

tion. When I finally went to bed, I had such brilliant hypnagogic visions of colored snapshots of children that it was difficult to fall asleep. I also had one vision of an African drummer.

My feelings of serenity continued on the next day and continue even today. I was very impressed by the unity in nature, down to the image of a tree reflected in the veins of a lettuce leaf. My general feeling of peace has continued to the present.

What have I learned? I died and I am here, and I shall never fear dying again. The experience was not what I had expected, but it was just as much as I deserved. I feel that I am quits with life. I know that I cannot give other people anything and that they cannot give me anything. Anything I give, I give not because it is needed but because I want to. Anything I get, I get because it is available and I want it. When you are born, no trumpets blow, because there are no trumpets. While we are each totally alone, it is an error to confuse this with being lonely. Each of us is himself and there is nothing better and nothing greater and nothing more. I no longer feel concerned with God, whether or not He exists (I used to feel sure He did). He takes care of His Self, and I take care of mine. I eat when I am hungry, I drink when I am thirsty, and, if I feel like it, I forgive when I am insulted.

## WHO AM I, AND SO WHAT IF I AM?

JERRY RICHARDSON

The first noticeable effects of the drug were physical. At about 10:20, fifteen minutes after ingestion, I began to feel somewhat lightheaded and dizzy: I became overactive, fidgety, impatient, and irritable, waiting for something to happen.

The feeling of lightness gradually changed to heaviness; I was now becoming slightly numb. The room and the objects in it began to look tilted, and I seemed to be seeing with a new, living astigmatism. My body started to tingle, felt heav-

ier and heavier, and my nervousness passed away. Things were beginning to happen.

The outlines of objects began to shimmer and quiver, as did the convolutions in Bernie's shirt, which made him appear to be breathing in a remarkable manner. He was sitting in his chair reading poetry and seemed to be having quite an experience. Looking through the window, I could see the bare branches of the trees outside. They were moving back and forth rhythmically to the music of Debussy's "La Mer," which was playing on the phonograph. As I looked harder, it seemed that the trees were framed in the window, depthless, as if painted in layer upon layer of diaphanous paper. If I concentrated on any one branch, it stood out and came toward me, giving the impression that I could almost touch it.

When I looked up at the neon ceiling light, it too was shimmering, not really attached to the ceiling, but floating overhead, suspended in an inky, yellowish fluid. I gazed at this for some time, and as the light became more detached from the ceiling, I became more and more dissociated from everyday concerns. When I turned back to the room, I found everything—chairs, tables, even Bernie—in constant motion, quivering and vibrating.

I walked unsteadily to the window. It was a magnificent scene: the movement of the trees, and the ground below, patches of brown and green, in swirling, snakelike motion. There were blackbirds hopping around on the grass, comically, looking for worms. It was all a living painting—and I was the artist.

After a few minutes of this, I began to feel sleepy and lay down on the cot for a while. "La Mer" had finished; Bernie put on a guitar solo by Montoya. I closed my eyes and began to experience strange internal visions.

At first I saw only vague shapes, which soon became brightly colored geometric patterns that spontaneously exploded into view, dissolved, and were replaced by others, similar, but never quite the same. Then came a splendid array of red, green, blue, yellow, and purple spirals sliding around inside my head, gold doorways opening out into infinity, and flashes of white lightning illuminating variously colored question marks, dots, and ribbons. Other forms appeared—vaguely

defined and brightly colored animals and faces coming mysteriously and quickly, illuminating themselves, dissolving, and disappearing.

After a while I wondered if I could conjure up some images myself, so I tried to imagine something horrible. This time I saw goblins in green and yellow and blue; red devils with sinister, twisted faces; and then bodies, faces, ghostlike creatures in white, coming out of nowhere, rushing toward me, tumbling over each other, and disappearing into the back of my mind in a seemingly endless procession of ludicrously grotesque imagery.

It appeared ludicrous because none of this seemed particularly threatening. I'm not even certain why I wanted horrible forms instead of pleasant ones. I think it was probably because I had read and heard that these sessions can be quite nightmarish for some people. But in my case this was not so. These weird figures were only comical.

Opening my eyes stopped the mental imagery. Around the room, everything was now bathed in a curious yellowish-warm, glowing radiance. An ordinarily rather nondescript, somewhat messy, and ugly room had been transformed into something out of a fairy tale. In front of me, at the foot of the cot, two closet doors had assumed fantastic proportions, appearing much wider at the top and narrowing sharply toward the bottom, as though someone had painted them to emphasize and exaggerate the perspective. To give a comic effect, the artist had also drawn in a long, curving crack running lengthwise from the floor to halfway up one of the doors. It struck me as very humorous and appropriate.

Again I looked up at the ceiling light. It was now not a light, but a mass of fluctuating, vibrating, yellowish squares floating in, around, and in front of a yellow sky. The ceiling was all atmosphere—yellow, radiant, infinite, fascinating.

Through all of this, Bernie had been sitting with his back to me, reading. When I looked at him, he appeared to be some kind of elf, with slightly pointed ears and a wrinkled complexion. As I watched, thinking that in some ways he looked, with his pointed ears, very much like a wolf, he began to become more and more wolf-like. Then I thought, "Leprechaun," and again he changed. It was very peculiar;

what I had been able to do before with my eyes shut, I could also accomplish with my eyes open. I discovered that I could cause these distortions myself. It was a very strange world I was in, but when I attempted to tell Bernie something of what was going on, words were difficult to find. I felt almost completely incoherent, incapable of saying anything intelligible. All I could manage was, "Bernie, it's all gnarled . . . and you're the little old man sitting at the foot of the gnarled tree."

Ordinarily, I am not particularly susceptible to music. This time, lying on the cot, I became acutely aware of the Montoya record playing. This was more than music: the entire room was saturated with sounds that were also feelings—sweet, delicious, sensual—that seemed to be coming from somewhere deep down inside me. I became mingled with the music, gliding along with the chords. Everything I saw and felt was somehow inextricably interrelated. This was pure synesthesia, and I was part of the synthesis. I suddenly "knew" what it was to be simultaneously a guitar, the sounds, the ear that received them, and the organism that responded, in what was the most profoundly consuming aesthetic experience I have ever had.

As magnificent as this was, it seems less significant than what happened next. After I had lain on the cot for some time, enraptured by Montoya, Bernie suggested that I take a look at myself in a small mirror provided for the occasion. This seemed interesting, so I got up from the cot, took the mirror, and sat down again.

At first, nothing happened. The face in the mirror was just me, with a rather foolish grin. Not very impressive, I thought. As it was difficult to focus clearly, I looked harder, straining to fix the facial outlines. Then, as I stared at them, they began to change—like the way by which, in the movies, a man's face slowly becomes that of a wolf. But I never saw myself as any kind of animal; what I saw was my own face in transition: in rapid succession, there were all the expressions I had ever seen before in a mirror—and many that I had not. A quizzical gaze turned quite sad, contemplative, amused, broke into a broad grin, and then changed to mournful, tragic, and finally tearful (real tears, it seemed)—all these faces within just a

few seconds, and never the same face for longer than a brief moment.

I spent some time looking at myself, and while I was doing so, I began to age. As the faces changed, I also became older, younger, and then older again, each face with a different expression and a different age.

This last was attributable, I think, to the questions Bernie was asking me as I contemplated myself. One of the purposes of the session was to give me an opportunity to identify myself better both personally and vocationally. I had been having some difficulty with these matters, and it was hoped that in this experience I could confront and perhaps resolve these problems.

After I had looked in the mirror for a while, Bernie asked me, "What is the face you see behind all the faces?" It was difficult to answer: there were so many faces, and none of them appeared to stand out against the rest—except perhaps the laughing one. I told Bernie this, but he kept asking the question until I felt obliged to give a better answer. So I looked harder, trying to project myself into the future to determine what I might be years hence. It was then that the faces began to age. But even with aging, there was no dominant face. Bernie asked the question again, and again I tried to find the face that might give the answer. Finally, I found one: "I see a kindly old judge," I said. This was true; however, I am not certain now, nor was I then, that this was the best answer—or even if it was any better than any other I might have given.

The problem here was that I had been in a dilemma as to whether to go to law school or not. I didn't particularly want to; yet, I could not really think of anything else more practical. This is one reason for the LSD session—to give this business of law school some deep thought. Hence, the reason for Bernie's questions and, I think, the reason for my seeing the "kindly old judge" among the many faces. He was there, all right, but I cannot honestly say that he arose because of any deep desire on my part to become a lawyer and a judge. I think I chose this figure because I felt that, given my shaky commitment to study law, it would be to my advantage to see such a face win out. However this may be, Bernie seemed

satisfied (although I don't think he believed it any more than I did) and didn't pursue the matter further at the time.

After the question-and-answer period, while I was sitting there with the mirror, Bernie got up and came over and stood behind me. I noted before how he had changed into an elf and a wolf, but now, as I looked at him in the mirror, he became very, very sad. His mirror image became pained, as though he were suffering great mental anguish. It was an oriental face, grotesque and tragic, and stayed that way for several minutes. Then the sad and pained expression passed away, replaced by one of abstracted contemplation, like that of the Buddha. For some time he stood there Buddhalike; then he returned to his chair and sat down.

One theory of hallucinations elicited by drugs such as LSD holds that these visions reflect one's deeper feelings about both himself and the world. Bernie and I discussed this afterward as it related to the various ways in which I had seen him during the day. We felt that my seeing him as a wolf represented some apprehensions I have about him, but that because of my own particular way of dealing with potentially threatening people and situations, I chose to regard this as comical instead of dreadful. Similarly, the other changes I perceived in Bernie were also manifestations of my feelings about him, the sad and suffering oriental face being an especially good example of this, and the Buddha another. It is as though there is a self-programming device within each of us—a computer in the basement, so to speak—that causes us to react as we do, whether our actions are voluntary or involuntary, recognized for what they are or rationalized. Under LSD, however, one may not be so easily able to disguise his feelings—his real ones, not the rationalized product of several intervening stages of conscious and unconscious manipulation; with the result that *reality itself* emerges from the depths. This may explain why some people react quite negatively, even disastrously, to the encounter. Their mental and emotional processes cannot cope with the program they themselves, unwillingly or not, have set up.

In any event, Bernie's face altered once more. This time it turned to stone, cracked, and crumbled, Humpty Dumpty-like. And no sooner had it finished crumbling, than it was

back—Bernie together again! It was not that his face fell away completely; it seemed as though an outer layer of it cracked and fell off, leaving another in its place. This happened several times, and caused me to wonder whether it would happen to me, so I looked back in the mirror. The face there immediately turned ash-gray, cracked, and fell away, and then spontaneously regenerated itself. I watched myself do this several more times and then glanced at my hand holding the mirror. It, too, became stonelike and cracked.

As I sat there, contemplating this, I began to see, even though my eyes were open, a flood of human forms. They were a mournful lot, mostly women, children, and old men, all Eastern, and all despairing, chanting a long, silent wail. They were in a river—*were* a river—coming toward and passing through me, an endless stream of faces, mournful and pitiful, and yet somehow with a nobility that transcended their suffering.

Where all this came from, I'm not quite certain, but I suspect the record that was playing, "Japanese Koto" by Shinichi Yuize (Cook), had something to do with it. On this record is the voice of an old man whose chant is long and mournful, like a dirge, and to me it seemed that he lamented about life. When I tried to visualize him, I saw the old man in the river of mourners dressed in the plain, white garb of an Indian beggar; he was chanting with the rest, and he, too, possessed both sadness and nobility.

In addition to the music, which provided a theme (lamentation) and a setting, I think there was another reason for my experiencing this particular imagery: this river of pitiable creatures was almost literally a manifestation of my own stream of consciousness, which tends to borrow heavily from the morbid stuff of life. Just as my feelings about Bernie were brought out by seeing him change, so did my feelings about life in general materialize in this mournful procession.

At about three in the afternoon, the hallucinatory effects of the drug had almost completely subsided. After three, until about nine that evening, my general mood was one of quiet, anxiety-free contemplation. The entire day, in fact, had been quite unusual in that never once (after the initial nervousness) did I feel anxiety nor did I worry about the present,

past, or future. Time in its usual sense had ceased to be, and with it my concern about temporal matters. With respect to time, I should add that I never completely lost my ability to estimate time intervals; however, I did feel that time was somehow unimportant to the world I was perceiving, in which a minute is an hour, an hour a minute. Time was not only relative; it was in fact irrelevant.

It is difficult to assess the long-range psychological effects of this session. I do not feel that I achieved any new and startling insights—at least not in the sense that I have any answers I did not have before. However, I do think that certain things occurred that have caused me to reflect more deeply upon the state of being alive and what to do about it. As a result, I am less confused by and about life than before, and have come to better terms with the questions “Who am I?” and “So what if I am?”

First of all, I am many different faces, confusing, contradictory, but never mutually exclusive. They all exist, and I must learn to live with them. Some are more dominant than others, but they are all nevertheless there. I have many identities, but to demand that one rise above all the others is to deny being human—it is as simple and as complex as that.

I am also the river, among the flood of images I saw during the koto music. The river is not kind; it is just there. It has no meaning; it is just there. Everything that exists, exists in the river, and each man is subject to all that the river is. Some men are carried along gently, in the shallows along the river's edge; some drown early, others late; some drown others in their attempt to survive, and some help others to survive. And after we are all gone, the river will still be flowing on.

None of this is especially profound or original, but thinking about it, I have decided to throw my lot where life appears to be most interesting and rewarding—not in the financial sense, but in those gray areas where things seem to be happening consonant with my own interests, which are somewhat offbeat and literary. Law probably would not allow me to pursue those interests outside the mainstream of life. I might, for example, want to go to China for a year or two, just to see what the river is like there. Or perhaps I might decide to teach or write or dig ditches, or do all these things

simultaneously, or do nothing at all. In any manner, however, in which I ultimately choose to identify myself, I can be assured as long as I live that there is a place for me in the river.

## YAGE IN THE VALLEY OF FIRE

PETER STAFFORD

The four of us, heading out to the desert to get high together, had little more in mind than a feeling that we'd enjoy sharing an intense experience. Ed had picked up some yage a few days before from a man of diverse interests. I don't think any of us knew much about this, other than that it was from an exotic plant—possibly even a bark or a vine—from somewhere in South America, and that it had psychedelic properties. Each of us had had experience with psychedelics and was confident about handling mind drugs. We knew little about this one, but anticipated an exciting time together, whatever its effects might be.

We chose Las Vegas because we had heard glowing reports about a beautiful desert setting nearby called the Valley of Fire. When we got there, we saw that it was much more fantastic than any of us had really expected. Everywhere were monuments of reddish-gold pumice, striated by blues and purples and scarlets. The volcanic formations rose abruptly from the level valley floor, scattered here and there as though cast by the wind. Every rock seemed hand-carved into animal or other suggestive shapes, which the highway department had marked by signs along the road. We found that several crags were decorated with ancient Indian hieroglyphics. We also stumbled upon a small adobe dwelling, empty and cool inside.

We had heard that yage made the user feel somewhat nauseous, so Ed suggested we start our trip on a small amount

This yage report is taken from a considerably longer account, which is available from the author at Box 285, Peter Stuyvesant Station, New York, New York 10009.