkable success with the treatment, I do not recommend LSD therapy to everyone, for three reasons: First: LSD is still experimental. Those doctors who are exploring its possibilities are pioneering—and

Their books offered new discursive positions on psychedelics beyond the pervasive anti-drug dogma, necessary interventions while the funding and regulation of psychedelic research was in jeopardy. Examining these accounts deepens our understanding of drug use, while also providing an important historical record of the development of psychology and pharmacology in the 1960s. Recovering *My Self and I* and *Exploring Inner Space*, we learn a more complicated history about scientific development than is told in standard histories of the period; we see the challenges these women raised to the monolithic reign of scientific rationalism. Cold War science's celebration of Enlightenment rationalism, objectivity and empiricism stands at odds with the ecodelic subjectivity, heightened extrasensory awareness, and expansive perception presented by psychedelic states. Newland and Dunlap's emotional experiences could not find a place within the objectivist and rationalist worldview of mid-twentieth century science. Psychedelics confounded the limits of scientific expression and inspired philosophers and practitioners of science to embrace increasingly pluralist and relativist perspectives on scientific discovery and knowledge. In their adoption of literary and drugged altered selves, Thelma Moss and Adelle Davis historically and rhetorically enact flexible modes of identity that challenge the singular empirical "I" of the scientific observer. Their narratives reflect the emerging pluralism of postmodern life and thought, an increasingly expansive system of knowledge that remains open to possibility and multiplicity. Jodie Nicotra draws out these parallels between pluralist worldviews and drug histories, citing William James' experiments with anesthetics altered states and his theories of the multiverse as "attempt[s] to account for life in all of its wild, messy

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pioneering, of its very nature, is a hazardous business. Second: LSD is so powerful and unpredictable a drug that it should never be taken except under supervision. Certainly it should not be taken for therapeutic reasons unless with a skilled psychotherapist. Although doctors around the world are now investigating LSD as an adjunct to therapy, they are few in number. Skilled psychotherapists are rare. Last: the techniques of LSD therapy seem to be as varied as the number of doctors working with the drug" (44).

immediacy, the flux of sensation and the clashes or affinities of multiple perspectives” (203).<sup>196</sup>

Psychedelic experiences reveal a “new mode of existence, one that recognizes the self as being inextricably bound up in an ecology with all other beings” as Nicotra argues (201). Newland and Dunlap’s ecologic and empathetic narratives of psychedelic consciousness present a challenge to modern science, whose Enlightenment model of knowledge overvalues disciplinary facts and individuated selves over an enmeshed web of information and subjectivities. By providing alternative perspectives on the nature of the self, consciousness, and reality, *My Self and I* and *Exploring Inner Space* contribute rhetorically to twentieth century paradigm shifts in scientific knowledge and literary practice.

Today, psychedelic research is currently undergoing a renaissance in psychology and neuroscience, as researchers find increasing evidence of the therapeutic benefits of psychedelics for individuals coping with trauma, repressed memories, and addiction. *My Self and I* and *Exploring Inner Space* attest to the continued potential of psychedelic use. Their narratives provide scientific researchers and literary scholars alike a glimpse inside psychedelic subjectivities, perspectives that better enable our work to recover non-normative identities and knowledge from the margins of obscurity. Establishing the psychedelic aesthetic as an artistic tradition and as a mode of epistemological and ontological inquiry provides scholars with new descriptive languages for the study of the human mind, and offers crucial narrative space for the legibility, visibility, and social recognition of those who experience altered states of

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<sup>196</sup> Jodie Nicotra, Marcus Boon and others have suggested that James’ flexible and expansive perspective on psychology and scientific knowledge was influenced by his experimentation with anaesthetics and other psychedelics (203).

consciousness and perception whether through drugs, mental illness, meditation or trance states.

Dunlap and Newland's narratives demonstrate how psychedelic writers forge affective maps of recognition, estrangement, empathy and reform by layering realist and fantastic literary modes.

In their representation of this rich cultural period and their lyrical reflections on the emerging

postmodern zeitgeist, Newland and Dunlap's psychedelic accounts, and perhaps similarly

obscured texts of the 1960s, deserve renewed scholarly interest for their contributions to not only

the psychedelic tradition, but to the American literary and scientific canons more broadly.

## CHAPTER THREE

### The Prankster Spectacle: Affective Registers of the Real

*There is no way to describe how beautiful this discovery is, to actually see the atmosphere you have lived in for years for the first time and to feel that it is inside you, too, "flowing up from the heart, the torso, into the brain, an electric fountain..."*

— Tom Wolfe <sup>197</sup>

There was a “mysto steam” beginning to cloud American consciousness in the mid-1960s, a general atmosphere toward the eccentric, the experimental, and the psychedelic. As Tom Wolfe observed in his 1968 countercultural classic *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*,

It was a fantasy world *already*, this electro-pastel world of Mom&Dad&Buddy&Sis in the suburbs....—*you're already there, in Fantasyland*, so why not move off your snug-harbor quilty-bed dead center and cut loose- go ahead and say it—Shazam!—juice it up to what it's already aching to be: 327,000 horsepower, a whole superhighway long and *soaring, screaming* on toward...Edge City, and ultimate fantasies, current and future..." (35)

Tom Wolfe's non-fiction novel channels the psychedelic ethos of a group of artists who embodied the experimental nature of the 1960s counterculture: the Merry Pranksters the eclectic

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<sup>197</sup> The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test 53.

group assembled by the novelist Ken Kesey and united by a common experience: LSD.<sup>198</sup> Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters were a postmodern performance troupe that travelled across the nation, turning America on to the psychedelic aesthetic.<sup>199</sup> They staged theatrical spectacles, pulled public pranks, created expressionist art, and left a multimedia archive of psychedelia in their wake. *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* is a cultural history of the Pranksters, seeking to faithfully document the activities of Merry Pranksters through a journalistic report. Wolfe must simultaneously account for the ‘real-life’ history of Kesey and the Merry Pranksters, while also representing their LSD-inspired fantasies, psychedelic visions and far out American dreams.<sup>200</sup> Because of its psychedelic subject, it is also a surreal trip into what Allen Cohen has called “the edges of the only frontier left in America—their own mind and their own senses” (qtd. in Farber 29). *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* captures the atmosphere of the fluorescent Furthur bus, the beautifully chaotic Acid Test parties, the paranoid hideaways in Mexico, and Kesey’s kaleidoscopic La Honda home, a “fabulous bower” of drug experimentation and cultural improvisation (Wolfe 51). In his attention to the psychedelic “mysteries of the synch!,” Wolfe

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<sup>198</sup> In the first few pages of the novel, Wolfe writes “About all I knew about Kesey at that point was that he was a highly regarded 31-year-old novelist and in a lot of trouble over drugs” (3). Ken Kesey is most known for the novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (1962). The novel was critically and popularly acclaimed for its portrayal of life in a mental institution and the parallel criticisms it raised to America’s medical-industrial-military system. Kesey’s second novel, *Sometimes a Great Notion* (1964), received initially mixed reviews, but has since remained critically acknowledged. Wolfe provides a brief background on Kesey, but see Rick Dodgson’s *It’s All a Kind of Magic: The Young Ken Kesey* (2013) for a fuller biography.

<sup>199</sup> *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* follows the activities of Ken Kesey and company during the years between 1962 and 1967. Members of the Pranksters have published their own accounts of this period. Most notable is Paul Perry’s oral history *On the Bus: The Complete Guide to the Legendary Trip of Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters and the Birth of the Counterculture* (1990). See also Carolyn Cassady’s *Off the Road* and William Plummer’s *The Holy Goof*.

<sup>200</sup> It is important to note the Pranksters’ varied use of fantasies and the fantastic. The Pranksters called their plans and performances fantasies. They saw these fantasies as possible in the real world, actual plans that could be carried out. A question is raised whether this use different from the sense of fantasies as unattainable, unreal and imaginary dreams. This question remains determined by the reader’s faith in the fantasy.

draws his readers into, what Jonathan Flatley calls, an affective map (Wolfe 208).<sup>201</sup> Part biography, part fantasy, the novel captured the psychedelic zeitgeist as it crystalized through the course of 1960s.<sup>202</sup> A best seller in its time, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* has remained a definitive text in the 1960s countercultural canon, significant for its historical representation of the psychedelic age and in its postmodern experimentation in narrative form. However, little attention has been paid to how its psychedelic subject furthered the aesthetic development of postmodernism. I offer a kaleidoscopic treatment of *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*: looking at Kesey and the Merry Pranksters' use of LSD as a medium for aesthetic experimentation and psychic exploration, at Wolfe's strategic use of literary realism and fantasy to represent psychedelic altered states and revalidate the poetic power of language, and at readers' theoretical reception of these aesthetically mediated realities. In short, I argue that Tom Wolfe and the Merry Pranksters loaded readers on a psychedelic vehicle named Furthur and helped swerve America into the postmodern future.

Wolfe's psychedelic vehicle is powered by an affectively rich postmodern narrative. Within an otherwise realist 1960s American setting, Wolfe uses fantastic imagery, metaphoric language, experimental punctuation, and a multi-layered temporal form to create an affective map of the Pranksters' psychedelic experience. Even though he admitted "it's a life I'm not

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<sup>201</sup> In *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism* (2008), Jonathan Flatley builds on theories of reader response and narratology to understand readers' process of affective identification, estrangement, and recognition within aesthetic spaces. Flatley highlights the affectively embodied nature of aesthetics; "the reader has an affective experience within the space of the text, one that repeats or recalls earlier, other experiences, and then is estranged from that experience, and by way of that estrangement told or taught something about it" (7).

<sup>202</sup> Wolfe's work was immediately recognized for its seeming accuracy in capturing not only the adventures of the Merry Pranksters, but of the spirit of the generation. In a 1968 review, Peter Meinke called *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* "an important account of an important event in American history; the rise of the psychedelic generation" (17).

really familiar with,” Wolfe says he “tried to make people *feel* the weird kind of euphoria that people started to feel in the Sixties” (Dean 24, emphasis mine). Through his strategic emphasis on emotive language, metaphor and analogy, Wolfe forges a shared aesthetic space of sensory and perceptual affects that attempts to reorient readers to the Pranksters’ psychedelic worldview. Wolfe brings readers along “this amazing experiment in consciousness ... going on, out on a frontier neither they nor anybody else ever heard of before” (47-48).<sup>203</sup>

### The Youth Quake

By the mid-1960s LSD had become a household word through the popular success of Huxley’s *The Doors of Perception* and the scandalous exploits of professors Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert who were famously dismissed from Harvard after giving psychedelics to students outside of the clinical setting.<sup>204</sup> For many, LSD became a means of awakening repressed consciousness and tapping human potential beyond the patriarchal and domestic hegemonies of the Cold War era. The youth generation, born during and after WWII, challenged the nationalism, heteronormativity, and patriarchal attitudes of their parents and developed new perspectives on self-expression, relationships, and lifestyles.<sup>205</sup> Communal living in the utopian

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<sup>203</sup> Wolfe explicitly acknowledges that many of his readers may have not taken psychedelics before and thus may be biased against the subject. Like Huxley, Dunlap and Newland, Wolfe must build his readers’ trust first through the mutual assurance of shared realist worldview.

<sup>204</sup> Like Aldous Huxley, Leary and Alpert advocated for the intentional use of LSD, treating psychedelics as a serious enterprise for exploring one’s awareness. Psychiatric researchers, coming from clinical backgrounds, stressed the importance of set and setting for LSD use, parameters that were seen as unnecessarily restrictive to the next wave of psychonauts. For more on, see Leary’s *Flashbacks*. Kesey and the Pranksters broke from this clinical model and brought LSD out in public with a more ‘anything goes’ approach.

<sup>205</sup> For a history of the diverse political and social commitments of the hippie counterculture, see Alice Elchol’s *Shaky Ground: The 60s and Its Aftershocks* (2002).

tradition of Brook Farm, the Fourier's, and the Oneidans was back in vogue.<sup>206</sup> Fashion became more colorful, sexually transgressive, and androgynous. Students dropped out, soldiers dodged the draft, and rock music turned the volume up. Rejecting the technological-industrial values of post-war American capitalism and imperialism, some, though certainly not all, postwar youth turned to radical education, communal living, and experimental lifestyles that celebrated values of free expression, love, and global empathy. There was a "trend of all this heaving and convulsing in the bohemia world of San Francisco," Los Angeles and New York City, Wolfe observes, particularly among the middle-class youth (9). "All eyes were on Kesey and his group, known as the Merry Pranksters," Wolfe writes, "Thousands of kids were moving into San Francisco for a life based on LSD and the psychedelic thing" (10).

Sociologist Theodore Roszak defined these alternative expressions of identity and lifestyle as a countercultural movement, a term coined in the classic *The Making of a Counter Culture* (1969).<sup>207</sup> To the conservative 'straight world' of the 1950s and early 1960s, these

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<sup>206</sup> Utopian philosophies inspired the Pranksters' communal lifestyle. There is a rich history of American utopian communities, particularly in periods of social uprest like the 1890s, 1930s, and then the 1940s onward, particularly in the wake of the World War II. Thoreau's *Walden* is an oft cited example of the utopian strain in American philosophy and letters. The behavioral psychologist B.F. Skinner reimagined Thoreau in *Walden Two* (1948), basing his utopian community in scientific Enlightenment. Notable 1960s communes include Hog Farm, The Farm, and New Buffalo. The Twin Oaks Community, founded in 1967, is one of the largest and longest lasting intentionalist communities in the United States still in operation. For a history of the utopian tradition in America, see Donald E. Pitzer's *America's Communal Utopias* (1997).

<sup>207</sup> It is useful to think about the Pranksters through the lens of countercultural expression. Building off of Theodore Roszak and the cultural studies work of Raymond Williams, Dick Hebdige offers a useful frame for the ideological challenge presented by psychedelic aesthetic expressions, "they were attempting to negotiate a meaningful intermediate space somewhere between the parent culture and the dominant ideology: a space where an alternative identity could be discovered and expressed." Describing the working-class cult scene around David Bowie in the 1970s, but equally applicable to alternative lifestyles that emerged out of the 1960s middle class, "They were simultaneously (1) challenging the traditional working-class puritanism so firmly embedded in the parent culture, (2) resisting the way in which this puritanism was being made to signify the working class in the media and (3) adapting images, styles and ideologies made available elsewhere on television and film...in magazines and newspapers..., in order to construct an alternative identity which communicated a perceived difference: an Otherness. They were, in short, challenging at a symbolic level the 'inevitability', the 'naturalness' of class and gender stereotypes." (89)

alternative lifestyles were strange divergences from mainstream manners and customs. The Pranksters saw drug experimentation as a way to resist the standard suburban, white, middle class American Reality where “The Youth had always had only three options: go to school, get a job or live at home. And—how boring each was!” (58). The LSD experience offered an opportunity to “Turn On, Tune In, Drop Out,” as Leary’s slogan goes. In the Prankster world, to be turned on in the 1960s was to be open to “the experience of ...the infinite...and a life in which the subject is not scholastic or bureaucratic but...*Me* and *Us*, the *attuned* ones amid the non-musical shiny-black-shoe multitudes, *I*—with my eyes on that almost invisible *hole* up there in the r-r-r-redwood sky...” (58). LSD was a means of forging a new “fantasy,” a reordering of reality that was an alternative to the “the middle-class intellectual’s game” as Kesey puts it (45). Though psychedelic drugs were often taken casually in the 1960s, David Farber recovers the reformist imperatives of psychedelics; “some people used LSD ...as a ‘resource’ that enabled them to hunt out, recombine, and produce cultural schemata that changed their trajectory on the social map of space and time” (19). A generation was seeking new rhetorical and aesthetic styles that would capture their new cultural schemata, a postmodern sensibility of fluid identities, communal lifestyles, and pluralist realities that were not fully reflected in the modernist model of the authentic, unified self.

The Pranksters came to being amidst an age of remarkable technological development and turbulent social change within a relatively short span of time. Post-WWII America was, in the words of Paul West, a world of “the imagination the unknown ‘x,’” a cultural zeitgeist of “quasars and DNA, curved space and Leptis Magna, voodoo and LSD, dollars and dinars and drachmas, belly-dancers and computers, \$6.95 semispread Pima-cotton shirts and NO-Kloresto

egg substitute and Telstar and Queen Magazine” (20-21). For the older generations of the Great Depression and WWII, the 1960s was a fantasy land of new technology and transgressive lifestyles.<sup>208</sup> The Pranksters embraced this futuristic world of vast media proliferation, rapid scientific advancement and its plastic consumer boom.<sup>209</sup> They recombined the modernist literary and theatrical past with new visual media to broadcast their psychedelic message on multiple postmodern frequencies,

They are above the multitudes, looking down from the Furthur heights of the bus,  
and the billion eyes of America glisten at them like electric kernels, and yet the  
Pranksters are grooving with this whole wide-screen America and going with its  
flow with American flags flying from the bus and taking energy, as in solar heat,  
from its horsepower and its neon and there is no limit to the American trip.  
Bango! (100)

To turn America on to their psychedelic vision, The Pranksters took hold of the nation’s technological energy, embracing film, TV, and radio as the new mediums of collective communication. They tapped into Marshall McLuhan’s media age and created a live spectacle. Their famous Acid Tests were visual spectacles designed to draw audiences into a shared

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<sup>208</sup> Wolfe observes the generational divide in the youth after the war, “the first wave of the most extraordinary kids in the history of the world,” “the world’s first generation of the little devils—feeling immune, beyond calamity. One’s parents remembered the sloughing common order, War & Depression—but Superkids knew only the emotional surge of the great payoff, when nothing was common any longer—The Life!” (35).

<sup>209</sup> Wolfe captures the science fiction fantasy of the post-war economic boom through consumer details, “The incredible postwar American electro-pastel surge into the suburbs!—it was sweeping the Valley, with superhighways, dreamboat cars, shopping centers, soaring thirty-foot Federal Sign & Signal Company electric supersculptures—Eight New Plexiglass Display Features!—a surge of freedom and mobility, of cars and the money to pay for them and the time to enjoy them and a home where you can laze in a rich pool of pale wall-to-wall or roar through the technological wonderworld in motor launches and, in the case of men like his father, private planes—“ (33).

structure of feeling, and in that space, to create a psychedelic praxis where “every day would be a happening, an art form” (51). The Pranksters wanted to integrate the fantasy space of aesthetics into the social fabric of the everyday, to awaken their readers to the altered states always already around them.

To express the psychedelic realities of postmodernism, Pranksters experimented with form and medium, blending genres and traditions, and creating aesthetic spaces of free play. Their aesthetic aims were ambitious; they wanted to create social change from their art. The Pranksters used performative spectacles to estrange audiences from their habitual perspectives, and introduce them to new modes of consciousness and lifestyles that emphasized values of presentness, free play and multimedia expression. The Pranksters felt that the psychedelic experience would “get them to move off their snug-harbor dead center, out of the plump little game of being ersatz daring and ersatz alive” (45). The generational use of psychedelics in the 1960s contributed to what Wolfe tentatively called “a third great awakening”; many saw this rise in metaphysical interest and transcendental exploration on the same plane as the religious revivals intellectual reformations, and romantic renaissances of modern Europe (Dean 28). Through his story of the Merry Pranksters, Wolfe registered the individual and collective paradigm shifts that he was noticing across America. *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* is a literary record of their aesthetic experimentation, and is itself an example of how the psychedelic aesthetic developed the postmodernist awakening.



**Figure 8: Ken Kesey, Photographed by Duke Downey**

### Out with the Old: Why Ken Kesey Stopped Writing

*What was it that had brought a man so high of promise to so low a state in so short a time? Well, the answer can be found in just one short word, my friends, in just one all-well-used syllable: 'Dope!'*

—Tom Wolfe<sup>210</sup>

Ken Kesey's 1962 novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* was a hit, earning critical and popular acclaim. The reviews for his second novel *Sometimes a Great Notion* (1964), about a logging family and a "heroic strikebreaker" in the Pacific Northwest, "ran from the very best to the very worst" (91).<sup>211</sup> The young writer from Oregon was one to watch; "He was always

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<sup>210</sup> *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* 4.

<sup>211</sup> As quoted in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, Maurice Doblier of the *New York Herald Tribune* called it "a towering redwood," Granville Hicks called Kesey "a forceful, inventive, and ambitious writer" (91). *Time* magazine criticized the novel for being "overwritten" and *The New York Times* called it "insufferably pretentious" (91). Orville Prescott in *The New York Times* also made mention that Kesey was a "beatnik type," mixing up Kesey with Neal Cassady as the inspiration for Dean Moriarty in Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*. Wolfe suggests that the reviews of *Sometimes a Great Notion* may have been negatively impacted by Kesey's embrace of the counterculture, "The Pranksters got a good laugh over that. The old guy was mixed up and...maybe put out by the whole thing of the bus and the big assault upon New York: stop the Huns..." (91). The New York press, covering the publication Kesey's new novel, did not know quite what to make of the Pranksters and the Furthur bus.

included with Philip Roth and Joseph Heller and Bruce Jay Freidman and a couple of others as one of the young novelists who might go all the way” (3). But by 1966, Kesey was the young novelist fugitive, in trouble with drugs and hanging out with a whole cast of weird characters.

Kesey was turned on to psychedelics after volunteering for a psychiatric study at Veteran’s Hospital in Menlo Park on “psychomimetic drugs” (36). He later took a job as an attendant on a psychiatric ward, which gave him access to these pharmaceuticals.<sup>212</sup> During those early years of the 1960s, Kesey lived among the exclusive intellectual circle at Perry Lane, “Stanford’s bohemia quarter,” “a typical 1950s bohemia” scene of residual modernism.<sup>213</sup> Wolfe parodies the academic elitism that Kesey would later reject, “it had true cultural cachet. Thorstein Veblen had lived there. So had two Nobel Prize winners everyone knew about though the names escaped them...Getting into Perry Lane was like getting into a club” (30). “The Perry Lane set,” where “everyone was young and intellectual and analytic” romanticized Kesey because of his Oregon backcountry manners and All-American football player physique, “He had Jack London Martin Eden Searching Hick, the hick with intellectual yearnings, written all over him” (31). As Kesey began experimenting with drugs, his wild energy became too much for some residents of “noble old Perry Lane” and he moved the newly emerging psychedelic scene to La Honda, where he set the Pranksters’ communal home.<sup>214</sup> Wolfe writes, “Being hip

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<sup>212</sup>“Volunteer Ken Kesey gave himself over to science over at the Menlo Park Vets hospital—and somehow drugs were getting up and walking out of there and over to Perry Lane, LSD, mescaline, IT-290, mostly” (Wolfe 41).

<sup>213</sup> Kesey had attended Stanford University on a creative writing fellowship in 1958. Notable residents at the time included by novelists Robin White and Gwen Davis. According to Wolfe, “they had taken him in on Perry Lane because he was such a swell diamond in the rough” (30).

<sup>214</sup>To give you a sense of the scene that collected around Kesey and the permeable shifting group called the Pranksters, I quote this longer passage from Wolfe’s account, “All sorts of people began gathering around Perry Lane. Quite an...underground sensation it was, in Hip California. Kesey, Cassady, Larry McMurtry; two young writers, Ed McClanahan and Bob Stone; Chloe Scott the dancer, Roy Seburn the artist, Carl Lehmann-Haupt, Vic

on Perry Lane now had an element nobody had ever dreamed about before, wild-flying, mind-blowing drugs. Some of the old Perry Lane luminaries' *cool* was tested and they were found wanting" (41). Kesey split in the Perry Lane scene, causing a paradigm break that would mirror the Pranksters' postmodern turn,

Perry Lane took on a kind of double personality, which is to say, Kesey's. Half the time it would be just like some kind of college fraternity row, with everybody out on a nice autumn Saturday afternoon on the grass in the dapple shadows of the trees and honeysuckle tendrils playing touch football or basketball. An hour later, however, Kesey and his circle would be hooking down something that in the entire world only they and a few avant-garde neuropharmacological researchers even knew about, drugs of the future, of the neuropharmacologists' centrifuge utopia, the coming age of..." (41).

The utopian naturalism of Jack London, the romantic modernism of William Faulkner and even the roadside Beat realism of Jack Kerouac did not capture the postmodern technological future that Kesey was "hooking down." Kesey searched for a new mode of expression, one that would capture these psychedelic experiences and the new American future he was watching pop up around him.

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Lovell...and Richard Alpert himself...all sorts of people were in and out of there all the time, because they had heard about it, like the local beats—that term was still used—a bunch of kids from a pad called the Chateau, a wild-haired kid named Jerry Garcia and the Cadaverous Cowboy, Page Browning. Everyone was attracted to the strange high times they had heard about...the Lane's fabled Venison Chili, a Kesey dish made of venison stew laced with LSD, which you could consume and then go sprawl on the mattress in the fork of the great oak in the middle of the Lane at night play pinball with the light show in the sky..." (46).

In 1964, Kesey was starting to see the inherent limitations of the narrative form, and began “talking about how writing was an old-fashioned and artificial form” (91). The promising young novel was serving a disruptive blow to the remnants of modernist linguistic certainty. As Kesey saw it, canonical Western literature did not offer adequate language for the permeable manifestations and pluralistic performances of identity. Like nearly all the figures in this project, Kesey was inspired by *The Doors of Perception* and Huxley’s theory of mind as a reducing valve that filters out humankind’s perceptual potential. But Kesey rejected Huxley’s narrative approach and scientific framework; “But these are *words*, man! *And you couldn’t put it into words.*” As we saw in Chapter Two, the clinical psychiatric framework pathologized psychedelic experiences into narrow discursive categories of sane, insane, normal, abnormal.<sup>215</sup> In his first novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (1962), Kesey condemned modern psychiatry’s use of tranquillizers and shock therapy to numb creative individuals in the pursuit of normality.<sup>216</sup> The Pranksters resisted the scientific community’s feeble attempts to categorize psychedelic experiences; “The White Smocks like to put it into words, like *hallucination* and *dissociative phenomena*,” and focused on the “visual skyrockets” (40). To simply describe the visual effects would be, in Kesey’s view, to misunderstand the experience;

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<sup>215</sup>Wolfe’s comments show the failures of this clinical psychiatric system which worked to ‘correct’ individuals rather than heal their anxieties and disorders, “The whole system –if they set out to invent the perfect Anti-cure for what ailed the men on this ward, they couldn’t have done it better. Keep them cowed and docile. Play on the weakness that drove them nuts in the first place. Stupefy the bastards with tranquilizers and if they still get out of line haul them up to the ‘shock shop’ and punish them” (43).

<sup>216</sup>According to Wolfe’s account, Kesey wrote parts of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* on peyote and LSD; “he could write like mad under drugs. After he came out of it, he could see that a lot of it was junk. But certain passages—like Chief Broom in his schizophrenic fogs—it was true vision, a little of what you could see if you opened up the doors of perception, friends...” (44)

*But don't you see?*—The visual stuff was just the décor with LSD... The whole thing was...*the experience*...this certain indescribable *feeling*...Indescribable, because words can only jog the memory, and if there is no memory of...The experience of the barrier between the subjective and the objective, the personal and the impersonal, the I and the not-I disappearing...that feeling! (45).

Kesey wanted to emphasize “*the experience*,” but did not want to put into language which would only confine the experience into the conventions of syntax. Ken Kesey later told reporters that he abandoned writing because “writers are trapped by artificial rules. We are trapped in syntax” (136). As we will see shortly, Tom Wolfe wrestles with those same linguistic constraints in his account of Kesey. The Pranksters resisted the narration of their experiences as a strategy of distancing themselves from dominant ideological metanarratives of mid-twentieth century domesticity, nationalism and Enlightenment progress. They preferred to keep it “The Unspoken Thing”; “they made a point of not putting it into words. That in itself was one of the unspoken rules. *If you label it this, then it can't be that...*” (112).<sup>217</sup>

Rejecting the narrative form, Kesey turned to the communal living and performance art. The Pranksters were Kesey's new aesthetic, a way of life and a mode of expression; he would

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<sup>217</sup> Wolfe uses ambiguity to make *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* a narrative space of symbolic uncertainty and free play. As Richard Kallan points out, Wolfe offers “maximum personal meaning” to the reader through “an ambiguity that not only heightens the reader's involvement by encouraging participation in constructing the message presented, but which extends the range of summonable symbolic responses” (79). By keeping his descriptions of the altered state ambiguously elliptical and fragmented, Wolfe creates a “general mysto steam” in the minds of his readers (16). He creates an atmospheric sense that “there is something startling enough, fearful, awesome, strange, or just weird enough” (16-17).

“point out, for all who cared to look...the bus” (91).<sup>218</sup> The reception of Kesey’s new aesthetic was first met with confusion, “nobody really comprehended what was going on, except that it was a party” (91). Kesey felt collectively produced, multimedia, performative art could immerse audiences in aesthetic experiences in a way that traditional literature could not; “He talked about something called the Acid Test and forms of expression in which there would be no separation between himself and the audience. It would all be one experience, with all the senses opened wide, words, music, lights, sounds, touch- *lighting*” ( 8). The newness of this aesthetic was exaggerated, in typical Prankster fashion. Wolfe asked Kesey if the Acid Tests were “on the order of what Andy Warhol is doing,” to which Kesey responded, ““No offense,...but New York is about two years behind. He said it very patiently, with a kind of country politeness, as if...I don’t want to be rude to you fellows from the City, but there’s things going on out here that you would never guess in your wildest million years, old buddy...”( 8). Kesey knew they were indebted to the visual artists, experimental film and jazz performances of the Beats and avant-garde scenes. But, he also felt the Pranksters were doing something of another order, on another perceptual plane.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>218</sup>Kesey told the press he was moving on from writing, presenting instead the Pranksters’ bus. As Wolfe records, “The local press, including some of the hipper, smaller sheets, gave it a go, but nobody really comprehended what was going on, except that it was a party” (91).

<sup>219</sup> Wolfe asked Kesey if the Acid Tests were “on the order of what Andy Warhol is doing,” to which Kesey responded, ““No offense,...but New York is about two years behind.’ ‘He said it very patiently, with a kind of country politeness, as if...I don’t want to be rude to you fellows from the City, but there’s things going on out here that you would never guess in your wildest million years, old buddy...”( 8).



**Figure 9: Furthur Bus, Photographed by Joe Rosenthal**

In with the New: The Pranksters' Multimedia Collective

*So the Hieronymus Bosch bus headed out of Kesey's place with the destination sign in front reading 'Furthur' and a sign in the back saying 'Caution: Weird Load.'*

—Tom Wolfe<sup>220</sup>

By 1964, there was a clear sense of the changing of the guard. In New York for the publication of *Sometimes a Great Notion*, the newly postmodern Pranksters met up with the remnants of Beat modernism,

here was Kerouac and here was Kesey and here was Cassady in between them, once the mercury for Kerouac and the whole Beat Generation and now the mercury for Kesey and the whole—what?—something wilder and weirder out on

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<sup>220</sup> *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* 63.

the road. It was like hail and farewell. Kerouac was the old star. Kesey was the wild new comet from the West heading Christ knew where.<sup>221</sup> (90)

Beat modernists like Jack Kerouac, William Burroughs, and Allen Ginsberg were the experimental precursors of psychedelic postmodernism. They believed in the poetic capacity of language to communicate truths, even if those truths were only partial, temporary, and local. Kesey moved away from modernism's privileging of the literary form and embraced visuality as the aesthetic order of postmodernity. Multimedia art and performance, he felt, better addressed the spectacular space age, nuclear age urgencies and mass media wonders of postwar American life.

The Pranksters thought they were on to something and wanted to test their spectacle on the road. They were seeking approval, "If there was anybody in the world who was going to comprehend what the Pranksters were doing, it was going to be Timothy Leary and his group, the League for Spiritual Discovery, up in Millbrook, New York." (93) The Pranksters left New York City and, on route to California, visited Leary and company, excited that their "the two secret societies bearing this new-world energy surge were going to meet" (93).<sup>222</sup> They were disappointed by the visit<sup>223</sup>; "the trouble with Leary and his group is that they have turned *back*,"

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<sup>221</sup>At the Madison Avenue New York party where they met, "Kesey and Keraouc didn't say much to each other" (90).

<sup>222</sup> Wolfe tries to recreate the mounting energy at this moment in the early 1960s when few yet knew of psychedelics, "They headed off expecting the most glorious reception ever. It is probably hard at this late date to understand how glorious they thought it was going to be. The Pranksters thought of themselves and Leary's group as two extraordinary arcane societies, and the only ones in the world, engaged in the most fantastic experiment in human consciousness ever devised. The thing was totally new." (93).

<sup>223</sup> When the Pranksters arrived at Leary's Millbrook, "...there is a general...vibration...of: We have something rather deep and meditative going on here, and you California crazies are a sour note" (94)

turned back into that old ancient New York intellectual thing, ducked back into the romantic past, copped out of the American trip. New York intellectuals have always look for...another country, a fatherland of the mind, where it is all better and more philosophic and purer, gadget-free, and simple and pedigreed: France or England (100).<sup>224</sup>

Like the Beat modernists, Kesey criticized the Continental tradition of Enlightenment analytic thought for overvaluing the capacities of reason and cognition. He wanted to reinvest in the emotional and experiential dimensions of human experience, an investment underscored by a similar philosophical turn toward the affective, mediated nature of human experience in phenomenology, feminist criticism, game and performance theory in this same moment.<sup>225</sup>

Leary, Richard Alpert and company gleaned insight from Buddhist and Hindu traditions, and tried to recreate the experiential atmosphere of the East for their psychedelic programming.

According to Kesey via Wolfe, “Leary...decrees that everyone should have such a dwelling place of such pristine antique décor, with everyone hunkered down amid straw rugs and Paisley

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<sup>224</sup> With “The Learyites,” it is “the same thing, only with them, it’s India—the East—with all the ancient flap-doodle of Gautama Buddha or the Rig-Veda blowing in like mildew” (101).

<sup>225</sup> I am thinking here of Gilles Deleuze, Adrienne Rich, Marshall McLuhan, R.D. Laing, Silvan Tomkins to name a few central figures of early postmodernism. Though the Pranksters’ praxis aligns with much postmodern theory, they themselves did not align to any theoretical or theological camp. Wolfe marvels at how the Pranksters’ treatment of “experience” resonates with the basis of all the major religious traditions “There was no theology to it, no philosophy, at least not in the sense of an ism. There was no goal of an improved moral order in the world or an improved social order, nothing about salvation and certainly nothing about immortality or the life hereafter. Hereafter! That was a laugh. If there was ever a group devoted totally to the here and now it was the Pranksters. I remember puzzling over this. There was something so...religious in the air, in the very atmosphere of the Prankster life, and yet one couldn’t put one’s finger on it. One the face of it there was just a group of people who had shared an unusual psychological state, the LSD experience—But exactly! The experience—that was the word! and it begins to fall into place. In fact, none of the great founded religions, Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, none of them began with a philosophical framework or even a main idea. They all began with an overwhelming new experience, what Joachim Wach called ‘the experience of the holy,’ and Max Weber, ‘possession of the deity,’ the sense of being a vessel of the divine, of all the All-one.” (Wolfe 113)

wall hangings, that the Gautama Buddha himself from 485 B.C. could walk in and feel at home instantly” (101). Leary created experiential spaces that programmed a psychedelic subjectivity based on the East. Eastern philosophy offered a rich language for phenomenological experience as the work of Huxley and Alan Watts also shows. But, Kesey sought an American-born aesthetic that expressed the distinct 1960s experience. The Pranksters’ psychedelic subjectivity of the neon billboard, automobile, TV age of American youth had no place in Leary’s Romantic return to the past, “Above all, keep quiet, and for chrissake, no *gadgets*—no tapes, video tapes, TV, flags, no neon, Buick Electras, mad moonstone-faced Servi-centers, and no manic buses, f’r chrissake, soaring, doubleclutch doubleclutch, to the Westernmost edge—“ (100-101). Kesey and the Pranksters rejected the dominant Enlightenment project and the hold-over mysticisms of the meditative Beats.<sup>226</sup> Away with static text and contemplative silence, the Pranksters sent out a rich kaleidoscope of sound, color, light and touch, designed to engage the senses, disrupt the “middle-class intellectual’s game,” getting people to move beyond the consumerist fantasy of American life, “and move out to ...Edge City...where it was scary, but people were whole people” (45). Through the collective experience of their psychedelic aesthetic, the Pranksters offered perhaps a way to heal the alienation of the postwar societal schizophrenia.

Kesey envisioned America on the verge of “a very Neon Renaissance,” and with this shifting worldview, he saw the need for a new set of cultural mythologies (35). He rejected the classical myths for the emergent culture of comic books, TV and mass media; “— the myths that actually touched you at that time—not Hercules, Orpheus, Ulysses, and Aeneas—but Superman, Captain Marvel, Batman, The Human Torch, The Sub-Mariner, Captain America, Plastic Man,

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<sup>226</sup> The Pranksters acknowledged the Leary tradition in their mythologizing history, calling the Millbrook mansion “the Pranksters’ Ancestral Mansion.” Wolfe mockingly called the chapter devoted to this visit “The Crypt Trip.”

The Flash” (35). These image-based myths were postmodern visions of superhuman potential amplified by technological power. Kesey raised the postmodern banner of popular culture, declaring “the comic-book Superheroes as the honest American myths” (35).<sup>227</sup> He emulated this mass media iconography, dressing up as various American heroes: the astronaut, the WWII hero, and the superhero, “bare chested, wearing only white leotards, a white satin cape tied at the neck, and a red, white, and blue sash running diagonally across his chest. It’s...Captain America! The Flash! Captain Marvel! The Superhero, in a word...” (352).<sup>228</sup> The self, for the Pranksters, was a game, a constructed performance that they played in public. They took on new names, costumes and regalia, performed circus tricks and took on distinct roles within the group. The Enlightenment figure of the intellectually discoverable self has no place in the Pranksters’ fluid notion of performative identities. Subjectivity was based on group relationality and cultural games in the tradition of R.D. Laing. Identity and subjectivity, in the Pranksters’ postmodern view, was a series of permeable, plural and shifting performances that were not bound up in notions of truth or authenticity: “Never Trust a Prankster,” as their slogan goes (340). Their Prankster prefigures postmodern theories of performativity of Judith Butler and Eve Sedgwick. Studying the Pranksters helps us see how these postmodern theories were first tested out, felt and interpreted through psychedelic experiences and art. The Pranksters’ psychedelics performances were so richly affective that they soon defined the Haight-Ashbury scene.

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<sup>227</sup> Kesey was a fan of comics and inspired by their fantasy aesthetics, as I will discuss shortly, Wolfe reports that Kesey spends “hours on end reading comic books, absorbed in the plunging purple Steve Ditko shadows of Dr. Strange attired in capes and chiaroscuro” and speaking of travelling between different dimensions” (82).

<sup>228</sup> The Pranksters played on the American signifiers of nationalism in their dismantling of American flags for costumes. Wolfe describes the Pranksters as “the Flag People,” dressed in “their American Flag coveralls” (349). The reappropriation of the American flag was part of the protest strategies of the Vietnam outrage and then became popular in street fashion.

## What's a Writer to Do? Tom Wolfe's Literary Challenge

*I tried not only to tell what the Pranksters did but to re-create the mental atmosphere or  
subjective reality of it.*

—Tom Wolfe<sup>229</sup>

Tom Wolfe faced an aesthetic challenge of considerable proportions. If Ken Kesey declared literature a dying form, could a journalist really capture the Pranksters in print? Wolfe's disjointed, elliptical, experimental prose demonstrates the representational battle he faced in taking on this subject (53). He must find language for their excessive performances, their multiplicitious identities and fluid development. Coming from an academic background, versed in critical scholarship, creative fiction and journalistic writing, Wolfe was well equipped for the task.<sup>230</sup> Originally working on assignment for the *World Journal Tribune*, Wolfe had to conform to the realist standards of the news magazine genre while trying to invoking the mood of the Pranksters' psychedelic fantasies.<sup>231</sup> Yet, the realist conventions expected of a journalist's account did not provide adequate language to describe the "raggedy raggedy edge" of psychedelic reality (29). Just like Kesey, who felt trapped by syntax, Wolfe once told an interviewer that he "figured it was time someone violated what Orwell called 'the Geneva conventions of the mind'" ("Introduction" 21). Wolfe used this as an occasion to experiment and theorize about the state of journalistic realism in American letters. In order to represent the

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<sup>229</sup> *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* 371.

<sup>230</sup> Wolfe acutely understood the uneasy line between fact and fiction that came with any form of storytelling, particularly given his scholarly training. Wolfe received his Ph.D. in American Studies at Yale University in 1957.

<sup>231</sup> He originally went on assignment to write about Kesey's fugitive run from the law and subsequent arrest; "I got the idea of going to Mexico and trying to find him and do a story on Young Novelist Real-Life Fugitive" (Wolfe 5).

Pranksters' psychedelic break from the standard reality of postwar America, Wolfe similarly had to break away from journalism's neutral and 'objective' packaging. Wolfe forms one node in a cluster of writers, including Truman Capote, Norman Mailer, Hunter S. Thompson, and Joan Didion, who embraced New Journalist techniques, as the style was later called. Instead of flat empirical-based reportage, New Journalists, Richard A. Kallan argues, were seeking a way of "massaging, or engaging the reader's attention, by giving the feel of an event instead of simply reporting what has happened" (72). By layering multiple points of view, New Journalism was a means of creating an atmospheric, perspectival sense of events and those involved (73). Some criticized this new style, accusing the writers of being overly subjective, and taking creative liberties, causing audiences to doubt whether this style could faithfully record the 'objective' facts expected of the highly realist genre of journalism.

The empirical facts, in the case of the psychedelic Pranksters, were somewhat beside the point.<sup>232</sup> Rather, Wolfe wanted to give "the reader the feeling of the scene as he experiences it" (qtd. in Kallan 73). To reconstruct the Prankster atmosphere for the novel, Wolfe used film and tape recordings, interviews and journals to construct, what Kallan calls, a "fetching panorama of character that engulfs the sensibilities" (73). Wolfe integrated multilayered dialogue and onomatopoeic sound, detailed descriptions of place and space, multiple third and first person points of view, and a montage visual form in typography, punctuation and fantastic metaphoric imagery (73). Wolfe broke from linguistic conventions by embracing new languages, but also

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<sup>232</sup> *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* is a realist text in many ways. It is a non-fiction account of historically verifiable persons and events. The domestic life of the Merry Pranksters makes up the majority of the narrative; readers get mundane details of meals, chores, and lovers' quarrels. Kesey and his fellow psychonauts come from "All-American" backgrounds, described by Wolfe as the quarterbacks and small town girls of a realist American landscape.

new forms, most notably in his experimental use of punctuation and imagery. He saw how “exclamation points, italics, and abrupt shifts (dashes) and syncopations (dots) helped to give the illusion of not only a person talking but of a person thinking. ... It seemed to me the mind reacted –first! ... in dots, dashes, and exclamation points, then rationalized, drew up a brief, with periods” (21-22). He discovered “it was possible in non-fiction, in journalism, to use any literary device, from the traditional dialogisms of the essay to stream-of-consciousness, and to use many different kinds simultaneously, or within a relatively short space...to excite the reader both intellectually and emotionally” (“Introduction” 15). Wolfe takes the literary pastiche a bit farther than some of his contemporaries, borrowing not just from practices of literary realism, but from the marginalized genres of fantasy as well.

As I have argued throughout this project, with these newly felt psychic experiences, there was need for a new language. Wolfe has an especially good ear for the latest slang, and *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* archives the emergence of new cultural discourse that bubbled up in this turbulently creative decade.<sup>233</sup> The invention of new language, along with use of metaphor, allegory and fantastical imagery helped Wolfe move from the conventions of mid-century realism. As the Pranksters break from conventionality reality, and subsequently from realist language, Kesey places their psychedelic discourse in the realm of the fantastic.<sup>234</sup> Wolfe observes the Pranksters’ linguistic emphasis on fantasy early on in the novel,

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<sup>233</sup> Wolfe defines new slang for his ‘straight’ readers throughout the narrative, “Thing was the major abstract word in Haight-Ashbury. It would mean anything, isms, life styles, habits, leanings, cause, sexual organs; thing and freak; freak referred to styles and obsessions, as in ‘Steward Brand is an Indian freak’ or ‘the zodiac—that’s her freak,’ or just to heads in costume. It wasn’t a negative word.” (10)

<sup>234</sup> To review, the fantastic is perhaps best recognized by the reader’s affective and cognitive reception of the text. Readers decide how textual realities are processed and classified along the spectrum of fact and fiction, reality and irreality. Surveying competing definitions of fantasy by Irwin, Swifen, Manlove, and Kennard and others, Lance

Fantasy is a word Kesey has taken to using more and more, for all sorts of plans, ventures, world views, ambitions. It is a good word. It is ironic and it isn't. It refers to everything from getting hold of a pickup truck—"that's our fantasy for this weekend"—to some scary stuff out on the raggedy raggedy edge... (29)

Wolfe picks up the language of the fantastic partially from Kesey's own "curious little library" of science fiction and comic books (123).<sup>235</sup> Under this fantastic influence, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* presents a world where "all the angels are under extreme stress," where "walls keep jumping up so goddamn close" and "the perspectives are all berserk" (84). In "the magical bower" of La Honda, Wolfe must employ language that fits this "fantastic stage setting" in order to adequately capture "the lime ::::: light :::::" of this "Other world, a higher level of reality" (53, 51, 127). Wolfe especially uses fantasy as a framework for understanding the pharmaceutical and technological basis of the Merry Pranksters' psychic and aesthetic exploration, "they will broadcast on all frequencies, waving American flags, turning up the Day-Glo and the neon of 1960s electro-pastel America, wired up and amplified, 327,000 horsepower,

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Olsen finds that they all commonly "define the idea of fantasy epistemologically, as way of perceiving 'reality'" (287). Olsen shows how fundamental our affective registers are in fantasy literature, explaining "fantasy is that stutter between two modes of discourse [the mimetic and the marvelous] which generates textual instability, an ellipse of uncertainty. The stutter may last for a phrase, for a sentence, for a chapter, even for a novel, but its result is the banging together of the here and there so that neither the reader nor the protagonist knows quite where he is" (288-289). It is this "raggedy raggedy edge" between "here and there" that is of particular interest in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*. How does one represent Kesey's "Edge City," that ever stuttering frontier line that few of Wolfe's readers have personally experienced (45)?

<sup>235</sup> Kesey has a number of "books of science fiction and other mysterious things, and you could pick up almost any of these books and find truly strange vibrations" (123). Wolfe reads the Merry Pranksters through Robert Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land* (1961) and Arthur Clarke's *Childhood's End* (1953), two notable exemplars of mid-century science fiction (165). Wolfe is particularly struck by how "the whole thing here is so much like...this book on Kesey's shelf, Robert Heinlein's novel, *Stranger in a Strange Land*. It is bewildering. It is as if Heinlein and the Pranksters were bound together by some inexplicable acausal connecting bond" (Wolfe 123). Through his library, Kesey provides Wolfe an entry into the fantastic tradition, a position from which to speak of the Merry Pranksters in terms of other worlds, alien states, superior beings and superheroes, language that does not ordinary fit the journalist repertoire. Brian Ragen suggests that this was common in Wolfe's journalist approach, "in telling much of the story from the point of view of his informants, Wolfe also adopts their language" (90).

a fantasy bus in a science-fiction movie, welcoming all on board” (166).<sup>236</sup> Wolfe’s stylistic and thematic use of the fantastic aligns with a wider cultural interest in the nature of reality in America during the mid-century. Mas’ud Zavarzadeh considers how a striking sense of societal crisis, disproportion and imbalance emerged in the postwar era, which “aroused suspicions about the epistemological authority of any omniscient interpreter of reality” (15). This epistemological doubt regarding the nature of reality is a recurrent theme in much of the contemporary literature “paying witness to the fantastic” (15). By representation these fantastic drug states, Wolfe helps validates psychedelic experiences, giving them meaning in the realist world by carving out a language for their public articulation. Wolfe’s nonfiction novel smacks up against the established disciplinary boundaries between realism and the fantasy, fact and fiction, truth and myth; divisions that would crumble under the weight of postmodernism.<sup>237</sup> In his New Journalist pastiche of multiple voices, layered space and episodic time, Tom Wolfe resists the restraining syntax of literary realism to construct a richly affective postmodern fantasy.

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<sup>236</sup> Wolfe employs the fantasy metaphors throughout, sending the Merry Pranksters on a science fiction exploration into the uncharted realms of human understanding.

<sup>237</sup> Wolfe’s style of journalism, developed in *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby* (1965), *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (1968) and *The Pump House Gang* (1968) (these two were published on the same day) and demonstrated throughout his prolific career, often came under attack for his blurring of the line between fact and fiction.

## Communities of Affect

*If only they, Mom&Dad&Buddy&Sis, dear-but-square ones, could but know the Kairos, the  
supreme moment...*

--Tom Wolfe<sup>238</sup>

The Pranksters performances, read through the fraught linguistic space of Wolfe's prose, mark out the shifting intersections between modernisms at this moment in American cultural history, and demonstrate how the emergence of new practices and revision of representational forms were integral to that shift. What is the status of text in an image-based age? Do writers abandon the project entirely? Wolfe's prose suggests not.<sup>239</sup> His novel revives the poetic power of language, evoking a mood that provocatively represents the Pranksters' psychedelic experiences, albeit in different, though still affective ways than the Pranksters' multimedia performances. *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* presents readers with "a flood of sensory stimuli, all quite ordinary, but...*revealing* themselves for the first time" in the psychedelic altered states (Wolfe 37). Wolfe pays close narrative attention to the multisensory affects, heightened perceptions and cognitive upheaval of the Pranksters' psychedelic scene. Early to the neurological approach now in critical vogue, Wolfe was interested in "current studies in the physiology of the brain," believed that in print even though "the events are merely taking place on the page," "the emotions are real. Hence the unique feeling when one is 'absorbed' in a

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<sup>238</sup> *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* 114

<sup>239</sup> Ken Kesey would also return to print, though his later novels were met with limited success.

certain book, 'lost' in it" ("Introduction" 47- 48). Wolfe tries to recreate that absorbed affect in his readers, bringing them aboard the Furthur bus and on to the postmodern psychedelic trip.<sup>240</sup>

The internal subjective nature of the altered drug state made psychedelics "a great secret life" to the Pranksters; "The befuddled citizens could only see the outward manifestations of the incredible stuff going on inside their skulls" (69). For Wolfe, the internal natural of psychedelics represents a major challenge for reader recognition. For the Pranksters' mission to succeed in 'turning us on,' readers must at some level recognize these cognitively strange, seemingly unreal altered states as familiar enough to make meaning of the narrative. Wolfe must envelop readers within the world of the text.<sup>241</sup> But, how does one arouse the feeling of "the entire harmonics of the universe from the most massive to the smallest and most personal" (125)? It is here, where language begins to fail, that aesthetics rely on the affective receptiveness, cognitive expansiveness and imagination of readers. In *The New Journalism*, Wolfe lays out what could be considered a theory of affective aesthetics. He sees print as "an indirect medium that does not so much 'create' images or emotions as jog the reader's memories" ("Introduction" 48).<sup>242</sup> Wolfe must represent the psychedelic experience as strangely new, yet recognizable at the level of

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<sup>240</sup> The drug state employs the same "structures of feeling" that the aesthetic state does; it is an embodied perceptual, affective, and cognitive experience that mediates the user's sense of reality during the time of engagement.

<sup>241</sup> Like Vivian Sobchack, I treat aesthetics as "modes of embodied existence" which uses "structures of direct experience" to present narrative and visual realities to readers (Williams 37). Aesthetic provide potentially profound moments of mediated affective experience.

<sup>242</sup> In this same essay, Wolfe examines the example of writers who "try to describe the state of drunkenness," they have to "count on the readers having been drunk at some time" so "they as much as say, 'So-and-so was drunk—and, well, you know what that's like.'" (48). Wolfe then admits that "with regard to more arcane highs, such as LSD or methedrine, the writer can make no such assumption—and this has stymied many writers" (48). Operating with "no more than a cartoon outline," writers must rely on "the reader's memory... to fill in the rest" (48).

affect, jogging readers' affective memories.<sup>243</sup> To do so, he employs realist strategies of familiarization alongside the estranging mode of the fantastic. From the point of view of prankster Sandy, Wolfe takes readers on a bodily trip,

flute music comes spraying out of the nozzle and the heat is inside of him, it is like he can look down and see it burning there and he looks down, two bare legs, a torso rising up at him and like he is just noticing them for the first time. They exist apart from him, like another human being's, such odd turns and angles they take amid the flute streams, swells and bony processes, like he has never seen any of this before, this flesh, this stranger. He groks over that—only it isn't a stranger, it is his...mother...and suddenly he is back in this body, only it is his mother's body—and then his father's—he has become his mother and father. No difference between I and Thou inside this shower of flutes on the Florida littoral. (95)<sup>244</sup>

In this passage, Wolfe estranges the reader through Sandy's perspective as we note the “odd turns and angles,” a world like we “have never seen...before” (95). Sandy's body is defamiliarized; his once solid materiality runs fluid, as heat, water, and body merge, the margins between the self and other, self and world begin to collapse. Readers follow his affective state: estrangement, burning, flowing, transformation, a condensation of Freudian dream imagery and science fiction fantasy. Amidst this strange psychedelic imagery, Wolfe builds moments of recognition; readers “grok” Sandy's affective state as Sandy himself makes sense of the

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<sup>243</sup> Working the lineage of Deleuze and Brian Massumi, I treat affect as intensities, the raw bodily unmediated sensations that arise in and through the body-mind. See Massumi's *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation, Affects*.

<sup>244</sup> The word “Grok,” meaning to profoundly and intuitively understand, comes from Robert Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land* (1961).

experience. Sandy feels it, and so can readers too through Wolfe's affective map.<sup>245</sup> Readers learn how to interpret psychedelic affect through the narrative's emotional attention. Wolfe's narrative helps readers process psychedelic affects of awe and terror into emotions of transpersonal connection, intersubjectivity, and transcendence. Wolfe models the kind of open perceptual exploration and expansive mindset the Pranksters used to make meaning of psychedelic experiences. Psychedelic narratives, like all aesthetics, provide an affective map, a way of interpreting sensory intensities into meaningful feelings and rational thoughts.<sup>246</sup> Wolfe teaches readers to take seriously the perceptions and emotions of those under the influence of mind-altering drugs, in doing so, he helped turn on future generations to psychedelics.<sup>247</sup>

In a 1968 review, Paul West gushed about Wolfe's affective, emotional and performative power: "Here comes the prose, ogling and cavorting and aflash with gorgeous virtuosity, and with it a built-in response-kit" (19). The novel's "built-in response kit," West points out, allows Wolfe to possess his subjects and "tak[e] possession of the reader too, so that you either go along with him in everything, letting him dictate the timbre and duration of even every buzz or whooped emitted (such is the acoustical insistence of his style), or you close the book at once" (19).<sup>248</sup> West highlights the affective nature of Wolfe's literary techniques that

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<sup>245</sup>I make these readerly response claims for the sake of argument. Certainly, there is a variety of reader response based on the confluences of reception: subjectivity, social position and epistemologies. For some readers, Sandy's psychedelic experience has no place in their scientific understanding of the self as delimited and material. It seems that if the emotion is too far outside their common sense worldview, they will have more difficulty making sense of the affect. In *Statistical Panic*, Kathleen Woodward points to Alison Jagger's notion of "'outlaw' emotions" as a way of thinking through how emotions are repressed by epistemologies. See Jagger's essay "Love and Knowledge."

<sup>246</sup> Though, let Raymond Williams remind us, "not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought" (132).

<sup>247</sup>*The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* remains in print and well-read, particularly among college aged students.

<sup>248</sup> Paul West captures the multiple registers of Wolfe's postmodern style, "Wolfe's own dizzymaking pyrotechnical prose style—curt and lissome, heppedup and contemplative—somehow tells them, even as they are reading him,

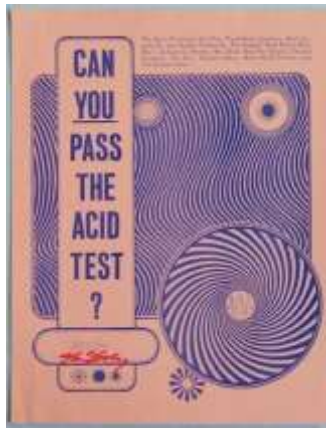
help to immerse readers in the Pranksters' alternative reality. Wolfe reconstructs the Pranksters' multiple performative identities for readers to possess and be possessed by. The emotional and cognitive power of Wolfe's narrative comes through in the transpersonal relations of the novel. Intersubjectivity, the group think, synchronicity, the transpersonal are central keywords in the Prankster's psychedelic aesthetic and postmodern theory. The power of intersubjective inhabitation, living and learning by reading the mind of another, was at the heart of the Pranksters and Wolfe's aesthetic practices. Wolfe models intersubjective relations in depictions of crowds, strategically mirroring possible modes of response for his readers through the performance of spectators in the novel. Wolfe records the reactionary mood the Pranksters stirred up in the small towns of America,

right away this wild-looking thing with the wild-looking people was great for stirring up consternation and vague befuddling resentment among the citizens. The Pranksters were now out among them, and it was exhilarating—look at the mothers staring!—and there was going to be holy terror in the land. But there would also be people who would look up out of their poor work-a-daddy lives in some town, some old guy, somebody's stenographer, and see this bus and register...delight, or just pure open-invitation wonder. (61)

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how it ought to feel while they are reading him" (West 19). From "The Pump House Gang The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test." *Commonweal* 134 (20 December 1968), 413-16.

The crowd responds in a mixture of terror and wonder, estrangement and desire.<sup>249</sup> Wolfe creates affective scenes of spectacle and invites readers to identity with some of the performed figures in the scene.<sup>250</sup>



**Figure 10: Prankster Acid Test Poster**

Do readers respond in horror or delight? Wolfe presents a challenge to readers, asking them to believe in the psychedelic reality and step onto the Prankster bus. Are you “hip” enough? Do you accept “Cosmo the Prankster god”? Do you believe in “Furthur”? Are you on or off the bus?

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<sup>249</sup> The affective intensities of awe and terror, which are on seemingly opposite ends of the spectrum, have been treated extensively in the tradition of the sublime. Sublime delight and terror register the meeting of the edge of conventional knowledge, the encounter of the unknown and the New.

<sup>250</sup> In establishing a crowd’s reaction to the Pranksters, Wolfe allegorizes the reader, creating a framework for readers’ affective response. As Flatley writes, “this allegorization of the experience that the aesthetic practice is itself promoting, the narration of the production of their own readers—this is the moment in which the text functions as an affective map for its readers” (83).

## Are You On the Bus? The Reception of a New Mood

*Despite the skepticism I brought here, I am suddenly experiencing their feeling. I am sure of it. I feel like I am in on something the outside world, the world I came from, could not possibly comprehend.*

—Tom Wolfe<sup>251</sup>

Like the Pranksters' acid tests, the book itself is a test, challenging readers' normative sense of psychological and social reality. There was an epistemological gap between the activities of Prankster avant-garde and his imagined audience, likely composed of the white literary world and college co-eds; "she was learning...that the world is sheerly divided into those who have had the experience and those who have not—those who have been through the door and —" (47). The challenge of representing avant-garde aesthetics or new epistemologies is that to readers might not be "quite ready."<sup>252</sup> In the novel, Wolfe models the resistant readers' responses through descriptions of the Pranksters in public, "But in July of 1964, not even the hip world of New York was quite ready for the phenomenon of a bunch of people roaring across the continental U.S.A in a bus covered with swirling Day-Glo mandalas" (91-92). I share the assumption of Hans Robert Jauss that readers' horizons of expectations – their epistemological sense of the known and recognizable— change over time with new experiences. One generation's enlightenment is another's pathological social deviance. Readers' recognition of the Prankster

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<sup>251</sup> *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* 25.

<sup>252</sup> Wolfe figures modernist-trained readers as some of the most receptive as he traces Kesey's experiments with sound recording to the modernist avant-garde, "Sometimes the results were pretty—well, freaking gibberish to normal human ears, most likely. Or, to the receptive standard intellectual who has heard about the 1913 Armory Show and Erik Satie and Edgard Varèse and John Cage it might sound...sort of avant-garde, you know. But in fact, like everything else here, it grows out of...the experience, with LSD" (52).

psychedelic reality thus relies on the successful uptake of Wolfe's representation within readers' epistemological horizon. Wolfe's goal is to foster readers' affective believability, emotional willingness and imaginative generosity; these receptive conditions are necessary to encourage readers to accept the trip in the Prankster spirit of awakening consciousness and playful transformation.<sup>253</sup>

In *The Witch's Flight: The Cinematic, the Black Femme, and the Image of Common Sense*, Kara Keeling suggests that certain forms of affect can disrupt our "habituated responses" and propel us into critical thought (13). Affect is an important bodily register of experience, it senses phenomena and experiences that exceed or elude both language and thought. The strong reactions of wonder and terror that the Pranksters evoked suggest that we can feel even what we cannot completely understand. Conventional and institutional knowledge is a form of power, a complex and unstable construction of the known world that incompletely intercepts our bodily affect (1628).<sup>254</sup> We feel beyond what we can visually perceive and discursively speak. As the ordinary "citizens of the land" witness the Pranksters, they "struggle[e] to summon up the proper emotion for this—what in the name of God are the ninnies doing" (78). Wolfe here shows how people can physically see and affectively feel phenomena that they may not be able to perceptually and cognitively register. The gap between seeing and knowing is resultant of the societal conditioning of the "rational work-a-day world," which is "blind" to the visionary "Other World" and provides "no language which will express the things I hear and see" (114).<sup>255</sup> Psychedelics attuned Kesey to the "sensory lag, the lag between the time your senses receive

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<sup>253</sup>I must credit colleague Brent Griffin for pushing my thinking here.

<sup>254</sup> See Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* and *The Order of Things*.

<sup>255</sup> Need to include more of a discussion of Gramscian commonsense here.

something and you are able to react” (129).<sup>256</sup> Wolfe continually points out this edge line between sensory perception and cognitive processing: “the whole landscape is lit up—it’s brighter than day—reds and golds and greens are chasing one another across the sky—oh, it’s beyond words, it doesn’t seem fair that I’m the only one to see it—I never thought such colors—” (148). Wolfe ends the sentence at this dash, suggestively leaving off the key word “existed,” and perhaps implying that there are perceptual phenomena that readers cannot fit within Enlightenment paradigms of reality. This failure in perception is resultant of power demarcating certain knowledges, like the altered drug state, unthinkable, and thus imperceptible. Yet, our bodies continue to register the presence of these feelings, even if we lack the words for them. Wolfe shows us that readers can make meaning out of these affective intensities through aesthetic altered states.

Wolfe connects audiences to the otherness of the psychedelic experience through the transpersonal affective and epistemological relations of the spectacular crowd. In the novel, those ‘in the know’ are bound together by this knowledge. As the Merry Pranksters understood it, “the world was simply and sheerly divided into ‘the aware,’ those who had experience being vessels to the divine, and a great mass of ‘the unaware,’ ‘the unmusical,’ ‘the unattuned. Or: *you’re either on the bus or off the bus*” (116).<sup>257</sup> If readers are drawn up in the Pranksters’ psychedelic energy and become attuned to their sensorial mood, they may begin to share the

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<sup>256</sup>Wolfe asks readers to trust epistemological faith in their subjective senses. This readerly trust is essential as he attempts to bring “inside the emotions, inside the subjective reality of the people you are writing [and reading] about” (16). “The only authentic way to deal with outside phenomena,” Mas’ud Zavarzadeh observes, “is to report them as they register themselves on one’s participating senses” (15).

<sup>257</sup>The Pranksters believed taking psychedelics was necessary to understand the experience, the “perception of the cosmic unity of this higher level,” the “feeling of timelessness,” and universal pattern “can be truly understood only by opening the doors of perception and experiencing it” (Wolfe 127).

Pranksters' relational epistemology.<sup>258</sup> The Pranksters drew people together through their shared emotional knowledge. Wolfe's task is to tap into this community's archive of affect.<sup>259</sup> Wolfe sees aesthetic representation as a process of invoking the "sets of meaningful data" in our human memory through strategic images and recognizable emotions ("Introduction" 48). By "manipulat[ing] the memory sets of the reader," writers can "create within the mind of the reader an entire world that resonates with the reader's own emotions" (48). Through the narrative's Prankster mood, Wolfe evokes what Kathleen Woodward calls binding emotions—"those that connect us to other people" (21).<sup>260</sup> By conditioning readers' affective and emotional response to the novel, his narrative has the power to potentially shift readers' epistemological worldview. It is in this way that the psychedelic aesthetic becomes a cultural formation in tradition of Raymond William's cultural formations: "those effective movements and tendencies, in intellectual and artistic life, which have significant and sometime decisive influence on the active development of a culture, and which have variable and often oblique relation to formal

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<sup>258</sup> Jonathan Flatley's discussion of mood is perhaps useful here. Mood is a form of attunement, "the foundation or starting place for everything else, the 'presupposition' for our 'thinking, doing, and acting,' the medium in which these things happen" (21). It is through a particular attunement, or affective mood, that attachment and thus value is assigned, where "things always appear to us as mattering or not mattering in some way" (21). Wolfe must build the attuning mood of his readers in order to secure their attachment to the psychedelic experience. For maximum meaning, readers must become psychedelically attuned.

<sup>259</sup> Jonathan Flatley suggests, "in an important sense, we never experience an affect for the first time; every affect contains within it an archive of its previous objects. Or, more exactly, there is a secret archive of objects out in the world in which our affects are residing" (81).

<sup>260</sup> *In Statistical Panic: Cultural Politics and Poetics of the Emotions* (2009) Kathleen Woodward provides a good overview of the ongoing debate about whether emotions originate instinctually in the self, or come from outside, a mood stuck upon us as we interact in the world. She sidesteps the debate by accepting both sides of the dialectical; "We live in a mixed economy of feelings, one characterized by both the psychological emotions and intensities, and my point is that they often stand in dialectical relationship to each other, with the narration of our experience a crucial capacity. Emotion can be intensity recognized redescribed, and owned, understood as if for the first time" (25). It seems that the intensities of affect initially arises within us outside of cultural scripts, example the raw unmediated affects of trauma, terror, and awe. These affects are almost immediately mediated through societal and cultural constructions and processed as emotion. Emotions are then further processed as cognitive thought. These multiple levels of affect, emotion and thought occur simultaneously in lived experience.

institutions” (117). In the case of the Pranksters, the cultural movement is toward the rejection of the capitalist ideologies, normative domestic identities, and the pathological normalization of subjectivities.

### Symbolic Spectacles

*don't just describe an emotion, but arouse it, make them experience it, by manipulating  
the symbol of the emotion.*

--Tom Wolfe<sup>261</sup>

The psychedelic aesthetic, like the acid trip, to quote from Avery Gordon, “make[s] a contact that changes you and refashions the social relations in which you are located” (22). Wolfe presents terrifying and awe-inspiring moments of contact through scenes of spectacular performance and crowd transformation. Staging spectacles at Vietnam protest rallies, Beatles concerts, in American hometowns and the quiet suburbs, the Pranksters disrupted the normative myths of family, nation, and capital by presenting their fantastic psychedelic alternatives. They destroyed familiar American symbols of the U.S. flag and the classic yellow school bus, making the flag into lurid costumes and the bus into a Day-Glo, drug fueled spectacle.<sup>262</sup> In the end, the Pranksters even deconstructed their psychedelic imperatives as just another ideological game, “Day-Glo game, this yea-saying game, this dread neon game, this...*superhero* game, all wired-up and wound up and amplified in the electropastel chrome game gleam” (360). To respond to

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<sup>261</sup> *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* 166.

<sup>262</sup> At the annual California Unitarian Church conference, Kesey dramatically steps on an American flag in front of a horrified crowd. The young minister who invited the Pranksters tries to explain the act to the congregation, “That flag is a symbol we attach our emotions to, but it isn’t the emotion itself and it isn’t the thing we really care about, but we get so distracted by the symbols” (166-7).

these deconstructive rituals with delight meant you were of the “Beautiful People,” the “potentially attuned” (116). Otherwise, readers are unattuned, off the bus. Wolfe offers some consolation, “either way, the Intrepid Travelers figured, there was hope for these people. They weren’t totally turned off. The bus also had great possibilities for altering the usual order of things” (61). Whether positive or negative, it is the alteration that the Pranksters sought. Readers of *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* undergo “consciousness-expanding, mind opening” rites as the narrative asks them to restore our “Blakean innocence” and overcome our “societal conditioning” (Zavarzadeh 22).<sup>263</sup> The narrative invites readers to question their epistemological worldview against the Pranksters’ alternative psychedelic experiences; was Sandy’s trip really “not a dream or a delirium but part of his awareness” (Wolfe 36)? If we allow ourselves to value affect as a bodily confrontation with the unknown, “various hegemonic and official common senses might be exploded, unleashing affectivity’s creative self-valorizing potential” (Keeling 6). Affect provides a way to reveal the invisible and to express the unspoken. It brings the subject to the edge of the unknown, and asks us to pay attention to the “ecstasy” and “vast revelation” that what we may feel there (Wolfe 113). If we believe in the possibility of alternative ways of perceiving and acting in the world, ones that may not fit within the hegemonic order, we are believing, in some ways, in the rupture of our known world. According to Kara Keeling, this moment of hesitation leads readers into critical thought, as readers try to process unhabituated affective experiences. This moment of thought-provoking estrangement contains the “condition of possibility for the emergence of alternative knowledges that are capable of organizing social life and existence in various ways, some of which might constitute a counterhegemonic force”

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<sup>263</sup> In “The Contingent Donnée: The Testimonial Nonfiction Novel,” Mas’ud Zavarzadeh persuasively argues that the Pranksters “undertake a series of almost ritualistic acts, aimed at dislodging the mind from its habitual mode of thinking and transposing it to a higher order of reality” (22).

(19). As we affectively register the psychedelic state, we must begin to weigh Kesey's "current fantasy" against what we know to be real, which in part means challenging our social conditioning and embracing alternative knowledges. Through the presentation of alternative affects and knowledges, Wolfe creates a "deconstructive mode of narrative" with the power to shift the readers' sense of known world (Olsen 289).<sup>264</sup> The Pranksters wanted to "de-school" the mind through the "hard kicks" of the drug experience, and replace it with the "the sublime, raw visions of alternative realities" (Farber 37).<sup>265</sup>

Wolfe and the Pranksters revel in the liminal zones of postmodern doubt. Mas'ud Zavarzadeh argues that the reality question is the heart of *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*; Wolfe's kaleidoscopic narrative "attempt[s] to deal with that zone of consciousness which emerges from the tension between the 'factual' and the 'fictional' levels of experience," and enables Wolfe to "rejec[t] the very notion of a monolithic, separable reality beyond sense experience" (15). The psychedelic mode of consciousness helps illuminate the ideological constructiveness of reality because psychedelics "suddenly force[s] your mind to reach for connections between two vastly different orders of experience" (Wolfe 125). Theorist of the fantastic, Darko Suvin suggests that we may learn more in a "space of a potent estrangement" like the psychedelic.<sup>266</sup> The Pranksters and Wolfe's psychedelic aesthetic construct "a realistic

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<sup>264</sup> This deconstructive shift is temporary and partial: "The whole other world that LSD opened your mind to existed only in the moment itself—Now—and any attempt to plan, compose, orchestrate, write a script, only locked you out of the moment, back in the world of conditioning and training when the brain was a reducing valve" (Wolfe 52).

<sup>265</sup> David Farber provides an excellent overview of the political dimensions of the psychedelic culture in "The Intoxicated State / Illegal Nation: Drugs in the Sixties Counterculture." See *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and 70s*, ed. Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle.

<sup>266</sup> Fantastic texts, in Darko Suvin's words, "ten[d] toward a dynamic transformation rather than toward a static mirroring of the author's environment" (10). See Darko Suvin's *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*.

irreality,” that readers affectively feel, cognitively consider, and deconstruct (Suvín viii). The Pranksters and more broadly the sixties counterculture project was about the breakdown of white suburban American common sense. Wolfe, Kesey and the Pranksters’ psychedelic aesthetics reject the Enlightenment myth of a singular objective reality and present postmodern models of multiple, co-existent, subjective, and indeterminable realities.<sup>267</sup>

### The Pranksters Welcome the Postmodern Media Age

*The trip, in fact the whole deal, was a risk-all balls-out plunge into the unknown.*

--Tom Wolfe<sup>268</sup>

For the Pranksters, the psychedelic transformation was more than an aesthetic flourish. It was about temporarily altering the relations between individuals, others, and their environments. The Pranksters’ aesthetic aim was to “go through the face of America muddling people’s minds,” but they recognized “it’s a momentary high, and the bus would be gone, and all the Fab foam in their heads would settle back down in their brain pans” (63). Despite their resistance to capitalist imperatives of labor and commercialism, The Pranksters’ multimedia aesthetic was subsumed back into the gadgetry marketplace. They relied on the latest media technologies of strobe lights, cameras, recorders and stereos for their aesthetic expression. Their Acid Test spectacles were used for profit by Bill Graham and the Fillmore and later commercialized into concerts and festivals. By the end of the decade, the revolutionary potential of psychedelic aesthetics started

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<sup>267</sup> If readers can believe that “Ego and Non-Ego started to merge,” that “a sound became...a color,” “colors became smells, walls began to breathe like the underside of a leaf, with one’s own breath,” can they accept postmodern transhuman subjectivity (125)?

<sup>268</sup> *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* 78.

to wither under marketing clichés. In paisley and Day-Glo Campbell's Soup and Coca Cola advertisements, the commercialization of the psychedelic aesthetic was, in Wolfe's words, like "pure ambrosial candy for the brain with creamy filling every time. To which Kesey would say: 'They know *where* it is, but they don't know *what* it is'" (224). The Pranksters would eventually go "Beyond Acid," staging an acid graduation in Haight-Ashbury to phase out their psychedelic use. The "Beyond Acid" movement was about seeking alternative modes of postmodern epistemology and praxis without using psychedelic substances themselves. He felt the Pranksters "had made the trip now, closed the circle, all of them, and they either emerge as Superheroes closing the door behind them and soaring through the hole in the sapling sky, or just lollygag in the loop-the-loop of the lag" (290).

The Merry Pranksters led the way in "this amazing experiment in consciousness," "out on a frontier neither they nor anybody else ever heard of before" (47-48). Given the popular success of the book, it seems Wolfe was indeed successful in pulling readers into the Pranksters' strange experiment.<sup>269</sup> The Pranksters' hope for the psychedelic aesthetic is that "everyone goes manic and euphoric like a vast contact high, like they have all suddenly taken acid themselves" (68).<sup>270</sup> In *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, Wolfe stretches his linguistic skills to reorient

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<sup>269</sup> Like Kallan, I credits the novel's successful reception to Wolfe's affectively dynamic prose; "with rapid-flow immediacy, events unfold; the reader suddenly there, seeing and hearing firsthand, listening to Kesey's vision, interacting with Kesey and the Pranksters, experiencing the soaring heights of their highs" (74). By pulling us into their high, readers are further suspended in the fantastic encounter, buying this new reality, even if only for a moment.

<sup>270</sup> Wolfe did not take acid while with the Merry Pranksters, but eventually felt he must experience it before finishing the book. He told an interviewer about his experience, "I had a friend in Buffalo who had access to LSD, so I went up there and took 125 milligrams. At first I thought I was having a gigantic heart attack—I felt like my heart was outside my body with these big veins...As I began to calm down, I had the feeling that I had entered into the sheen of this nubby twist carpet—a really wretched carpet, made of Acrilan—and somehow this represented the people of America, in their democratic glory. It was cheap and yet it had a certain glossy excitement to it—I even felt sentimental about it. Somehow I was merging with this carpet. At the time, it seemed like a phenomenal insight, a breakthrough" (qtd. in Scura 212). Wolfe would later dismiss it as not meaning "a goddamn thing" (212). Though

readers away from conventional notions of reality and toward the ‘turned on’ psychedelic experience. Through the popular and critical success of Wolfe’s postmodern novel, the Pranksters’ multimedia aesthetic became the epoch of “the psychedelic movement, whose waves are still felt in every part of the country, in every grammar school even, like the intergalactic pulse” (Wolfe, “Introduction” 30). Wolfe remembers that after he wrote the book, he “then waited for the novels that I was sure would come pouring out of the psychedelic experience...but they never came forth, either” (30). Where others failed to meet the representational challenges of the psychedelic aesthetic, Wolfe succeeds. Like the Merry Pranksters, Tom Wolfe was an “Intrepid Traveler” (59); as Wolfe once remarked about Kesey, “somebody has to be the pioneer and leave the marks for others to follow” (27).

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Wolfe is skeptical about his personal experience with LSD, he admits that the mind-expanding and experimental environment of the psychedelic sixties affected him significantly.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Light Fantastic: Cinematic Expressions of Psychedelic Perceptions

*It was the world's first acid film, taken under conditions of total spontaneity barreling through the heartlands of America, recording all now, in the moment. The current fantasy was...a total breakthrough in terms of expression...but also something that would amaze and delight many multitudes, a movie that could be shown commercially as well as in the esoteric world of the heads.*

– Tom Wolfe<sup>271</sup>

Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters were fascinated with film. With Hagen and Walker at the helm, the camera ran in the background of their many adventures as they sought to document their psychedelic experiences. Canisters piled up in Kesey's La Honda house, yards of uncut footage waited to be edited, while the Pranksters recorded more and more. Their hope was to share their psychedelic experiences on screen. But, aside from projections of short clips for private viewings and their Acid Test productions in the mid-1960s, the footage was never compiled together. It was only in 2011 that Alison Ellwood and Alex Gibney edited the Pranksters' hundreds of hours of film into the feature length documentary *The Magic Trip*. The result is a candid glimpse into the Prankster's road trip on the Furthur bus in 1964. Ellwood and Gibney's *The Magic Trip* provides an important documentary view of the West coast counterculture and the Pranksters' psychedelic experimentation. Feeling "writers are trapped by artificial rules," Ken Kesey moved away from a successful career as a novelist and turned to film and live performance (136). The highly visual nature of psychedelic experiences seemed to beg

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<sup>271</sup> *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* 122.

cinematic treatment as Aldous Huxley, Gene Youngblood and others have observed. Even Tom Wolfe's novel about the Pranksters, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, borrows cinematic techniques of montage to capture their psychedelic fantasy. Despite their attempt to make "the world's first acid film...a total breakthrough in terms of expression," the Pranksters fail to capture the internal nature of psychedelic experiences.<sup>272</sup> Watching the Pranksters wander around the California desert, high on acid, I wonder, how can film represent the altered states of perception and sensory experiences of psychedelics?

Psychedelic writers stretched metaphoric language and experimental typography to imaginatively invoke the perceptual disruption of their psychedelic fantasies. Filmmakers responded to this representational challenge with experimental discontinuity editing and splicing, the use of saturated lights, color filters and special lenses. What we commonly call cinematic 'special effects' were rapidly advanced by filmmakers in the American psychedelic aesthetic tradition. As in the print narratives I've discussed in prior chapters, the limits of form were pushed to meet the demands of the ineffable and fantastical psychedelic aesthetic. While the Pranksters were skilled at orchestrating immersive multimedia productions during their Acid Tests, their footage lacks the postproduction special effects that were essential to the formation of the psychedelic aesthetic in sixties' cinema like Storm de Hirsch's *Peyote Queen* (1965), Roger's *The Trip* (1967), and Tobe Hooper's *Eggshells* (1969). These films vividly capture the

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<sup>272</sup> The Pranksters' were inexperienced in film production and had limited access to professional postproduction technologies. Without film education, Kesey struggled to work with cinematic syntax, and eventually returned to literature.

visual distortions of time and space, synaesthetic visions and emotional enchantment of psychedelic altered states.<sup>273</sup>

This chapter traces the emergence of the psychedelic aesthetic in 1960's American cinema. I look at three seemingly disparate examples: a 9 minute avant-garde experiment in cinematic form, a commercial B movie starring one of the generation's hottest young actors, and an independent film made at the cusp of the seventies, lost and unscreened until it was restored in 2009. De Hirsch's *Peyote Queen* (1965), Corman's *The Trip* (1967), and Hooper's *Eggshells* (1969) encapsulate in some small measure a wider genealogy of the psychedelic aesthetic in American cinema. Psychedelic aesthetics inspired technological innovation in cinema, pushing filmmakers to develop new cinematic special effects in editing, filters, use of strobes and light effects, and manipulation of the film stock. These cinematic special effects were a structural response to artists and audiences' desire to capture psychedelic structures of feeling. The body is central in these films, as we see in Storm de Hirsch's attention to the haptic senses in photographing of her own body. She invites audiences to feel their own bodily presence through recognition of affect onscreen, even as she juxtaposes this materiality with scenes of animated abstractions. Cinema's audio-visual capacity can more fully engage audiences' senses than print. Manipulations of the cinematic form, through light filters, saturated colors, and collision editing, can create disruptive and estranging affective experiences for audiences familiar with

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<sup>273</sup> I use Gene Youngblood's spelling of synaesthetic in *Expanded Cinema* (1970). I use the term, synaesthetic, in its common definitions as an invoking of a sense (ex. smell) through the representation through another sense (ex. sight) and as a bringing together and integration of all the senses through a single medium. I also align the term with Youngblood's usage (of whose example I follow in the spelling of synaesthetic) as a "mind manifesting." Youngblood renews the vitality of sensory experiences, demonstrated in the present participle manifesting., Youngblood poetically suggests that aesthetic meaning is built out of sensory relationality: "Romance is born in the space between events" (127) "It ceases to be spectacle because its real subject cannot be displayed." (117)

Hollywood's "illusion[s] of continuity" and ideological closure.<sup>274</sup> In their various articulations, De Hirsch, Corman, and Hooper break from the popular manufactured realisms of Hollywood, neorealism, and postwar documentary in order to find visual space for their psychedelic perceptions and altered realities. In this believable space of shared realism, as *Peyote Queen*, *The Trip and Eggshells* variously demonstrate, these films can stage their psychedelic cinematic fantasies, hallucinatory dreams that aim to disrupt hegemonic common senses and normative narratives of identity.

The films of De Hirsch, Corman, and Hopper all illustrate the strange co-mingling of fantasy and reality that formally characterizes the American psychedelic aesthetic. Cinematic psychedelic aesthetic, as is the case in print, is indebted to Romantic, Surrealist, Expressionist and Realist poetic and visual traditions. Corman and Hopper draw on literary tropes of Faustian strivers, shamanic muses, tribal rituals, gothic castles, and medieval quests. The Romantic influences of the past are paired with visual imagery from mass media science fiction, fantasy, and graphic comics, proliferating new genres of the postwar boom. Burning film stock and painting onto the glass projection slides to make *Peyote Queen* (1965), Storm de Hirsch creates an experimental short and raises cinema into three-dimensional tactile relief. De Hirsch disrupt spectators' passive cinematic perception and reorient audiences to a new bodily psychedelic perspective, yet resists reincorporating that perceptual knowledge into conventional meaning.

Roger Corman takes the cinematic psychedelic aesthetic developing in underground film and

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<sup>274</sup> In "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," Jean-Louis Baudry identifies ideological power in narrative cinema's "denial of difference," presenting all visual frames as "a motionless and continuous whole" which "elaborates a total vision which corresponds to the idealist conception of the fullness and homogeneity of 'being'" (42). Conventional Hollywood cinema, Baudry argues, presents a "fantasmization of an objective reality" that creates an illusion of wholeness and closure that propels master meta-narratives and capitalism's visions of reality (43). See also Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Psychedelic cinema departs from modernist myths of objective reality by presenting all notions of reality as fantastical, constructed, relative and uncertain.

gives it the narrative treatment in *The Trip*. The film uses the quest trope, presented within a realist American setting, to draw audiences into the psychedelic process of cultural reconditioning as they follow Peter Fonda's journey for enlightenment. Despite its reliance on Hollywood plot formulas, *The Trip* is subversive in its ideological critique and visual validation of alternative lifestyles.<sup>275</sup> If the avant-garde *Peyote Queen* stands at one axis of the psychedelic spectrum with *The Trip* at the commercial end, Tobe Hooper's independent film *Eggshells* (1969) arrives squarely in the middle. Blending cinéma vérité, realism and abstract expressionism, *Eggshells* deconstructs myths of the counterculture and finds expressive space for the psychedelic aesthetic beyond the commercially popular "drug movies" of the late 1960s and early 70s.<sup>276</sup> This cluster of films illustrates how the psychedelic aesthetic developed along the varying nodes of American art house, Hollywood, and independent cinema. *Peyote Queen*, *The Trip*, and *Eggshells* exist along a wider continuum of psychedelic cinema, which I partially catalogue throughout this chapter. In their manipulation of perspective, obscuring of vision, disruption of time and space, their invitation for recursive and bodily recognition, and creation of mobile spaces of play and indeterminacy, these shared aesthetic approaches arise out of, give meaning to, and critique postmodern models of vision, subjectivity, and reality.<sup>277</sup>

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<sup>275</sup> For a history of Hollywood film and narrative conventions, see David Bordwell and Janet Staiger's *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (1985) and Bordwell's *Narration in the Fiction Film* (1985).

<sup>276</sup> For histories of the development of cinéma vérité and documentary film, see Betsy McLane's *A New History of Documentary Film* (2005). On surrealist cinema, see Inez Hedges' *Languages of Revolt: Dada and Surrealist Literature and Film* (1983) and Michael Richardson's *Surrealism and Cinema* (2006). Abstract Expressionism is typically associated with painting, but scholars and curators have identified influence of this aesthetic in the films of John Whitney and Storm de Hirsch. De Hirsch's short films *Aristotle* (1965) and *A Reticule of Love* (1965) were included in an exhibit of Abstract Expressionism at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, curated by Anne Morra and Sally Berger.

<sup>277</sup> In their deconstruction of perceptual and narrative truths, in their embrace of kaleidoscopic multiplicity and uncertainty, these psychedelic films take part in the larger project of postmodern aesthetics and philosophy as initially outlined by Gilles Deleuze, Jean-François Lyotard, Ihab Hassan, and others. See Deleuze and Félix

Cinema is, in the words of Vivian Sobchack, “life expressing life, as experience expressing experience” (5).<sup>278</sup> Film mediates audiences’ sensory experiences through structurally affective visual techniques like intercuts, nonlinear editing, split screens, multiple exposures, light filters, prismatic lenses, and optical layers. In heightened Technicolor display, psychedelic cinema makes visible the mediated processes of vision. “The business of the writer or the film-maker,” media theorist Marshall McLuhan explains,

is to transfer the reader or viewer from one world, his *own*, to another, the world created by typography and film. That is so obvious, and happens so completely, that those undergoing the experience accept it subliminally and without critical awareness....The reader or spectator had become a dreamer under their spell, as Rene Clair said of film in 1926. (249)

Through filmic structures of affects displayed in narrative, acting, mise-en-scène, editing, we register various emotions and process these sensory experiences through the film’s value schema alongside our pre-existing cultural values. My interest in *Peyote Queen*, *The Trip*, and *Eggshells* is the possible embodied affects and cognitive effects produced out of the psychedelic cinematic aesthetic. De Hirsch brings audiences directly into a peyote trip, showing viewers a drugged state of mind through subjective cinematic perception. Corman guides along the process of a trip, taking audiences on Peter Fonda’s quest for psychedelic insight, while Hooper teaches audiences

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Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980), Jean-François Lyotard’s *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979), and Ihab Hassan’s *The Postmodern Turn* (1987).

<sup>278</sup> In *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (1992), Sobchack tries to close the perceived gap between representation and experience, seeing both film and everyday life as built out of the same structures of experience. She locates the bridge between aesthetics and ‘real life’ in embodied existence, “cinema uses modes of embodied existence (seeing, hearing, physical and reflective movement) as the vehicle, the ‘stuff,’ the substance of its language. It also uses the structures of direct experience (the ‘centering’ and bodily situating of existence in relation to the world of objects and others) as the basis for the structures of its language” (5).

how to see the “crypto-embryonic hyper-electric presence” just outside our perceptual blinders (Austin Film Society). The psychedelic cinematic aesthetic provides the visual and affective tools to help audiences register, situate, and give meaning to a range of ultra-sensory experiences. Psychedelic cinema deconstructs the Enlightenment conventions that naturalized a singular and static model of perspectival vision. De Hirsch, Corman and Hopper offer audiences visual models that are kaleidoscopic, diffuse, and layered.<sup>279</sup> Through these potentially estranging and reorienting affective relations between audience and film, the psychedelic aesthetic in cinema contributes to the postmodern deconstruction of visual and linguistic certainty and challenges totalizing myths of self and social identity. These films are not escapist stoner flicks. They are cinematic protests against singular and static Western conceptions of perception, self and society, and filmic utopias of pluralism, relativity, and social change.

### Storm de Hirsch Conjures the Peyote Queen

Storm de Hirsch’s nine minute experimental film *Peyote Queen* (1965) is a meditation on the nature of mediated perception. *Peyote Queen* is the second in a trilogy of short films called *The Color of Ritual, The Color of Thought*, which also includes *Divinations* (1964) and *Shaman: A Tapestry for Sorcerers* (1966). *Peyote Queen* is about alternative forms of visual perception. Though the short film contains no explicit representations of peyote use, the title announces its

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<sup>279</sup> I use estrangement throughout this chapter to signify affective processes of ‘making strange,’ as the Russian formalists understood it. Estrangement is achieved through aesthetic techniques that distance audiences from the work of art, allowing audiences to see the constructed nature of the aesthetic and invite them to critically self-examine the constructiveness of their own reality. Walter Benjamin, responding to Brecht, saw estrangement as a manner of seeing the self as an object, treating one’s own life to critical reflection and inquiry. This self-estrangement denaturalizes cultural givens and opens up the space for recognizing alternatives. I focus on estrangement over other somewhat related terms like *Verfremdungseffekt*, *ostranenie*, alienation effect, and defamiliarization (the translation and proximity of these terms is much debated). Bertolt Brecht’s alienation effect invites audiences to grapple with social issues rather than to identify with a story or characters. See Brecht’s “A Short Organum for the Theatre” (1949). Viktor Shklovsky’s *ostranenie* is a literary trope that makes the reader see reality from a different perspective. This strategy of perception is discussed in *A Theory of Prose* (1925).

affiliation between psychedelic drugs and the form of sensory perception de Hirsch presents. Like her contemporaries Jordan Belson, Stan Brakhage, Jonas Mekas, and Marie Menken, De Hirsch resists Hollywood feature film conventions in favor of abstract formalism. There is no narrative, no characters or actors beyond de Hirsch herself (who only appears on camera in fragmented parts, recording close ups of her breast, eye and mouth through a glass prism).<sup>280</sup> She rejects conventional photographic point of view shots, primarily using animation instead. De Hirsch defamiliarizes photographic and animation conventions by creating her images through destruction of the film stock itself.



**Figure 11: Still from *Peyote Queen* (1965)**

In an interview with Jonas Mekas, de Hirsch said in making the film, “I wanted badly to make an animated short” but “had no camera available. I did have some old, unused film stock and several rolls of 16mm sound tape. So I used that—plus a variety of discarded surgical instruments and the sharp edge of a screwdriver—by cutting, etching, and painting directly on

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<sup>280</sup> I base my assumption that the person filmed in *Peyote Queen* is de Hirsch herself on the scholarship of Wheeler Winston Dixon. See “Performativity in 1960s American Experimental Cinema: The Body as Site of Ritual and Display.” *Film Criticism*. 23.1 (1998): 45-60.

both film and tape” (Anthology Film). Her punctures, emitting light through the hole, form multiple projection sites. De Hirsch literally pokes holes in the suture of cinematic objectivity, creating her cinematic vision out of ruptures instead of seams. When she does use photographic film, the camera viewpoint is mediated and refracted through prismatic lens, preventing audiences from seeing the profilmic reality the way it is “normally” photographed. In doing so, *Peyote Queen* challenges the reign of the “Renaissance-based mode of vision” that flattens the perspectival image. Instead, she presents drug experiences with sensory immediacy and kaleidoscopic photographic imagery. The collisions and shifts of the quick cross-cut editing further estrange audiences’ sense of time and place, while a nondiegetic musical soundtrack of rhythmic percussion and jazz creates a new order. De Hirsch tries to create a trance state in her hypnotic visuals and music. In this altered cinematic state, *Peyote Queen* visually deconstructs Hollywood cinematic convention and modernist literary faith in signification, replacing it with a free play of moving, merging, ever changing lights and images. De Hirsch resists Enlightenment models of objective perception, presenting vision instead as always multiple, diffuse, and refracted through our everyday interaction with multidimensional mediums of art and representation.

In this “personal art film,” a genre Sheldon Renan cites as fundamental to the expansive development of underground filmmaking in the 1960s, de Hirsch highlights the personal side of film production and deliberately situates herself outside of the commercial Hollywood industry. Instead of the conventional feature film sequence of opening titles and production credits, the film begins simply with a charmingly handmade title screen, reminiscent of women’s scrapbooking and craft culture. *Peyote Queen* is written in paint with a mother of pearl button

substituting for the Q. Plastic, prismatic jewels and small drawings of flowers frame the script. In a meta-commentary on film paratext, the title page's material presence is highlighted as the camera films this page beyond its margins, showing the paper to be noticeably off-kilter on the black background. The handmade, personal quality of the film is further underscored by the closing credits; one still frame reading "by Storm de Hirsch" written again by hand. The handwritten title and credits underlines the tactile quality of de Hirsch's aesthetic.



**Figure 12: Title Screen from *Peyote Queen* (1965)**

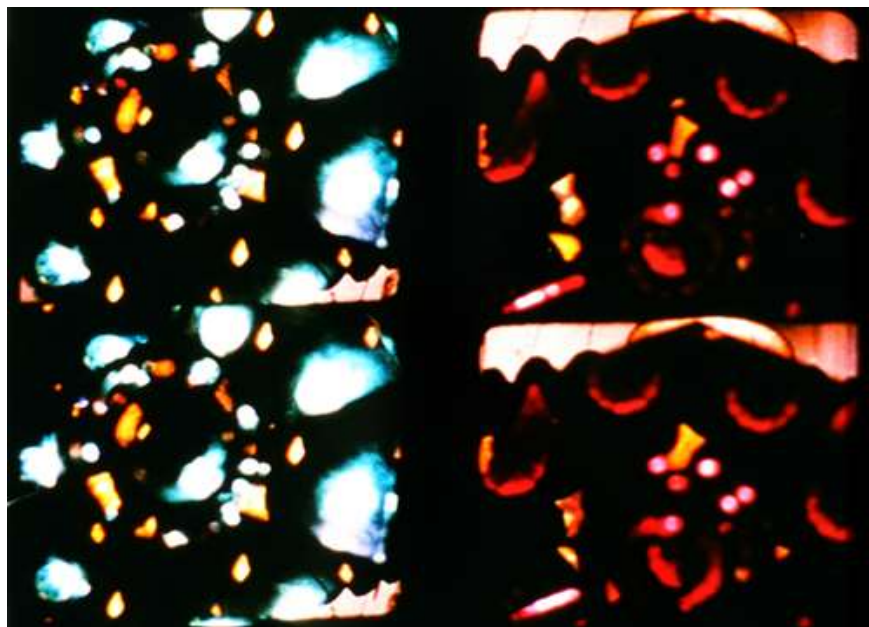
The materiality of the button and jewels is contrasted with the two dimensional paper, film, and projection screen. De Hirsch presents audiences with a material juxtaposition, flattening out the film image yet raising audiences' haptic sensory awareness with the tactility of these buttons and jewels. De Hirsch's emphasis on the craft materiality of her handmade, personal film provides a bodily frame for the film, especially important given the depersonalized abstraction of the first

sequence of the film. De Hirsch, like the other filmmakers in this chapter, treats the body as a touchstone in her psychedelic aesthetic, as it is through bodily sensations that audiences can register cinematic affect and process its various cognitive and metaphysical effects.

The film is divided into three parts. It opens with a black screen lit up by white perforations emitting light, as seen in figure 1. Scattered dots, lines, and slashes move and disappear in seemingly random order. The visuals are accompanied by a musical score of rhythmic percussion, reminiscent of indigenous tribal rituals. After a few minutes, the white lines switch to slashes of colored film, appearing as if the glass slides were painted on and shown through the cut outs in the black film stock. In her physical destruction of and creative addition to the film stock itself, de Hirsch reminds us of the haptic senses, the feelings of touch invoked by the button and jewels on the title screen, the tactile realization of the cut up film and the painted on color, the beating of the drums. As the cut outs flicker along the black screen, audiences are asked to make meaning out their sensory experiences as they witness, in Youngblood's echoing of psychedelic and Eastern philosophies, "one image constantly manifesting" (86-87). De Hirsch then splits the screen up into four quadrants, with each square displaying different colors, images of prismatic light, and honeycomb jeweled colors in reds, yellows, blues and greens. As the colors change and merge, de Hirsch creates the kind of synaesthetic cinema Gene Youngblood calls for in his influential aesthetic statement *Expanded Cinema* (1970), "a physical, structural equivalent of the Hopi 'present manifested' and 'present manifesting' space-time continuum" (86). To observe the cinematic manifestation of a present moment, without narrative or character development to provide meaning, asks audiences to inwardly examine of the self and the affective relation to the object seen. This reflective moment

is affectively estranging because it breaks the position of the passive spectator, and makes critical demand on audiences to process these affective experiences. Psychedelic aesthetics and philosophy, as discussed in earlier chapters, is centrally concerned with this mindful observation of the present moment as it manifests, taking reality with all its objects and subjects not as static givens, but always in relative flux.

In the next sequence, de Hirsch turns to the traditional photographic mode, but she defamiliarizes this photographic standard with kaleidoscopic effects. From the quadrants of abstract colors, de Hirsch switches to a filmed image of a lamp decorated with plastic manufactured jewels. De Hirsch focuses on a close up image of the lamp; the hazy clusters of jewels reflect multicolored light that shine and blend together.



**Figure 13:** Still from *Peyote Queen* (1965)

Displayed in a quadrant split screen, the images of the lamp rotate at different speeds and are presented at slightly different camera angles. Audiences see nearly the same image, but with a difference in each of the four quadrants. “The effects of metamorphosis,” which Youngblood describes as central to synaesthetic cinema, “become more apparent if shots A, B, and C happen to be of the same image but from slightly different perspectives, or with varied inflections of tone and color” (86-87). Metamorphosis is used in the psychedelic aesthetic to disrupt static notion of object and subject, unsettle totalizing identity categories, and treat signification as always in flux. De Hirsch invites audiences to look closer to discern the degrees of difference, to watch the objects’ diversity unfold and manifest before them.

Recognizing difference on and through the body is essential to de Hirsch’s aesthetic. In the next sequence, De Hirsch turns to the human form, presenting a breast reflected through a prismatic lens. The camera focuses sensuously on the nipple, seen refracted and multiplied by eight through the prism. The image of the nipple appears unfamiliar in its intimate close up and its multiplication. The camera momentarily pans out to show part of the breast from a side view, but the audience never gets a full view as de Hirsch keeps the audience’s desire in constant deferral in her partial, refracted views. Wheeler Winston Dixon suggests that de Hirsch herself becomes the object manifesting before us; de Hirsch “extend[s] the filmmaker’s body into the performance space of the film frame, as de Hirsch photographs herself, nude, through a variety of prismatic lenses and diffusion filters, presenting her body as the site of ritualistic display to her audience” (“Performativity” 52). De Hirsch defamiliarizes commercial pornographic portrayals of the nude form which makes the female body into a static object of voyeuristic desire. In her feminist cinematic gaze, de Hirsch’s body is a performance in flux, multiplicity

and diffusion. The attention to the sensual body is especially important in the psychedelic aesthetic because it grounds the psychedelic's intellectual and spiritual abstractions back into empirical materiality. The breast then shifts to an eye, the image again altered through the prismatic lens. I take the eye, an image de Hirsch returns to again towards the end of the film, as particularly significant. De Hirsch estranges our vision through the kaleidoscopic eye. Visually multiplying the eye, de Hirsch suggests that vision is always plural, diffuse, and relative. Film scholar Gwendolyn Audrey Foster points out how de Hirsch's films work towards a "reconfiguration of the primal scene enacted among filmmaker, film, apparatus, and spectator" (105). She looks back at us through the lens; her eyes form an audience of spectators looking for meaning from disparate angles but originating from a singular point of departure. Multiplied, divided, deferred, de Hirsch points the eye back at the spectator, critically estranging our gaze through her fantastic self-presentation of filmmaker and film subject.



**Figure 14:** still from *Peyote Queen* (1965)

The music then abruptly shifts from the beating percussion to a jazz song, which sounds jarringly cheery and old fashioned next to the visually disorientating special effects. In this sequence, symbols painted in white light flash along the black screen, animatedly moving, sometimes in sync with the music, but often time dancing to their own discordant rhythm. De Hirsch presents simplistic symbols of fish, flowers, the male and female hieroglyphs, boats, breasts, circles, eyes, waves, river, sun, lips, rain, moon, stars, and clocks. These recognizable cultural symbols are juxtaposed with non-symbolic lines, shapes and scribbles. The symbols move, take shape, disintegrate, change into new shapes. De Hirsch again demonstrates “one image continually transforming into other images: metamorphosis,” a central tenant of Youngblood’s synaesthetic film (86). A drawn clock winds around chaotically, turning into a slashed zero Ø. In this image, de Hirsch’s “synaesthetic cinema, whose very structure is paradox, makes paradox itself a language in itself, discovering the order (legend) hidden within it” (Youngblood 87). De Hirsch here emphasizes the relativity of our cultural symbols, divesting them of meaning by leveling these cultural signs to the same plane as scribbled colored lights and holes in the film stock. None of these signs are alphabetic; they are pictorial, an act of international coding to be read across a number of languages and cultural positions. Gwendolyn Audrey Foster calls de Hirsch’s work an exploration into “a prelinguistic discourse of feminine language of the cinema” (105). Deconstructing Western cultural signs, de Hirsch deconstructs dominant masculine languages and replaces this linguistic void with visions of the female body and collective chanting by tribal women.<sup>281</sup> *Peyote Queen* teaches audiences to value visual, auditory, and tactile messages over linguistic signs. Aside from the title and credit screens, there

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<sup>281</sup> Extending Foster’s claim, I would argue that De Hirsch attempts to create a global language of cinema as she presents images and signs that could be potentially read by peoples across cultures and geographies. She especially cites South American and indigenous influences, in her invocation of peyote, a substance used in traditional South American shaman rituals, and in her use of tribal singers.

are no words, dialogue or lyrics in the soundtrack; this linguistic absence in the film is especially interesting given de Hirsch's work as a poet. De Hirsch, who was a published poet before turning to film, creates a visual poetics in her cinematic style. In her two volumes of poetry, *Alleh Lulleh Cockatoo* (1955) and *Twilight Massacre and Other Poems* (1964), de Hirsch develops a surrealist poetics in print that readily translates to abstract films like *Peyote Queen*. Reviewing her work in 1966 alongside contemporaries Le Roi Jones and William Bronk, Harriet Zinnes calls de Hirsch's poetry "lithe and surreal" (93). Zinnes connects Hirsch's poetry to her filmmaking, particularly in her use of montage, "this poet's work depends entirely on the rapid movement of one strange image after another (one can see why this writer has turned to films)" (93). De Hirsch's cinema is poetic in its movement and lyrical abstraction, but *Peyote Queen* is decidedly non-literary in its refusal of linguistic discourse and dialogue. Instead, de Hirsch moves audiences out of the linguistic realm and raises the visual and auditory space of cinema as a site of ritual incantation for psychedelic possibilities.<sup>282</sup>

During the final sequence, and what the Anthology Film Archive calls "a self-reflective coda," the music returns to the rhythmic drumming now accompanied by women chanting and singing (Anthology Films). The series of colored slashes and the perforated white holes on a black background return. Short interludes of polka dot and floral fabric prints are filmed through the prismatic lens, as well as blurred lights and a vague sense of a room, which de Hirsch prevents spectators from seeing clearly. The film draws to a close returning to the punctuated

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<sup>282</sup> Here, I echo Sheldon Renan's phrasing in *An Introduction to Underground Film* (1967), "Storm de Hirsch's *Peyote Queen* is very much like a ritual of incantation with its drum-punctuated visual changes" (32). This is Renan's lone description of de Hirsch's work, aside from a listing of her "mysterious shorts *Divinations* (1965) and *Peyote Queen* (1965), and a narrative feature called *Goodbye in the Mirror* (1964)" in his category of "The Avant-Garde / Experimental / Underground Film" which includes her contemporaries Andy Warhol, Nathaniel Dorsky, Bill Vehr, and Andrew Meyer. Renan's *Introduction to Underground Film* was an early catalogue of the 1960s experimental film tradition and used by early scholars and critics of the avant-garde. Renan's marginalization of de Hirsch leaves her acknowledged, but understudied.

darkness of the black screen with white lights momentarily flashing through the cut film stock. The reel ends with the credit screen, a simple signature “by Storm de Hirsch”; her cinematic authorship drawn out in painted penmanship. That hand drawn authorship would later show signs of impermanence as de Hirsch’s life and work gradually eroded away from popular and critical attention. Biographical and critical scholarship on Storm de Hirsch is woefully lacking. She receives occasional notice by film scholars, particularly by Wheeler Winston Dixon who remarks in his discussion of Shirley Clarke and Maya Deren in *Experimental Cinema: The Film Reader* that de Hirsch was “one of their most talented contemporaries,” yet she is “often marginalized” (Dixon 8).<sup>283</sup> Throughout many film histories and avant-garde critical studies, de Hirsch receives occasional notice, but little to no explication. Gwendolyn Audrey Foster makes a similar lament about de Hirsch’s marginalized status in *Women Film Directors: An International Bio-Critical Dictionary* (1995), finding it “truly amazing that the work of Storm de Hirsch is so completely ignored in the canon of experimental filmmaking” (105).<sup>284</sup> Foster suggests that women filmmakers like de Hirsch’s were marginalized due to the power dynamics of a male-dominated scene of New York filmmakers and critics in the mid-twentieth century. With her scrapbooked title screen, the women powerfully chanting, and the female body in intimate display, De Hirsch stands in contrast to the masculinized film subjects of contemporaries like Kenneth Anger and Andy Warhol. Undoing mid-century gender narratives through her kaleidoscopic diffusion, de Hirsch plays with what subjects are obscured, seen and valued.

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<sup>283</sup> In an earlier essay, “Performativity in 1960s American Experimental Cinema: The Body as Site of Ritual and Display,” Dixon demonstrates a case in point of this widespread critical marginalization of de Hirsch’s work by limiting discussion of her “considerable body of work” to one sentence (*Experimental Cinema* 8).

<sup>284</sup> Foster summarizes de Hirsch’s scholarly legacy, “It is an eye-opening experience to read the critical praise that de Hirsch received for her work from her contemporaries, considering that today she rarely rates even a cursory entry in most film encyclopedias or textbooks” (Foster 105). De Hirsch’s work is best catalogued by fellow filmmaker and essential scholar and supporter of underground film, Jonas Mekas in the pages of *Film Culture*. [Note to self: Need to check details at Anthology Film Archive: Mekas and de Hirsch were both founding members of the Filmmakers Cooperative, yet de Hirsch’s role in this organization has not been adequately noted.]

*Peyote Queen* creates a personal reign for de Hirsch to explore alternative possibilities of cinematic vision.

*Peyote Queen* highlights the mediated processes of vision and the way perception can be altered, multiplied, refracted, and diffused. De Hirsch tries to break the conditioned perspective audiences learn from conventional Hollywood cinema, TV, and visual art. Gene Youngblood, working from E.H. Gombrich's theory of art illusion, explains how Hollywood films are presented as packaged forms of objective realism through which "artists and society thus learn to read the schema as though it were objective reality" (90). Youngblood believes that this conditioned perspective strips audiences of the power of critical thought, "the viewer is captive under the hold, or spell, of the medium and is not free to analyze the process of experience" (Youngblood 90). De Hirsch attempts to draw audiences into a peyote trance of hallucinatory effects. Her trance state holds the possibility of becoming an estranged space apart from ordinary reality where audiences can critically reflect and investigate the very nature of perception, representation and meaning-making. Without narrative, de Hirsch leaves this affective experience for audience to make sense of and reincorporate into their subjective self-narratives. Her filmmaking is personal in its impersonality; its abstraction enables her psychedelic vision to be taken up by others for self-definition.

## A New American Cinema

*Our world is too cluttered with bombs, newspapers, TV antennae—there is no place for a subtle feeling or a subtle truth to rest its head. But the artists are working. And with every word, every image, every new musical sound, the confidence in the old is shaken, the entrance of the heart is widened.*

– Jonas Mekas, “Notes on the New American Cinema” (1962)

De Hirsch’s *Peyote Queen* is a forgotten film in an expansive and diverse tradition of underground, avant-garde, and art-house cinema. Filmmakers manipulated cinematic equipment; Stan Brakhage glued moth wings to celluloid, John and James Whitney illuminated wet paint, scratched and burned slides, Jordan Belson played with digital animation, building a new library of cinematic special effects. Screened at small theatres and private houses, experimental films like *Peyote Queen*, Kenneth Anger’s *The Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* (1954), Stan Brakhage’s *Dog Star Man* (1963), Ron Rice’s *Chumlum* (1964) had limited distribution, but were praised by the critics like Gene Youngblood, Jonas Mekas, and Sheldon Renan for their innovation of the cinematic form.<sup>285</sup> Avant-garde psychedelic cinematic developed alongside experimentations in light shows, theatre and other visual, plastic, and literary arts. The use of Day-Glo color schemes, cosmic, indigenous and otherworldly imagery, optical art and abstract

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<sup>285</sup> Kenneth Anger’s *The Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* (1954, recut 1966) was initially released in the same year as Aldous Huxley’s psychedelic treatise *The Doors of Perception* (1954). Sheldon Renan describes *Inauguration* as “a lavishly costumed magic masquerade party inspired by the neopagan rituals of Aleister Crowley. The various characters are from classical mythology, and as the celebration becomes an orgy, they become ‘high’ on an LSD-like witches’ brew and go through costume / make-up / personality changes, while the film itself enters a hallucinated crescendo of editing and superimposition.” (Renan 108). Anger made three versions of the film. The first is, according to Renan’s history, “a standard single-screen film. The second, shown in 1958 at the Brussels Experimental Film Festival, has a main screen flanked by ‘wings’ (two smaller screens used for counterpoint) and uses three synchronized projectors. The third, edited in London in 1966, is the final ‘psychedelic’ version and is calculated by the film-maker to be experienced under the effect of LSD. It has up to quintuple-imposition and uses added footage of the naked souls in Hell from Dante’s *Inferno*, an early thirties Hollywood spectacle” (Renan 108-109).

expressionism in the psychedelic aesthetic met the technical development of the light shows. Light technologies like strobes and kaleidoscopic liquid light projections disrupt audience's perceptual sense of space and appearance, and early digital experimentations with sound allowed producers to play with audience's sense of time and duration through mixed, overlapping tracks and programmed lags and delays.<sup>286</sup> Light shows become a ubiquitous part of the underground club scenes of San Francisco and New York. The "Vortex Concerts" at Golden Gate Park's Morrison Planetarium between 1957 and 1960 introduced expressionistic light shows to audiences in San Francisco.<sup>287</sup> The Merry Pranksters would popularize the light show experience at their public Acid Tests, hosted in the famous Fillmore Ballroom. Mas'ud Zavarzadeh goes so far to suggest that "the arsenal of technological gadgetry," from strobes, amplifiers, tapes, to mixers, lent the psychedelic experience "a quality uniquely American and unmistakably 'technetronic'" (23). For the baby boomer generation growing up in Marshall McLuhan's "electric age," light shows and immersive psychedelic performances drew from their already media-saturated American environments and made these media a source of parody and play. The West Coast especially became a site for visual and audio experimentation as the avant-garde film scene, which cohered around the San Francisco Art Institute and Museum of Modern Art, mixed with the Hollywood scene in Los Angeles and West Venice. These visual and audio aesthetic forms were intricately intermeshed with the drug counterculture, mutually inspiring each other,

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<sup>286</sup> Sheldon Renan makes this connection between the technologies of cinema and psychedelics, "Still another element in the development of expanded cinema, especially in color instruments and light shows, is the recent advent of so-called consciousness expanding drugs. It is desirable to have a maximum of visual (and other) sensations while under the influence of LSD. Many cinema environments and light shows are originated to simulate the effect of a psychedelic 'trip.' This has led to research into older and even ancient methods of the manipulation of light" (Renan 229).

<sup>287</sup> Renan ties the origin of light shows explicitly to psychedelics, "Its origin in time and place, the late fifties in North Beach and West Venice in California, strongly coincides with the beginning of widespread use of hallucinogenic drugs. (The names for light events, *Freak Out*, *The Acid Test*, and *Trips Festival*, usually have psychedelic connotations. And aficionados of light art call themselves 'color heads.')

The patterns that one sees in a light show are said to be similar to what the eye sees when a person is under the effect of LSD" (251).

as especially seen in the postmodern, multimedia performances of countercultural icons Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters.

While many of the short art-house films of the early sixties use psychedelic aesthetic techniques, only a few were about drug use explicitly. Some, like Stan Brakhage, denied the influence of drugs.<sup>288</sup> Though Brakhage sought to expand audience's visual perception, he advocated alternative ways of reaching these states, such as through meditation and eye experiments.<sup>289</sup> Yet, experimentation with psychedelic special effects in the late fifties and early sixties was instrumental to the mainstream psychedelic aesthetic that would solidify the popular images of the sixties' counterculture that continue to circulate today. The spread of psychedelic drugs, in particular LSD, in the mid-1960s created a provisional mainstream acceptance of the drug subculture as I discuss in chapter three. There was certainly public concern about the drug, which eventually led to its classification as an illegal substance in 1966. Representations of drug states in early cinema were rare, likely as a result of production codes.<sup>290</sup> When made, these films often contained a moralistic anti-drug message. Otto Preminger's 1955 *The Man with the Golden Arm*, starring Frank Sinatra, loosened Hollywood's self-censorship and introduced heroin addiction into popular consciousness, while the 1936 cult classic *Reefer Madness* hyperbolically

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<sup>288</sup> Jonas Mekas, on visiting LSD researcher and advocate Timothy Leary's Millbrook house and filming "A Report from Millbrook" (1965), remarked to Leary that "the chemicals that motivate and drive artists are more powerful and mysterious than LSD or any drug" (*Jonas Mekas Collection: Short Films Booklet*).

<sup>289</sup> See Brakhage's well cited *Metaphors on Vision* and the collection of essays *The Essential Brakhage* (2001), edited by Bruce McPherson.

<sup>290</sup> The Hays Production Codes instituted by The Motion Pictures Producers and Distributors of America governed representations of American films from 1930 to 1968. These codes supported the censorship of representations of drug addiction and excessive drinking, as well as representations of illicit sexualities, promiscuity and prostitution. These codes were loosened in the late 1950s as foreign films flooded the market. Not subject to the governance of these American restrictions, films of Bergman and Fellini stretched American audience expectations. Director Otto Preminger especially challenged the censorship codes and his representation of heroin use in *The Man with the Golden Arm* (1955) enabled the freer representations of drug use and sexuality prominently displayed in the 1960s psychedelic films I discuss here. See Lenoard Leff's history of American film censorship in *The Dame in the Kimono: Hollywood, Censorship, and the Production Code*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001.

presented the dangers of marijuana. These films, and others like them from the early and Golden Hollywood era, represent drug use primarily through third-person camera perspectives of the actors and setting. Techniques like the hazy focus used to imply a drug high were inspired by the dream sequences of surrealist and German Expressionist cinema. But, few American films before the 1960s attempted to represent drugs from the first-person perspective. Perhaps studios feared direct representation of the drug experience would be seen as a form of advocacy. Studios' refusal to produce and distribute psychedelic films could be read as a form of political partitioning off of audience desire. Yet, the general cultural interest in these drugs, whether for or against, combined with a generation of young movie-going consumers, inspired mainstream studios to cautiously embrace film productions about the drug culture.

### A Psychedelic Trip to Hollywood

A wave of Hollywood films featuring representations of psychedelic drug use came out in the mid to late 1960s. In "The Short-Lived Life of the Hollywood LSD Film" (2001), Harry Benshoff calls the commercial feature length LSD film "a historically specific microgenre," part of a larger subgenre of "head films," which share "specific iconographic or semantic elements (chiefly, the use of the cinematic apparatus to approximate the sensations of an LSD trip) and a concomitant thematic or syntactic 'take' on said experience" (29). Benshoff cites William Castle's *The Tingler* (1959), a horror film about a mad scientist, as the first commercial American film featuring LSD. Most Hollywood LSD films did not appear until the mid to late 1960s, with *Hallucination Generation* (also known as *The Drifters*) as one of the first in a steady wave of "genre hybrids, deconstructions, parodies and new 'microgenres' such as drug films, biker films, and youth movies" that capitalized on countercultural trends (Benshoff 30). One of

the most well-known commercial film about LSD from this period is Roger Corman's *The Trip* (1967), with the Beatles' *The Magical Mystery Tour* (1967) appearing in the same year. Film scholars have painted films like *The Trip*, *Head* (1968) and *Psych-Out* (1968) in the same disparaging light, uncritically labeling them as exploitative for their appropriation of the underground psychedelic aesthetic. Sheldon Renan remarks on the parasitic relationship between Hollywood and the avant-garde in his introduction to American underground film culture, "Commercial cinema has always used the personal art film as a laboratory culture to be watched for useable material" (51). Studios like American International Pictures (AIP) hoped to cash in on the youth subculture by making low-budget movies quickly and screening them at popular midnight movie events. Yet, it was at the same midnight movie screenings that art films like *Peyote Queen* gained a following; these overlapping sites of distribution suggest that the parasitic relationship between commercial and art film was actually more symbiotic. Roger Corman's *The Trip* provides an illustration of what a narrative feature film can do with the psychedelic aesthetic that short abstract films like *Peyote Queen* did not, most particularly the deconstruction of hegemonic American myths and values.

Roger Corman's *The Trip* takes audiences along a psychedelic journey of self-discovery. *The Trip* arose out of past collaborations with Jack Nicholson, Peter Fonda and Bruce Dern, actors and writers that Corman had worked with before on earlier films, most notably the motorcycle movie *Wild Angels*.<sup>291</sup> *The Trip* is a cinematic how-to guide for LSD. *The Trip*

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<sup>291</sup> Corman often worked with the same sets of actors over and over, especially given the quick rate he made films. A very prolific filmmaker, Corman has directed 56 films and produced over 400 films in the course of his career. He mentored so many actors, writers and directors, particularly those of the 1970's New Hollywood. Directors like Martin Scorsese, Ron Howard, and Peter Bogdanovich credit the influence of the "Roger Corman Film School." See the 2010 documentary *Corman's World: The Exploits of a Hollywood Rebel* for interviews with notable directors and actors citing Corman's influence.

focuses on the process of a psychedelic experience, bringing the audience into the ritualistic, yet personal, experience of taking acid from alternately objective and subjective cinematic perspectives. Corman uses distanced third person camera perspectives, what I will call objective here, to form the plane of common sense reality. The film logic uses these distanced camera shots, devoid of special effects, to represent the normative un-altered vision that the film assumes audiences share. Corman employs close ups, first person point of view perspectives, and special effects to show the subjective state of Fonda's hallucinations; these close ups, point of view shots, and special effects represent his altered state of mind, allowing audiences to visually experience his psychedelic subjectivity. Unlike fantasy films that take place in a completely fictional time and place with little correlation to a historical period, *The Trip* is realist in time and setting, taking place in its contemporary moment of mid-1960s Los Angeles. Yet, the film is fantastic in its presentation of the seeming unreal and irrational; through the protagonist's hallucinations, *The Trip* tests audiences' faith in material and psychic reality. *The Trip* uses fantastic elements like medieval and gothic costuming and mise-en-scène, abstract special effects, surrealist juxtapositions, and non-continuity editing within this realist setting in order to highlight the contrasts between Fonda's pre- and post- drug altered states. The hallucination sequences are fantastic in their seeming empirical implausibility, particularly in contrast with standard Hollywood realism of Corman's distanced third person camera view. Though audiences may wish to dismiss Fonda's fantastic visions as unreal, these hallucinations are real within the diegetic world of the film as they are experienced affectively and cognitively by the drugged hero. We watch as Fonda traverses desert and forest, followed by two Bergmanesque black hooded horsemen, as he swirls around a carousel with Dennis Hopper dressed as a Faustian

scholar, and as his face transforms into spider webs in a mirror.<sup>292</sup> The atmosphere of some of these hallucination scenes is crafted exclusively through production setting, costuming, lighting and dialogue, but the more inventive and affectively rich scenes are a result of postproduction editing and special effects. In his review of *The Trip*, film critic Hollis Alpert makes an astute observation on the effect of Roger Corman's formal mixture of realism and fantasy; he comments that Corman "is at his best when he mingles Fonda's dazed unrealities with the garishness of the real world he intermittently encounters" (Alpert 206). These intercuts of realism are essential in the fantasy aesthetic, as Kathryn Hume reminds in *Fantasy and Mimesis* (1984), fantasy depends on what the audience has been conditioned to think of as real (23).<sup>293</sup> As Corman plays on audiences' conditioned expectations of realism and fantasy to construct his psychedelic visions in *The Trip*, he enters audiences into processes of affective estrangement and critical thought.

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<sup>292</sup>Corman was very influenced by foreign filmmakers like Ingmar Bergman, Federico Fellini, and Akira Kurosawa. His production company New World Films helped distribute foreign films by Fellini, Bergman and Francois Truffaut in the 1970s. See Chris Nashawaty's *Crab Monsters, Teenage Cavemen, and Candy Stripe Nurses: Roger Corman: King of the B Movie* (2013).

<sup>293</sup> Hume seeks to correct the assumption that the Western canon is driven by realism or mimesis, "We need to go back and rethink the original assumptions, those being (1) that the essential impulse behind literature is mimesis; (2) that fantasy is separable and peripheral phenomenon; and (3) that, because separable, it is pure and best defined by exclusion" (20). Hume suggests instead a "different basic formulation, namely, that literature is the product of two impulses. These are *mimesis*, felt as the desire to imitate, to describe events, people, situations, and objects with such verisimilitude that others can share your experience; and *fantasy*, the desire to change givens and alter reality—out of boredom, play, vision, longing for something lacking, or need for metaphoric images that will bypass the audience's verbal defenses" (20).



**Figure 15: Stills from *The Trip* (1967)**

The film follows Paul Groves, played by Peter Fonda, on a LSD trip. The film opens on Paul filming a perfume commercial on the beach. Dressed in a button down shirt, sweater and khaki pants, Paul is portrayed as a square, particularly when juxtaposed with the hippies he meets throughout the film. Along with Paul, the audience enters the counterculture crash pad, an old Victorian house transformed by neon paint, beads, and young couples lounging on floor cushions. Joints are passed around in a communal ritual of inclusion. Paul is initiated into the drug counter culture as he smokes and passes the joint in a circle with fellow guests. While his friend and psychedelic guide John (Bruce Dern) picks up some acid, Paul is asked by one of the young houseguests why he is going on a trip. He initially questions her motives for asking, “Why, are you writing a paper?” He tells her, “curiosity,” then revises his answer, “insight.”<sup>294</sup> This exchange highlights the prevalent cultural and intellectual meanings of LSD use. In the opening sequence, we learn Paul is in the midst of divorce filings with his wife, whom he still seems to love, but has neglected in pursuit of his advertising and film career. Throughout the film, his wife’s image is repeated, chased after, and eventually morphed in Hitchcockian style

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<sup>294</sup> Roger Corman tried LSD for the purpose of making the film. Though Jack Nicholson, who was experienced user of psychedelics, wrote the screenplay, Corman felt it was necessary to have first-hand experience with the drug in order to responsibly make the film.

into another female subject of desire. Corman registers the intellectual current running throughout the psychedelic culture at the time, acknowledging that Paul's use of LSD is not for fun, but for the pursuit of personal growth and understanding.

Corman's attunement to the broader psychedelic scene in the 1960s is demonstrated in the allusions and references he places around the film's sets. John's apartment is a pastiche of psychedelic references: Buddha statues sit next to Sidney Cohen's collection of psychedelic essays *LSD* and the City Lights Pocket Poets edition of Allen Ginsberg's *Howl*, multicolored beads and tapestries hang from ceiling to floor. When Paul remarks on the psychedelic décor around the room, John responds, "I can't let you go tripping in a messed up place." John, a substitute for the director Corman, establishes a psychedelic mise-en-scène for Paul's experience. John acts as Paul's and the audience's guide. He provides explicit instructions and advice to orient audiences to the psychedelic experience. John gives the audience insider knowledge into drug use. The camera focuses in on the three pills that John lays down the table as he tells Paul these pills are "250 micrograms a piece." John then presents another pill, reassuring Paul that if the trip goes badly, he can give him Thorazine in case he wants to stop the psychedelic effects.<sup>295</sup> John asks for Paul's complete faith and trust as his guide. He references contemporaneous rhetoric on psychedelics, "You got to do just as they say, you got to turn off your mind, relax and then float downstream." John's instructions can be read doubly as reassurances to the audience, "You're bound to be nervous your first time." After Paul takes the

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<sup>295</sup> Thorazine (chlorpromazine), a strong tranquilizer, was taken to counteract the hallucinatory effects of LSD and was reported to help people come down from bad trips, or "bummers" as they were popularly called. Health clinics began to carry Thorazine especially for psychedelic related psychotic episodes. The practice of administering Thorazine and other substances to counter or stop the effects of psychedelics continues, though organizations like the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS) advocate for non-chemical interventions, such as talk therapy, in the practice of Psychedelic Harm Reduction.

pills, John says it will take about an hour to twenty minutes to take effect. The audience waits in anticipation as Paul cautiously puts on an eyeshade that John provided. The screen turns to black and then the swirling kaleidoscopic visions begin to appear as Corman begins to show reality through Paul's psychedelic eyes.



**Figure 16: Still from *The Trip*. Bruce Dern (John) and Peter Fonda (Paul)**

I spend time detailing this first sequence because of the way it initiates audiences into the drug experience. Audiences follow Paul through his nervous entry into the drug culture, socially in his interactions at Max's; culturally in his observations of the psychedelic art that decorates these spaces, psychologically in his mental preparation, and chemically in his ingestion of LSD. *The Trip* explicitly teaches audiences how to take LSD. The film acts as a cinematic manual for the acquisition of these drugs, the preparation of the set and settings, the dosage, props and guides. The film presents these scenes in a realist mode, showing Paul through a distanced third person camera, continuity editing, clear focus and Hollywood studio lighting. This first

sequence closely follows Hollywood narrative and visual conventions and prepares audiences for a counterpoint to the abstract expressionism and surrealism of Paul's hallucinations.

Once Paul is under the effect of LSD, the cinematic form transforms to reflect his interior state. Like de Hirsch, Corman brings audiences directly into Paul's psychedelic perspective. But, unlike *Peyote Queen*, the camera alternates between these interior visions and external views of Paul. Audiences have privileged access to both altered and normative states of perception as Corman intercuts Paul's hallucinatory point of view with distanced realist shots of his behavior. In one sequence, Paul runs down the city streets of L.A, as seen in Figure 5. The camera alternates between shots of his face lit up in co-mingled awe and terror and shots of the neon street signs morphed into streaking lines of color and vibrating light. The juxtaposition between the realist presentation of Paul stumbling around the city and the fantastic hallucinatory special effects of Paul's drug state provide doubled vantage points for audiences to critically observe and analyze the psychedelic experience. A strikingly affective scene is when Paul stares at his own reflection in the mirror. Audiences watch as the camera alternates between Paul staring into a mirror that reflects his mimetically empirical reflection, and Paul's subjective view, a hallucinatory vision of his face lit up in black and white lights, patterns and webs. The presence and absence of these special effects, made through rotating light projections, special lens, and postproduction film treatment, allows Corman to deftly switch between realist and fantasy modes.



**Figure 17: Still from *The Trip* (1967)**

The scene disrupts audience's expectations of normal perception as we alternate between these realist and fantastic frames. When the camera places these divergent realities on an equal co-existing plane, audiences' definitions and hierarchies of reality are challenged. The film puts forth a central paradox of representation; viewers are asked: what is real? Within the logic of the film, Paul is real and so are his visions. In presenting the seemingly unreal as real, *The Trip* enters into the realm of the fantastic, an aesthetic mode that plays on the audience's hesitation regarding the reality of representations in order to break audiences out of habitual patterns of perception and propel them into critical thought. Western paradigms of normative looking, enforced by modern psychology, are particularly challenged. Corman's special effects suggest alternative visions are possible not only through psychedelic drugs, but through aesthetics as well.

Corman shows his indebtedness to other Romantic, surrealist, and expressionist traditions that have taken the idea of alternative visions as their central thematic and formal concern.

Paul's LSD visions draw from a range of familiar psychedelic motifs, literary tropes, and cinematic references. Aware of psychedelic literature and scholarship, the film references the familiar trope of the death trip.<sup>296</sup> Paul hallucinates being buried, entombed and cremated in a medieval funeral feast and burial pyre. Paul's hallucinations borrow from medieval, Romantic, and carnival imagery.<sup>297</sup> Corman presents the psychedelic quest especially in Faustian terms. In one of his hallucinations, Paul appears in a surreal space containing a circus carousel, large portraits, flowing curtains and reflecting beads. A hippie named Max (played by Dennis Hopper), whom he met at the beginning of the film, appears in his vision dressed in Faustian robes. Paul's quest for insight and revelation seems to involve a Faustian bargain, though the film does not provide a clear answer to the costs of that exchange. Max seats Paul in mind-reading device that resembles a mid-twentieth century salon hairdryer. Echoing the Spanish inquisition, Max asks Paul a series of questions about his life and values. Max points to a series of iconic portraits on the wall, instructing Paul to stop him if he recognizes any of the figures, asking him "if they have any meaning for you." The camera closes up and focuses on portraits of Gandhi, Malcolm X, Sophia Loren, Uncle Sam, and Timothy Leary. The portraits cut to cultural symbols of the U.S. dollar, a heart, and a Christian cross. Paul has no reaction and finds no meaning in these very familiar cultural images and symbols. The film suggests that Paul's American values have been disrupted and his cultural capital washed away by his psychedelic experience. Paul's Faustian bargain is that he must let go of his accumulated cultural knowledge

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<sup>296</sup> Visions of death or material or psychic annihilation were sometimes common in psychedelic experiences, though psychedelic scholars in the 1960s much debated the frequency and meaning of such experiences. For unprepared users, themes of death could trigger fear and anxiety, causing them to feel they were having a 'bad trip.' Aldous Huxley, Ram Dass, and others suggested users should embrace such death themes, and reframed these experiences as constructive moments of self-transcendence and rebirth.

<sup>297</sup> A fan of foreign films, Corman seems influenced by the gothic imagery of Ingmar Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* (1957) and the surreal imagery of Federico Fellini's *Giulietta degli spiriti* (1965).

and start fresh. Max provides a psychedelic pedagogy for Paul, teaching him to release the myths of American commercialism, careerism, and monogamous marriage that were mainstays of Hollywood cinema. *The Trip* is a cinematic instruction manual, estranging Paul from expected American, capitalist, and Hollywood narratives of career and marriage and reconditioning him to accept new forms of value and relationships.

A central component in Paul's affective and cognitive reconditioning is in the area of human contact. Like de Hirsch's breasts in *Peyote Queen*, the human body is at the heart of the psychedelic aesthetic's affective power. Corman highlights the power of touch throughout the film. Paul's touchstone in reality is in and through the body. When Paul becomes paranoid, his guide John asks him to reach out and touch his outstretched hand. Their touching of hands provides some temporary comfort for Paul in the midst of a bad trip. Along with Paul, audiences' haptic senses may be activated, and with such sensory activation arises the possibility for strengthened bonds between audience and characters on screen. Later in the film, Paul wanders into a Laundromat and encounters a young woman. After talking for some time, the woman, rightly suspicious of Paul's erratic behavior, decides to trust Paul by extending her hand and introduce herself formally. Unmoored from his cultural knowledge, Paul stares at her extended hand, unsure what this socially conditioned gesture means. When they touch, Paul is amazed and the woman is affectively moved by his reaction. Watching Paul's estrangement from human interaction and his reentry into reality through touch, audiences are drawn in through the affective and cognitive power of bodily interaction. In *Deleuze, Altered States, and Film* (2007), Anna Powell draws out the importance of touch in synaesthetic cinema, "By watching characters touch objects and each other on screen, we 'touch' them ourselves, with consequent affective

responses. This is not just a fantasy projection. Engaged in the film, spectators recall their own memories of tactility and, via this recollection, virtually recreate the corresponding corporeal effect and ‘feel’ it” (100). Corman’s focus on the body, on the affective reactions of characters to each other’s bodies, brings the psychedelic experience back into real lived experiences, an important pair to the avant-garde abstraction of Paul’s visual trips.

The price of Paul’s psychedelic Faustian bargain is ambiguous. Paul is temporarily loosened from his American cultural knowledge and must relearn the manners of human interaction. Yet, he seems to gain the insight and emotional intimacy he was seeking from his LSD experiment. The final scene shows Paul rising in the morning from his lover’s bed and looking over the California hills. Without Corman’s permission, the distribution company American International Pictures (AIP) added a glass overlay in the final edit, ending the film with the apocalyptic suggestion that Paul’s mind has been irrevocably cracked, rather than the ambivalent, yet hopeful gaze out into the horizon in Corman’s original cut. The Hollywood studio condemns Paul to madness, an all too familiar scare tactic of anti-drug legislation and conservative morality campaigns.



**Figure 18: Final Frame of *The Trip***

Corman's psychedelic aesthetic is compromised by the Hollywood studio industry, reshaped to reflect the growing legal and scientific prohibition and societal censorship of such substances. Discussing commercial psychedelic films like *The Trip*, Anna Powell makes the astute observation that "mainstream narratives often gravitate against the energies released by their own experimental forays" (84). Powell's critique is well applied to *The Trip*. The psychedelic perception inaugurated in the film is somewhat undercut by the narrative compromises of the opening warning sequence and final cracked glass overlay. *The Trip*, and Corman's oeuvre at large, is often called exploitative because its commercial success came from tapping into popular trends and borrowing from avant-garde film techniques. Yet, while *The Trip* is a product of the Hollywood studio industry, Corman's visual message asserts the validity of the lived affective and bodily realities of psychedelic perceptions and suggests that cultural deconstruction through psychedelic estrangement is possible.

## Psychedelic Cinema Retreats Underground

From 1967 to the end of the decade, studios came out with a string of low budget commercial movies about the psychedelic counterculture like *The Acid Eaters* (1967), *The Weird World of LSD* (1967), *Head* (1968), *Psych-Out* (1968), and *Yellow Submarine* (1968). Others drew from the psychedelic aesthetic but divorced it from the counterculture, like Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). Studios gave increasing creative freedom to young directors like Dennis Hopper, Francis Ford Coppola, Peter Bogdanovich and Martin Scorsese; these freer studio conditions ultimately nurtured the development of the New American Cinema in the 1970s, which favored stripped down realist styles over excessive special effects. By 1969, uncritically optimistic representations of the psychedelic drug culture became clichéd and would be later parodied in the comic Cheech and Chong movies of the late 1970s and 80s. Hollywood LSD films accelerated the decline of the psychedelic aesthetic in the early 1970s because, as Harry Benshoff suggests, these films “often reduced the complex sensory, emotional, and intellectual experiences of the 1960s to a very restricted touristic mode” (30). Filmmakers turned to darker, more pessimistic portrayals of drug use, as seen in John Schlesinger's *Midnight Cowboy* (1969).<sup>298</sup> The psychedelic aesthetic would continue to permeate mainstream culture, co-opted on TV and in marketing campaigns, throughout the end of the sixties and the early seventies until the promises of this perceptual style grew dated and extravagant as cinema turned

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<sup>298</sup> Schlesinger draws from the psychedelic aesthetic in the party scene in *Midnight Cowboy*, though the drugs portrayed in the film appear to be amphetamines, heroin, and marijuana, not LSD. Benshoff interestingly ties the generation shift in amphetamine and stimulant use to the changing capitalist values of the baby boomers: “As the hippie counterculture of the 1960s became the upscale ‘Me Generation’ of the 1970s and 1980s, hallucinogenic drugs were surpassed in recreational popularity by central nervous system stimulants, most notably, cocaine” (30).

toward increasing documentary realist and naturalist modes. Dennis Hopper and Peter Fonda, who both starred in *The Trip*, came together in *Easy Rider* (1969) to deconstruct the commercial psychedelic aesthetic they helped forge. Written, directed by and starring Hopper and Fonda, *Easy Rider* is an elegy to the sixties' counterculture and the psychedelic aesthetic. The only psychedelic scene takes place in a macabre New Orleans graveyard. Hopper and Fonda take LSD with some prostitutes; their trip is filled with images of death and despair. The film draws to an end with the famously quoted lines, "We blew it." If *Easy Rider* puts the commercial psychedelic aesthetic to rest in a New Orleans graveyard in 1969, Tobe Hooper's film of the same year, *Eggshells*, gives it an embryonic nest in the cellar of independent cinema.

Though he would become famous for the horror films like *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) and *Poltergeist* (1982), Tobe Hooper's first feature length film was *Eggshells*, made in 1969. Set in a commune house in Austin, Texas, *Eggshells* is about a group of young people, working, playing and coming to age at the turn of the decade. In an interview, Hooper summarizes the film,

It's a real movie about 1969, kind of vérité but with a little push, improvisation mixed with magic. ...Most of it takes place in a commune house. But what they don't know is that in the basement is a crypto-embryonic hyper-electric presence that managed to influence the house and the people in it. The presence has embedded itself in the walls and grows into this big bulb, half-electronic, half organic. Almost like an eye, but like a big light, it comes out of the wall, manipulating and animating. (Factory Theatre)

This “crypto-embryonic hyper-electric presence” becomes a character in its own right, referred to by other characters as the ghost that lives in the house. This psychedelic spiritual presence imbues the entire film with a sense of metaphysical mystery and propels the characters in the film into inquiry, investigation and action. Given Hooper’s later genre work, it would be easy to classify *Eggshells* as a ghost story or a horror film. Yet, the presence in *Eggshells* is not monstrous or violent. Rather, it is psychedelic: immaterial, metaphysical and transformative. The presence defies description and understanding and invokes in the film’s characters and audiences the kinds of exploration and play central to the psychedelic aesthetic. Like *Peyote Queen* and *The Trip*, these psychedelic affects are achieved through Hooper’s experimental visual effects and narrative deconstruction of American hegemonic myths.



**Figure 19: Publicity Poster for *Eggshells* (1969)**

The psychedelic special effects are integral to the film’s story and Hooper’s overall aesthetic. Whereas De Hirsch’s *Peyote Queen* shows only the psychedelic state, providing no

outside perspective, and *The Trip* clearly delineates between the altered and normative state, the psychedelic perspective is infused throughout *Eggshells*. The film poetically suggests that reality itself is psychedelic. The camera finds the psychedelic in the ordinary: the dappled light coming through trees seen overhead from a moving car, the morphing, melting, merging masses at a Vietnam protest. Hooper blends realist and fantastic modes throughout and refuses to provide clear boundary lines between the real and the hallucinatory. One housemate, an artist and a loner, investigates the “crypto-embryonic hyper-electric presence” in the basement and discovers a fleshy orb of pink light coming out from the wall. The artist is deeply affected by the orb, entranced by its presence. He later discovers a machine in the basement, very similar to the mind-reading device in *The Trip*. He succumbs to the brain machine and the fleshy orb in the basement and seems to draw pleasure and personal growth from the experience. Hooper uses the artist’s reaction to the mysterious presence, brain machine, and strange leaps of time and space that occur in the basement to develop the experiential fullness of this psychedelic scene. Throughout the film, Hooper combines science fiction, fantasy, and horror tropes to represent the unexplainable aspects of everyday life in a Texas home. Hooper’s camera teaches audiences to witness the usually invisible visions and miracles that may exist just outside our periphery. Audiences are asked to tease out the lines of realism and fantasy and finally left to guess whether the house is haunted by a ghost, whether the visions seen are imagined or experienced, whether the affective bonds and love of the household are real and true.

*Eggshells* was described as a “time and spaced film fantasy” on its release posters. Like *Peyote Queen* and *The Trip*, *Eggshells* disrupts causal relations and resists progressive linear narratives. In one sequence, the camera is shot from a static angle overlooking a staircase in the

house. Members of the household individually walk up and down the stairs, one after the other, the shots edited together to seem sequential, though the conversation and dress suggests that time has elapsed between each trip down the staircase. Audiences view a party gradually progress from the sole vantage point of the stairwell, denied access elsewhere in the house, remaining on this staircase as guests arrive, congregate, flow, and depart. Hooper estranges audiences from human time and reorients them to staircase time, valuing only the events, movements and energies that occupy that particular space. Disruption of time, space and causal relations are a recurring feature in psychedelic experiences and, subsequently, in the psychedelic aesthetic. A common trope in psychedelic literature is the reportage of out-of-body experiences and an appreciation for object relations and nonhuman perspectives.<sup>299</sup> In Hooper's extended emphasis on the stairwell vantage point, we might ask whether the camera point of view supposed to suggest that audiences are looking out from the perspective of the ghostly presence that is referred to throughout the film. Are we the "half-electronic, half organic" eye-like orb haunting the room?

Unlike some other contemporaneous psychedelic films, Hooper does not shy away from the radical politics of the sixties. Hooper acknowledges the link between psychedelic reconditioning and political awakening. The film opens with a young woman walking the streets of Austin, encountering Vietnam protesters at the University of Texas Austin campus. Much of the film's dialogue is about feminist critiques of patriarchal structures, debates about communism and fascism, and the U.S. censorship of Vietnam news coverage.<sup>300</sup> Though the

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<sup>299</sup> See Chapter Two on Jane Dunlap and Constance Newland's memoirs of LSD use, both of which describe the deeply empathetic feelings they develop through their psychedelic out-of-body experiences.

<sup>300</sup> Hooper displays an especially deft hand in female relations, showing the ways women were marginalized and quieted in political debate by their male peers and how the domestic threatens to take over the lives of these young

film is not centrally about political action, Hooper uses dialogue throughout the film to establish the kinds of political, feminist, and social debate that circulated the hippie counterculture. His portrayal could be read as damning to some, as the young men and women of the film spout out simplified versions of communist philosophy and feminist theory. Yet, Hooper's inclusion of such discourse suggestively represents the forms of popularization that political theory and countercultural experimentation would take in a generation coming to age in at the turn of the sixties. Through the characters' discourse, Hooper takes particular aim at American imperialism and its damaging effects on physical bodies and social identities. The film's central theme is the romantic, intellectual and spiritual relationships built between members of the household, between couples, between friends, and between man and the "crypto-embryonic hyper-electric presence." The characters use discourse to deconstruct the hegemonic myths of American imperialist and capitalist society, as they critique the bodily destruction of war and the confining strictures of marriage and career. These emotional, bodily, domestic and spiritual relationships, built out of a psychedelic environment, are depicted as potentially transformative alternatives to dichotomous and fixed ideas of self and other, mind and body. Hooper presents a utopian hope for transcendence at the end of the film, suggesting continued personal and social growth is possible beyond the fading era of the sixties' counterculture.

The film presents three narrative closures: a funeral pyre, a wedding, and an act of transfiguration. Near the end of the film, Toast drives the car that he and his friends had painted with psychedelic and American flag designs into a field, takes an ax to the window shield, and

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women on the verge of marriage and motherhood. Through the screen time given to these young women, Hooper registers the increasing momentum of the feminist movement in the late 60s and 70s.

pours gasoline all over the car.<sup>301</sup> He lights a match, strips off his clothes to add to the fire, and then runs naked across the field away from the explosion. Toast seems joyful and freed as he ignites the Prankster symbol of the Day-Glo painted car and moves past the naïve countercultural clichés of American freedom. Like the Pranksters who called for people to “go beyond acid” in their Acid Graduation, Hooper seems to be encouraging audiences to seek out new forms of transcendence through art, relationships, and communal life. In the second narrative ending, one of the couples, Amy and David, are married in a park. Friends, family, straight and hippie, children and dogs co-mingle in their modest union. Hooper’s camera pays particularly attention to children, suggesting a new beginning for the countercultural young. The rabbi officiate reads the passage on marriage from Kahlil Gibran’s *The Prophet* (1923). In his reading, Amy and David are advised to “stand together yet not too near together: / For the pillars of the temple stand apart, / And the oak tree and the cypress grow not in each other's shadow.” They join politically and socially together in union by the marriage act, but are told to remain individual in body and mind. In this advice, Hooper registers an emerging postmodern model of identity politics in which difference is recognized as a social construction, yet the lived dimensions of that localized difference can still be registered and valued. Amy and David remain separate, distinguishable individuals who can acknowledge their difference in standpoint, even as they join together in productive union. Their traditional heterosexual wedding, a convention in literary realism, is followed by a union of another sort, a fantastic one of psychic communion and bodily transcendence. The closing sequence of the film shows the couple Maylene and Toast, and the artist and his unnamed lover, assemble the basement brain machine in a park, gear up by placing the device on their heads and wrapping a bag around their body. The machine starts, the bags

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<sup>301</sup> I have yet to confirm the name of this character. The credit screen does not list character names, just actors. Toast is my closest approximation to what is said in the dialogue.

deflate and contract, a spigot releases a stream of muddy water, and their bodies disappear, dematerializing in puffs of white smoke released from the machine. The cloud of smoke moves off through the trees of the city park, drifting out into the world, and beckoning audiences to follow. The couples, unlike their married counterparts, transcend their bodies and come together in a collective psychic presence. Here, Hooper's film suggests that, beyond our material differences (here, specifically gender position), a universal or cosmic order exists outside our normatively restricted human vision and comprehension. Hooper's psychedelic film gives audiences a cloudy glimpse of that cosmos.

*Eggshells*, like *Easy Rider*, reflexively acknowledges that the end of the sixties approaches. As Hooper remarks, "It was about the beginning and end of the subculture" (Factory Theatre Website). In both films, the motorized vehicles of the counterculture are ignited and destroyed. In *Eggshells*, it is a Prankster-style car, and in *Easy Rider*, two men and their motorcycles. Whereas *Easy Rider* closes in defeat, *Eggshells* ends in hope. The countercultural youth grow up, marry, and become domestic. Though the characters' reincorporation into white, middle-class suburban American life may be read as problematic, the film does not suggest that the psychedelic philosophies of the household are abandoned. Extending Anna Powell's reading of commercial psychedelic films to Hooper's *Eggshells*, I suggest that despite the film's "classical realist conventions" which "bracket off and reterritorialize 'trip' sequences or present a grim anti-drugs warning," *Eggshells* still "retain[s] the force of this special cinematic material and elude reification *despite* limiting narrative conventions" (84). The psychedelic aesthetic enables Hooper to represent the potentially transformative qualities of the film's alternative models of personal and social relationship

represented in Amy and David's wedding ceremony and the couples' dematerialized union via the brain machine. Through marriage, bodily transfiguration, and transcendence, the psychedelic spirit remains.

Released in 1969, *Eggshells* arrived at a moment of thick cultural saturation with countercultural subjects and likely was too easily dismissed as another exploitative LSD movie. *Eggshells* had a limited distribution at local theatres and festivals. Though it won the gold award at the Atlanta International Film Festival, college campus screenings soon dried up and *Eggshells* quickly fell out of notice (Macor 19). Hooper's next film, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), a grisly horror tale based loosely on the fairytale Hansel and Gretel, brought him national fame. Critical acclaim for Hooper's work is gradually forthcoming as critics begin to acknowledge how Hooper's horror and suspense films subtly and subversively registered the national anxieties and fears of the late twentieth century America. Aside from an occasional note in essays on Hooper's later films, *Eggshells* was rarely discussed until it was restored by Watchmaker Films and brought back on screen at the 2009 South by Southwest Festival in its hometown locale of Austin, Texas. The reason for *Eggshells*' disappearance from cinematic history is complex. As an independent filmmaker with a budget of \$40,000, Hooper did not have the resources to widely publicize and distribute the film. The publicity campaign for the film may have also limited its reach and public appeal. In publicity posters and the press kit, *Eggshells* is described as "an American freak illumination." The film was rarely reviewed, was gradually forgotten, and copies were destroyed and lost. Since making its return at South by Southwest, where the Austin native Hooper made the film, *Eggshells* has begun its slow return into the cultural memory of the sixties. There is unfortunately little historical or scholarly information on

*Eggshells* aside from a few short newspaper announcements of the film screening. Wayne Bell, who was involved in the production, suggests why *Eggshells* was forgotten, describing it as “a very psychedelic, playful film that was dated as soon as it came out” (quoted in Macor, author interview, 19). The ‘dated’ rhetoric often circulates critical conversations of the psychedelic aesthetic, perhaps due to the clichéd status that the counterculture would come to have in the late 70s and 80s. Yet, as a contemporary viewer, I see the special effects as strikingly imaginative, surreal, and dreamily psychedelic. *Eggshells* can provide scholars an alternative look at the American underground in the late 60s, particularly the Austin art scene. Recognizing Hooper’s contributions to the psychedelic form in *Eggshells* allows film scholars to see the larger range of avant-garde, commercial and independent cinematic responses to psychedelic drug use.

By the end of the 1960s, the psychedelic aesthetic became increasingly commercialized and subsequently rejected by many of its own advocates and practitioners. In *Eggshells*’ restoration and rescreening, interviews from director Tobe Hooper and actor Kim Henkel reveal a complicated relationship artists have with the canonically misaligned psychedelic aesthetic. Kim Henkel, who appears in the acting credits under the pseudonym Boris Schnur, is dismissive of the film’s quality, saying in a 2004 interview, “I thought they burned every copy. They *should* burn every copy. It was a cinéma vérité piece that evolved into a lamebrain psychedelic hippie thing” (Bloom). Hooper shares some of Henkel’s dismay, “It really kind of bummed me out,” says Hooper. “I didn’t want to make a drug movie. I wanted to make art movies, European-style movies. I was really discouraged. I had no money to hire real actors to

legitimize my film” (Bloom).<sup>302</sup> By dismissing the “drug movie” genre, Hooper attempts to distance his work from Hollywood LSD films like *The Trip*, *Head*, and *Psych-Out*. Hooper’s distinction between drug movies and psychedelic cinema highlights a larger shift in late 1960s psychedelic art and thought. As scholars and researchers distanced themselves from psychedelic studies after LSD’s criminalization and government prohibition of hallucinogenic research, the intellectual thread began to fray away from the psychedelic aesthetic. With this migration of intellectuals away from psychedelic subjects, the American psychedelic aesthetic became increasingly associated with the illicit, the marginal and an intellectually naive youth culture. Despite his attempt to remove himself from the drug film genre, Hooper produces an innovative independent film that provides a renewed space for psychedelic thought and aesthetics.

The psychedelic aesthetic’s retreat into the cultural margins is suggestively previewed in Tobe Hooper’s treatment. The psychedelic aesthetic becomes incorporated into science fiction and fantasy. As Hooper blends abstraction, fantasy, surrealism and cinemagic to represent psychedelic states in *Eggshells*, he gives the psychedelic aesthetic a home in fantasy and science fiction. Punning on the name of the film, we could suggest Hooper’s film provides an embryonic space for the psychedelic aesthetic to grow up in the genres of science fiction, horror, and fantasy. The psychedelic aesthetic would hide underground in animation, science fiction, and fantasy films like Alejandro Jodorowsky’s *The Holy Mountain* (1973), René Laloux’s *Fantastic Planet* (1973), Ridley Scott’s *Blade Runner* (1982), and Terry Gilliam’s *Brazil* (1985). Only recently has there been a serious return to the psychedelic aesthetic in realism, like Gaspar Noé’s

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<sup>302</sup>Hooper told John Bloom of the Texas Monthly, ““Alas, the only place *Eggshells* was ever seen was on a few college campuses, where,’ Hooper laments, ‘as soon as the lights went down, the Bic lighters would all go on’”(Bloom).

“psychedelic melodrama” *Enter the Void* (2009) This generic home in fantasy is necessary, yet problematic as it effaces the empirical reality of these altered cognitive and affective states. Defined reductively as a subgenre of science fiction or fantasy, the psychedelic aesthetic is dismissed as indulgent special effects or as noncritical escapes from reality. Hooper, Corman and de Hirsch show the postmodern political and social critique inherent in the psychedelic aesthetic that has stakes in our realist world.

### Prying Open the Canonical Doors

So, why have these films received so little serious critical attention? The answer seems to lie in the relationship between audience reception, film production and distribution, and the cultural milieu of its appearance. When were American audiences ready to see the hallucinations on screen? When did they have enough? And why did the psychedelic aesthetic have such a short shelf life in this period? Affective studies of film necessitates some consideration into the film’s production and distribution in order to understand the audiences and their shared, yet divergent affective reactions and critical responses to these films.<sup>303</sup> In the historical view of cinematic production, Storm de Hirsch, Roger Corman, and Tobe Hooper were variously outsiders to the mainstream Hollywood industry. While Corman made films in Los Angeles, he lacked support and distribution from major studios for most of his career. Making *The Trip* under American International Pictures (AIP) provided Corman a larger budget and distribution deal that he ordinarily received in his career. Corman’s relationship to Hollywood is obviously closer than de Hirsch’s, who made her films alongside the art collectives of New York, or

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<sup>303</sup> I do not mean to suggest that all audiences share the same response to any film. I acknowledge the range of interpretative possibilities, though do claim that the films visual and narrative forms attempts to work on audiences in particularly estranging and reorienting ways, though the success of that form is certainly dependent on each individual viewer’s cultural position.

Hooper coming from the independent scene circulating around University of Texas at Austin's film program.<sup>304</sup> These artists were working in various forms of the film industry, avant-garde, commercial, independent. These industrial relationships are reflected in their various treatments of the psychedelic aesthetic, particularly seen in light of Sheldon Renan's remarks in his 1967 survey of the American underground, "The commercial film is a medium of and for bankers, craftsmen, film crews, and audiences. The underground film is a medium of and for the individual, as explorer and as artist" (Renan 18). The personal space in which De Hirsch made *Peyote Queen* gave her the freedom for psychedelic exploration, allowing for an avant-garde visual and auditory experiment that eschews narrative and character altogether. Working in the margins of Hollywood, Corman's aesthetic was compromised by executives at American International Pictures (AIP) in its opening warning reel and a final frame that cautions audiences against the potential psychological harms of LSD. Lacking studio support, Hooper makes an independent film with few trained actors and little equipment, causing him to draw from the lived realities of the Austin counterculture and Texas landscape around him.<sup>305</sup> Yet, Hooper makes a strikingly fresh film that stands out from the bloated Hollywood attempts like the playful, but opportunist Columbia Picture *Head* (1968) starring The Monkees. Hooper, Corman, and de Hirsch's positions within these different sites of cinematic production create divergent takes on psychedelic cinema and the psychedelic aesthetic more widely.

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<sup>304</sup> While Corman did make film within the Hollywood system, he lacked support of the major studios, and in part rejected their big-budget style of filmmaking altogether, finding it unethical to spend multimillions of dollars on film. Considering Corman's place just outside the margins of Hollywood is important in recognizing his role as mentor and nurturer of the emergent independent commercial film scene we see today. Corman's complicated relationship to Hollywood is the subject of the recent documentary, *Corman's World: Exploits of a Hollywood Rebel* (2011).

<sup>305</sup> Hooper raised the money for the film himself from Austin area businessmen, politicians, and friends. See Alison Macor's *Chainsaws, Slackers, and Spy Kids: 30 Years of Filmmaking in Austin, Texas* (2010).

Despite these different sites of origin, these films had surprisingly similar reception histories. With their taboo subject material, these films were not readily picked up by large distribution companies. On the margins of the Hollywood system, de Hirsch, Corman, and Hooper relied on midnight screenings, drive in movies, universities, art institutions, and grind house theatres as alternative sites for screening their subversive films. With the advantage of its star, Peter Fonda, and its wider distribution by AIP, *The Trip* was seen by larger audiences and remained in cultural circulation. Without the backing of studio distribution and due to its experimental genre, *Peyote Queen*'s circulation was necessarily limited and fell out of critical attention. According to Anthology Films, "during the late 1960's *Peyote Queen* circulated as part of midnight movie shows and won a following" (Anthology Film). *Eggshells* was screened at local campus and small film festivals, but had a limited run before the film was packed away and seemingly lost until the SXSW restoration in 2009. Today, these films enjoy a new life in the resurgence of psychedelic interest and a gaining cult following due to wider online distribution.<sup>306</sup>

In their outsider modes of production and distribution, de Hirsch, Corman, and Hooper create alternative cinemas that, particularly with their thematic and formal treatment of psychedelics, help inaugurate new modes of perception. I place *Peyote Queen*, *The Trip*, and *Eggshells* along this spectrum of psychedelic cinema to show how the psychedelic aesthetic developed from the avant-garde scene to mainstream Hollywood movies and back underground again with a difference. My brief history of psychedelic cinema is by no means comprehensive, and I hope that my incomplete list will inspire other scholars to better catalogue the psychedelic

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<sup>306</sup> *Peyote Queen* can be seen on YouTube and UbuWeb for free or on DVD as part of the *Treasures of the Avant-Garde IV* collection by Anthology Films and Canyon Cinema. *Eggshells* is available on MUBI.com for a small fee, and *The Trip* is available on DVD.

canon. Psychedelic films are a genre of films which draw from a larger psychedelic aesthetic that exists across visual, poetic, narrative and musical traditions. Even within the genre of psychedelic films, there are many avant-garde, Hollywood, horror, and science fiction subgenres and hybrids as *Peyote Queen*, *The Trip* and *Eggshells* each demonstrate. While I understand Harry Benshoff's alignment of the Hollywood LSD film with the head film, a subgenre "specifically produced to be experienced on drugs or that has subsequently become identified by drug users as a film that can be pleurably enhanced via the ingestion of mind-altering chemicals" (29, 31), I find Benshoff's definition of the genre reductive. In Benshoff's definitional logic, LSD films like *The Trip* have value only through the ingestion of drugs, which elides the various aesthetic, visual, narrative, and metaphoric meanings of psychedelic films. The aim of this larger project has been to recover the value of the visual and narrative work of the psychedelic aesthetic at large and, in this chapter, to suggest that psychedelic films contribute meaningfully in the deconstruction of hegemonic myths of language and identity, and recondition audiences' perception to embrace more expanded modes of vision. I believe the project of psychedelic films transcends simple drug ingestion, and for critics to routinely dismiss such films as simply escapist, exploitative, or as stoner paraphernalia effaces the potentially transformative affective and cognitive experiences of audiences and overlooks the postmodern innovation of the broader psychedelic aesthetic.

*Peyote Queen*, *The Trip* and *Eggshells* are postmodern films in their psychedelic critiques of normative vision, language, cultural meaning, and subjectivity. These films perform this critique through their experimental forms that attempt to replicate psychedelic altered states. Developing special effects through light filters, overlays, prismatic lenses, and techniques of

discontinuity editing, multiple exposure, and superimposition, these psychedelic films attempt to disrupt audiences' passive modes of spectating. The psychedelic aesthetic in cinema acts upon audiences through visual and narrative modes of estrangement and ritualistic pedagogical reinscription, orienting audiences away from American normative worldviews and towards alternative perceptions of reality. In presenting these altered states of perception and consciousness, *Peyote Queen*, *The Trip* and *Eggshells* deconstruct language, normative perception, and the cultural images and myths of the counterculture. *Peyote Queen* inaugurates new frames of visual perception through ritual incantation. *The Trip* teaches audiences how to go down the rabbit hole and shows Hollywood how to blend the avant-garde and the commercial. And, like the "crypto-embryonic hyper-electric presence" that hides in the basement of the hippie commune, *Eggshells* gives the psychedelic aesthetic, withering into cliché under Hollywood commercialism, an embryonic home in fantasy and science fiction, the canonical subterranean of American cinema where the subversive psychedelic aesthetic will quietly evolve and periodically reemerge throughout the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

## CODA

### The Psychedelic Renaissance

*“This book is the true story of one women’s experiences with LSD, the new, experimental and dangerous mind drug that is exploding into use across America”*

-- Back cover of Constance Newland’s *My Self and I*

In a 1967 article entitled “The Hippies,” *Time Magazine* reported, “Whatever their meaning and wherever they may be headed, the hippies have emerged on the U.S. scene in about 18 months as a wholly new subculture, a bizarre permutation of the middle-class American ethos from which it evolved.” The spread of hippie culture across the American population, of course involved more than psychedelics. Part of my larger project is to put psychedelics back in context with the social turbulence of the civil rights, feminist and gay rights, and anti-war movements. Yet, seemingly overnight, psychedelics became America’s “Phantom Problem,” and LSD and marijuana use made national headlines. Not everyone approved of psychedelics. A great deal of the country remained socially and religiously conservative, viewing psychedelics and the associated hippie counterculture as a dangerous fringe element contaminating American wholesomeness. Even liberals feared psychedelics would compromise the promising reforms of Lyndon B. Johnson’s Great Society. Worried parents feared the so-called “beautiful people” that threatened their children’s safety. Acid panic was in the air, the media sensation was overhyped, blowing up minor incidences into fictions of alarming proportion.<sup>307</sup> While there is certainly

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<sup>307</sup> There were news reports of college students jumping out of windows, of suicides and mental breakdowns. Two stories recirculated the national newspapers, a five-year-old girl who accidentally ate a spiked sugar cube, and a man

some risk of mental harm, particularly in contaminated substances made by amateur chemists, high dosage, unprepared individuals and unsuitable environments, suicidal or violent side effects are extremely rare. Though psychedelic use was reportedly sweeping the country, there was little documented evidence of the scope of use and the societal effects. This uncertainty was in part due to the silence bred from fear of taboo and criminal penalty. Only a brave few were going on record. In a survey of psychedelic use on college campuses, one newspaper admitted that universities had almost no idea how many students were taking LSD. The only major consensus on LSD was that there was more unknown about psychedelics than was known. Yet this did not stop the media machine from wild speculation.<sup>308</sup> The viral media hype about psychedelics eventually had a disastrous effect on the legitimate research of psychedelics, as FDA and NIMH applications were rejected and funding withered up. Amidst this controversy, Sandoz halted production of LSD in 1965, and essentially turned the market over to underground chemists.

Responding to public concern, in May of 1966, Senator Robert Kennedy led congressional hearings on the FDA regulation of LSD. Kennedy invited several prominent psychedelic researchers and government officials to testify on the uses and abuses of LSD. Dr. Philip Lee, from the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, reported “There is no evidence that the use of LSD is a ‘stepping stone’ to such addicting drugs as morphine and heroin” (“United”). The committee heard repeated expert testimony on LSD’s limited physiological and psychological harm, its non-addictive nature, and its therapeutic value. But, the drug was still

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who murdered his mother-in-law while flying on LSD. The subsequent trial found the man had long suffered from chronic paranoid schizophrenia.

<sup>308</sup> Some news outlets were more responsible in their coverage. *Time* and *Life* magazine publisher Henry Luce and his wife Clare Boothe Luce had taken LSD and helped publish more balanced articles on the subject.

viewed as dangerous. The literature and film examined here suggests that psychedelic experiences can potentially produce radical shifts in values and worldviews. As reflected in Connecticut Senator Abraham Ribicoff's fearful remarks, "We aren't dealing with aspirin here, or with a cure for the common cold. We are dealing with compounds which have fantastic social implications that the old medicines do not have" ("United"). What were these fantastic social implications? A greater sense of compassion for all living beings? An impulse towards peaceful co-existence? A rejection of capitalist affairs? A desire for simple lifestyles? The countercultural psychedelic values did not exactly fit the mission of post-war global capitalism and the American military industrial complex. In 1966, one government official called LSD "the greatest threat facing the country today... more dangerous than the Vietnam war" ("United").

The Congressional trials resulted in legislation that banned LSD in California and many other states in 1966. Despite Congress' acknowledgment of its therapeutic value, LSD was classified as an illegal Schedule I drug in 1970. According to the Controlled Substances Act and as enforced by the DEA, Schedule I drugs are those that have no currently accepted medical use and a high potential for abuse. Considered the most dangerous drugs with potentially severe psychological or physical dependence, Schedule I drugs come with the stiffest criminal penalties. LSD, marijuana, ecstasy and peyote are listed alongside the very addictive, physiologically harmful, and potentially fatal substances like Quaaludes and heroin. Like Prohibition during the 1920s, the reactionary Drug War has resulted in increased violent crime, new underground economies, mass imprisonment of young black and Hispanic men, and little impact on the amount of drug use. It is time for our society to reopen the conversation about

drugs, to ask why humans have long sought out altered states and how we can pursue such use safely and responsibly.

According to studies by the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, an estimated 23.9 million Americans have used illicit mind-altering drugs in the past month. This statistic excludes our society's favorite drugs, alcohol and tobacco. 32 million Americans have used psychedelics in their lifetime, and there is actually more use now than in the legendary psychedelic sixties. Given that drugged altered states are a prominent part of human life, a practice that spans back to the earliest records of human civilization, where do we see such altered states represented in our art and culture? In *The Norton Anthology*, we will find Coleridge's Kubla Khan, or a Vision of a Dream, "In Xanadu did Kubla Khan, A stately pleasure-dome decree," where we will also find the footnoted aside that Coleridge's "milk of Paradise" was opium. We might flip ahead and see the occasional mention of Thomas de Quincey's *Confessions of an Opium Eater*. Jumping ahead to the twentieth century, we find Allen Ginsberg's "best minds destroyed by madness...looking for an angry fix" and William Burroughs's confessions of a heroin junky. This dissertation is not on the aesthetics of opioids, though, given contemporary rates of use it is a very necessary project for another scholar. Rather, its focus is on the aesthetics of psychedelics, those richly imaginative altered states that produce dream-like visions that open up the doors of perception, let the sensorial universe flood in, and may in the process teach us something about ourselves and others. Scanning through literary anthologies and course syllabi, where is the literature and art of psychedelics? Where and when does our culture pay witness to the history of altered states?

Applied to literary study, psychedelics teach us much about the functions of language, how audiences engage with aesthetics, and how notions of reality are made and shared across a culture. My project has two central aims, to define the canon of American psychedelic aesthetics and to use that canon to advance theories of aesthetic engagement that pay witness to the affective, embodied realities of aesthetic altered states. Psychedelic narratives are stories of discovery. They are about processing the past and healing the anxieties that traumatic memory leave recursively behind. I have felt the traumas of addiction, seen families ravaged by our society's drug of choice, the all too familiar alcohol. Discussions of drugs must not be overly romanticized; there can be serious physiological, psychological and societal effects to drug abuse. These effects, however, remind us of the need to study them, to take them seriously as critical dimensions of human experience.

Now is an especially rich time for psychedelic studies. Along with the renewed use in psychedelics among youth culture, particularly surrounding electronic dance music and lifestyle festivals like Coachella and Burning Man, new articulations of the psychedelic aesthetic are appearing in contemporary digital animation, cinema, and art. The resurgence in psychedelic use signals new generational interests in consciousness expansion. Naïve use of these substances, which can sometimes result in psychological or physiological harm, weakens the strides made by psychedelic advocates who believe consciousness-expanding drugs should be legal sacraments and medical aids. Huxley knew that psychedelic use would continue far beyond his age; "The habit of taking vacations from the more or less purgatorial world, which we have created for ourselves, is universal. Moralists may denounce it; but, in the teeth of disapproving talk and repressive legislation, the habit persists, and mind-transforming drugs are everywhere available"

(*Moksha* 97). Simultaneously, across the globe, societies are reconsidering the legal prohibitions surrounding various natural and pharmaceutical drugs. Current marijuana reform signals a widespread thawing of attitudes on drug use. We need drug reform that responsibly recognizes the medicinal, spiritual and recreational use of substances that are far less toxic than alcohol.<sup>309</sup> After decades of strict prohibition, new scientific research on psychedelics is being approved and funded by major institutions. A wealth of new studies show the beneficial therapeutic use of psychedelics such as LSD and MDMA for individuals coping with addiction, PTSD, anxiety and depression from terminal illness. This renaissance in scientific research is in part due to the advocacy work of MAPS, the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies. Reinvesting the literary, aesthetic, cultural and philosophical value of psychedelic subjects is especially important as we witness a contemporary resurgence in scientific research in such substances.<sup>310</sup> The scientific study of psychedelics, when divorced from aesthetics and philosophies of religion, seriously neglects the significant metaphysical, spiritual, and phenomenological value of psychedelic experiences. Nor is the clinical set and setting of the scientific study of psychedelics always conducive to studying the aesthetic, spiritual, philosophical nature of these experiences.

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<sup>309</sup> For example, psychedelic use has been shown to reduce recidivism rates among prisoners. See the study by Peter Hendricks, Brendan Clark, Matthew Johnson, Kevin Fontaine, and Karen Cropsey on “Hallucinogen use predicts reduced recidivism among substance-involved offenders under community corrections supervision” in the *Journal of Psychopharmacology*. January 2014 28: 62-66, doi:10.1177/0269881113513851. The results of this study “results suggest that hallucinogens may promote alcohol and other drug abstinence and prosocial behavior in a population with high rates of recidivism.” This study builds on the work of Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert’s Concord Prison Experiment at Harvard University in the early 1960s.

<sup>310</sup> Huxley believed psychedelics had a real therapeutic value: “While one is under the drug one has penetrating insights into the people around one, and also into one’s own life. Many people get tremendous recalls of buried material. A process which may take six years of psychoanalysis happens in an hour—and considerably cheaper! And the experience can be very liberating and widening in other ways. It shows that the world one habitually lives in is merely a creation of this conventional, closely conditioned being which one is, and that there are quite other kinds of worlds outside. It’s a very salutary thing to realize that the rather dull universe in which most of us spend most of our time is not the only universe there is. I think it’s healthy that people should have this experience” (“The Art of Fiction”).

In the deficiencies of scientific discourse's reliance on realism, psychedelic aesthetics provides a more expansive modality for representing psychedelic phenomenon through fantastic, poetic and romantic language. Psychedelics bring aesthetics and science into common conversation, and suggest increasingly integrative ways of looking at the inner and outer dimensions of human experience.

To echo William James, we must “forbid a premature foreclosing of our accounts of reality.” Psychedelic aesthetics expand our narrow accounts of the real and provide us with a mode for perceiving such alternatives. Psychedelic aesthetics give voice to the psychonauts, the potentially enlightened, yet marginalized subjectivities among us who inhabit these altered realms of consciousness. The self-reflective and empathetic frameworks offered by psychedelic aesthetics have real social and political consequences for those who experience altered states. Expanding our contemporary canon to include psychedelic literature and film would increase our scholarly sensitivity to a wider range of realities and mental abilities, an expansion that has particular stakes in our understanding of mental illness, disability and emergent transhuman subjectivity in the digital age. Altered states, in the words of James, “open a region though they fail to give a map.” Psychedelic aesthetics offer us a hazy, but valuable map.

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