

EPILOGUE

RUNNING OUT OF ERA: SOME NON-PHARMACOLOGICAL
NOTES ON THE PSYCHEDELIC REVOLUTION

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Several months ago an enthusiastic student explained to me that "if we could somehow drop some LSD into LBJ" many of the problems which confront our society today could be solved. This solution seems to me to be sociologically naïve. It is my belief that if we could somehow get 100 nineteenth century English bankers together and give them some LSD, at least 95 of them would have "bummers." But give the same drug to 100 mid-twentieth century American young people, and 95 or more of them will have a good experience.

This is because the English bankers and LBJ are not where the kids "are at." And where one is at is not a question of pharmacology; it is a question of culture and historical location. Expressed differently, the reason so many of today's youth can say "yes" to a drug experience of the marijuana or LSD type, has little to do with the consciousness altering chemicals in themselves. Rather, they can say "yes" to the experience because of their historical location in the center of a storm of cultural forces which has already altered their consciousness and which the drugs augment and make lucid. In short, a mind altering drug shows them where they are at; it doesn't put them there.

Rather than discussing the drugs as such, then, in this paper I want to discuss something of the historical location and cultural forces which I think are centrally relevant to the psychedelic (cultural) revolution.

At the outset, I want to make an assumption: that every historical epoch has as its driving force, its impetus, a myth. This notion is not an uncommon one amongst philosophers of history, historians, and social scientists. It is most clearly stated, I think, by Susanne Langer in her important book, Philosophy in a New Key.¹ Langer suggests that myth is the first form of a new symbolic system, a new dream, a new way of seeing the world. Myths are not discursive: they are essentially ineffable or inarticulable forms of "thought" which find their expression in ritual and art. A Myth, then, is the first embodiment of a new world view, but it can do no more than initiate and present this world view. The highest development of which myth is capable, according to Langer, is epic poetry. We cannot abstract and manipulate its concepts any further within the mythical mode. From this point onward, there must be a rationalistic period in which the spirit of the myth is made substance in the form of discursive writing and purposive action. Some day when the vision is totally rationalized, the ideas exploited, exhausted, and acted out, then a new myth must be invented, there must be a new vision. This is

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what is referred to as a "symbolic transformation," that is, a radical redefinition of the whole cultural situation.

It seems to me that the American dream (or myth) of success--that anyone can "make it" -- is really just a sub-myth. That the larger myth (and the larger historical epoch) involves the last several centuries of the Western World. The spirit of this larger myth (the world view or symbolic system) is something like: Prometheus Unbound, autonomous man as the measure of all things, dominant over nature, goal directed factor, Faustian-like qualities of onward and upward, over and against; in short, man making it!

I don't feel qualified to discuss the mythic phase of this historical epoch, expressed in ritual and art, but I think Milton's Paradise Lost might well have been the slightly belated epic poem that marked the turning point to rationalization and enactment of the myth. John Calvin provides an example of making the myth of autonomous man discursive, articulate, and a formula for action. The following passage, written in about 1550, is typical:

Let us every one proceed according to our small ability, and prosecute the journey we have begun. No may will be so unhappy but that he may everyday make some progress, however small. Therefore, let us not cease to strive, that we may be incessantly advancing in the way of the Lord, nor let us despair on account of the smallness of our success; for however our success may not correspond to our wishes, yet our labor is not lost, when this day surpasses the preceding one; provided that with sincere simplicity we keep our end in view, and press forward to the goal, not practicing self adulation, nor indulging our own evil propensities, but perpetually exerting our endeavors after increasing degrees of amelioration, till we shall have arrived at a perfection of goodness, which indeed, we seek and pursue as long as we live . . .

What Calvin is saying in this remarkably "lined" passage is, "Don't just stand there, do something!" And as Weber points out, the striving to do one's best religiously was readily interpreted to mean doing one's best in the "post assigned to him by his Lord," namely, his occupation. "What are you going to do when you grow up?"

About 410 years later, Tim Buckley writes:

The velocity addicts explode on the highways
 Ignoring the journey and moving so fast
 their nerves fall apart and they gasp but can't breathe
 They run from the cops of the skeleton past
 Petrified by tradition in a nightmare they stagger
 Into nowhere at all, and then look up aghast
 And I wave goodbye to speed
 And smile help to a rose.

It's like Buckley is saying, "Don't just do something, stand there!" And we've come full circle. He continues:

O the new children plan
Under Juniper trees
Sky blue or gray
They continue at ease
Moving so slow
That serenely they can
Gracefully grow
And yes still understand

I am young
I will live
I am strong
I can give
You the strange
Speed of day
Feel the change
Know the way

But let's go back to the 16th century and the rationalization of the myth. Enter rationalization itself with the "age of reason" and "enlightenment" in the succeeding two centuries. Enter the rationalization of power with democracy and the rationalization of economics with capitalism. Find the peak of the historical epoch--its flowering--in the first half of the 19th century for Europe, and in the second half of that century for America. Then witness the over-ripening of the myth and the simultaneous appearance of irrational art, literature, and philosophy: Nietzsche, Marx, Heidegger, Husserl, Freud, Sartre, Berdaev, Camus, Chardin, Dadaism, Cubism, Abstract Expressionism, Joyce, Beckett, Malraux, Faulkner, Hemingway.

The artist and the sensitive literary soul, however, is always historically precocious. In the words of the Buffalo Springfield, he has a way of "hanging up his eyelids and running down the hall," screaming while the rest of us sleep soundly in the adjoining bedrooms. What about the rest of us? We persist as true believers and continue to over-develop and over-ripen. Science flourishes (this is the epitome of acting out the rationalization of the myth), and the inquiring, manipulating, controlling, achieving spirit has really become man over and against. We have fragmented and specialized the goals toward which we have been oriented to the extent that we now have tens of thousands of professional journals, some of them with information on how to handle this information overload with computers.

And the Economy? It has become overdeveloped to the extent that it has to produce the consumption for its own products!

And the political system? Too horrendous to discuss. Suffice to say that the political system together with the psychedelic experience is largely responsible for the popularity of the slogan that "reality is an illusion."

By its own internal logic, of course, the myth of Faustian man ever ascending to more and more knowledge and control is a never completed project. Any biochemist or solid-state physicist will tell us that we are just getting started. But I think it is instructive to recall that Dr. Faustus himself threw up his hands late in his career and proceeded to sell his soul for the opportunity to engage in a different myth. It seems to me conceivable that a large segment of people might enter the stream of an overripe history at such a point that they collectively sense that the "Faustian Frontier" is closed, though by its own logic

it never can be. Experientially, it might be perceived that the phallic rocketship probing of the cosmos itself is going "just about far enough." This degree of goal-stretching might well be the point at which enterprising, knowledge explosion reverses itself and becomes the simultaneous presentation of information overload--the whirring of computers--that can only be characterized as implosion, a coming back on to itself. This would be symbolic transformation, and it would mark the invention of a new myth.

A book recently was published about the so-called "beatniks" of the 1950's. The title of this book is rather un-Faustian; it is called "Nothing More to Declare." Bob Dylan, perhaps the poet laureate of the so-called "hippies" of the 1960's, writes the following:

My eyes collide headon with stuff--graveyards, false
goals--I scoff
At pettiness which plays so rough, walk upside down
inside handcuffs
Kick my legs to crash it off, and say, OK, I've had
enough
What else can you show me?

"Nothing more to Declare" suggests the end of a myth. "What else can you show me" suggests the beginning of another. This, I think describes where the members of the psychedelic revolution "are at". Because of their historical location at the end of a myth, that is, at the end of a cultural era, they perceive the rewards of the going social order as unrewarding--as overripe. In Goodman's terms, these people have "grown up absurd." The generation gap seems to have widened to the extent that it is now a cultural gap as well.

Karl Mannheim,² who first articulated such an historical location approach to generations, suggested that certain times in history are critical. There are certain nodal points in history, and generations entering history at these points are critically located. Though there is always the risk of elevating the importance of our own time, it is my conviction that the current generation is unique enough that to treat them in terms of a phase in the life cycle which will be outgrown rather than in terms of their peculiar historical situation is to be misled and deluded. If they are on a moral holiday, they may not return to work. They may, in fact, well be the vanguard of a new cultural era, that is, a new mythology.

What is implied here is that the introduction of a new wave of people into the historical stream provides a situation of fresh contact with the culture which does not so much cause cultural change as it permits cultural change. The clauses of change are inherent in the social and historical process itself. The psychedelic generation is simply located in a strategic position so that they can perceive the overripeness of the old order. Likewise, the psychedelic drugs do not so much cause altered consciousness as they permit the perception of a consciousness already altered in the direction of a more appropriate world view. If this is the case, then one can argue that, at least in some historical periods, the young become seers for the old.

In the remaining portion of this paper I am going to discuss what I think to be several important components of the shared history of the generation which is most readily associated with the psychedelic revolution. More specifically, I want to present this discussion in terms of three historical "inputs" which seem to give this age group a temporal "location" which may permit significant cultural change: the historical location of the new youth relative to (1) other age groups, (2) the affluent state of the society, and (3) certain technological factors.

Historical Location Relative to Other Age Groups

In a complex society, many more sectors than the family are at work making us what we are. It becomes clear that men resemble the times more than they do their fathers. A very important element in the shared history of any age group, nevertheless, is the experience it has of that age group which immediately precedes it in the historical stream. For the current generation, this older group consists of people, now in their 30's and 40's, who were teenagers in the decade following World War II. The seriousness which characterized this post-depression and post-war period, added to the go-carefulness of McCarthyism, helped produce what has been described as "the oldest younger generation."³ This is a generation that willed itself directly from childhood into adulthood. The suburbanized organization man that resulted presents many of the current generation with an example that is conducive to "growing up absurd."

It appears, furthermore, that the organization man has lost commitment to his own life style. The current generation is, for the most part, not even asked to take up a way of life against which it can rebel. Perceiving a certain "end of ideology" in his elders, the new youth is left with a void. He can either choose that void as a way of life itself (as Keniston's "uncommitted"⁴ seem to have done), or he can invent an entirely different kind of game. The participants of the psychedelic revolution seem to have chosen the latter course.

One of the non-pharmacological factors which seem to characterize this new game is its apolitical nature. In the words of Bob Dylan, "there's no left wing and right wing; only up wing and down wing." As Simmons and Winograd⁵ have observed, this is a kind of irreverence that goes beyond openly aggressive challenging. For political and economic belief systems to be defied is one thing; but for them to be simply ignored and dismissed out of hand is something else. "This withdrawal has aroused some of the greatest resentment and opposition since it is perhaps the gravest affront to an established ethic not to be taken seriously."⁶

Alabama is prepared to have its capital city marched upon but California seems to be unprepared to have free food and clothing distributed in its parks every afternoon at 4 o'clock. A policeman is prepared to confront switchblades and even anti-war pickets, but apparently he is not prepared to confront a young man with flowers in his long hair and a bell around his neck handing him some incense. Universities are prepared to have goldfish swallowed (that's a fad), but they appear less prepared to have students turn themselves into a work of art (that's a threat). The established ethic, in short, is prepared to be defied, but it is not prepared to have its "mind blown." It

may well be this unpreparedness of the establishment which will mark its demise. Yet how can any system defend itself if the threat is a symbolic transformation? If the old myth is irrelevant, so are its guardians.

This important apolitical theme in the psychedelic ethos, then, is interpreted, at least partially, as a response to the preceding age group. The historical location of what Donovan refers to as the "dawning generation" places them adjacent to the ideological void which characterizes their immediate predecessors. Forced to confront a meaningless (or finished) contest, they may decide to invent a new game rather than join the old as opponents to a team which has lost its spirit. Even to picket the old game for having unfair rules is still political action, because one must go to the old stadium. The managers may not like the demonstration, but at least they understand it. To invent a new game, however, and to play it in an entirely different arena, is apolitical action. Politics is part of the old game. Again, to be defied is one thing; to be simply ignored and dismissed out of hand is something else. The one may bring about social change, but the other portends to cultural change. The one is a redistribution of things already valued (like contesting political systems); the other is a redefinition or transformation of values.

It may be charged that to opt out (or drop out) is to act in support of the established ethic by default. The political radicals level this charge against the members of psychedelica. But the possibility also exists that it is precisely direct political action which is most easily co-opted into the prevailing mentality. What the system cannot buy off may well be those who have "nothing more to declare" in the old arena. In the words of Herbert Marcuse:

Their opposition hits the system from without and is therefore not deflected by the system; it is an elementary force which violates the rules of the game, and in so doing, reveals it as a rigged game . . . The fact that they start refusing to play the game may be the fact which marks the beginning of the end of a period.⁷

Historical Location Relative to the Economy

Unlike most of the previous bohemian movement, the "hippy" ethos does not appear to be fiercely anti-materialistic. Affluence is an important part of the shared historical experience of this age group, and, for the most part, it is neither denied nor decried.

What is denied is the mythical mandate of material success. Again, their historical location seems to be a terminal -- they have arrived. This is the first time in history when a really significant portion of the youth generation in America has come out of homes where the dream of success has become a reality. Their subjective experience of the economic project is that the project is completed, and they find themselves in a position to say, "OK, I've had enough; what else can you show me?"

But it is important to understand that this attitude itself rests on a firm economic base. We must take as a given that a certain level of affluence and technological development is necessary for the emergence and maintenance of a psychedelic

life style. Critics of the psychedelic or hippy scene get very disconcerted at this point. Obviously but crucial questions are raised. Who will mind the shop? If a large segment of a generation opts out of the very economic system which both produces and sustains them, what's to become of the system? But these questions reveal preoccupation with the Faustian myth--the struggle for existence. If a large number of people are located at the end of a project, and they perceive that the project has been fulfilled, then they start asking qualitatively different questions. What about the pacification of existence? The participation or indulgence in existence? "Don't just do something; stand there!"

Yes, for the most part the members of the psychedelic revolution are parasites. This, perhaps, is what makes the phenomenon most instructive. If we are to believe the literature on automation and cybernation, all of us are going to be parasites. In face, most of us already are. Rather than lamenting the economic worthlessness of the hippies, then, perhaps it behooves us to take them as exemplary of an unabashed perception of the economic reality of our time. To live off machines rather than live like machines is to honestly accept one's historical location. The machine is not decried. It is put in its proper place and then celebrated. As one participant in the psychedelic revolution put it, "What we want is an electronic Tibet." When the concept of "work" becomes culturally irrelevant, then so will the concept of "parasite." This is a crucial symbolic transformation, and this I think, is where the psychedelic revolution "is at" in terms of the economy.

Historical Location Relative to Technology

The current generation is the first whose shared history included television, computers, and transistors as a given. This may be of signal importance in any attempt to understand the world view -- the socially constructed reality -- of the psychedelic revolution and, more generally, the emerging youth culture. In an effort to interpret Marshall McLuhan's thinking on these matters, Richard Kostelanetz writes:

... the electronic media initiate sweeping changes in the distribution of sensory awareness -- in what McLuhan calls the "sensory ratios" . . . The new media envelop us, asking us to participate. McLuhan believes that such a multisensory existence is bringing a return to the primitive man's emphasis upon the sense of touch, which he considers the primary sense, "because it consists in a meeting of the senses" . . . He sees the new media as transforming the world into a "global village," where all ends of the earth are in immediate touch with one another, as well as fostering a "retribalization" of human life.⁸

The number of media-mix shows which involve the simultaneous presentation of total hearing, seeing, smelling, and touching stimulation has increased steadily over the last two or three years. A statement from one of these shows indicates that "we are all at work beating the tribal drum of our new electronic environment . . . We flood the sense-receptors of the audience to the point where time sense is warped, emotions run free, and love of the world suffuses each spectator's body."

A curious pattern seems to be emerging. There is at least some indication that a post-industrial level of technology is creating the rudiments of pre-industrial (in fact, pre-literate) thinking and social organization. This must be what McLuhan means when he says "we have evoked a super-civilized sub-primitive man."⁹ This retribalization is seen as a consequence of an altered consciousness or symbolic transformation which is more consistent with non-linear electronic circuitry than with the linear typographical and industrial culture that has characterized the Faustian epoch.

We need not look only to the participants in the psychedelic revolution to sense a new mode of thinking. Those of us who are teaching will recognize in many of our students what McLuhan recognized in the young man who commented: "You see, my generation does not have goals. We are not goal-directed. We just want to know what is going on." McLuhan suggested that "the point that this person was making was that it is absurd to ask us to pursue fragmentary goals in an electric world that is organized integrally and totally."¹⁰

It's as if the very system of highly distinct and segmented goals which characterized a culture that could produce an electronic technology has now created its own obsolescence. The new technology is the medium which calls for a new (integral) cultural content. This is what I mean by suggesting that technological factors figure heavily in the shared historical experience of a generation which has within it the potential for radical cultural change -- for symbolic transformation.

A characteristic of the new ethos which seems very much related to this post-industrial quest for total involvement is the development of a tremendous interest in religion and cosmology. It is this phenomenon, perhaps more than any other, that is said to be the essence of the drug experience.¹¹ If drugs are the sacrament of a new religion, they are so in the same sense that the media mix is the mass of a new religion. The media mix is said to simulate a psychedelic drug experience. It is my suggestion here that both the drugs and the media mix simulate the electronic world in which we live, and such simulation is the religious experience.¹² Men need religion to make meaningful sense of the world in which they find themselves. Traditional Western religious forms made sense of Calvin's fragmented and goal-oriented world, but that project is completed -- that myth has run its course. Now the quest is for a religious form appropriate to the simultaneity of an electronic-organic post-industrial world.¹³ This, I think, is why so many participants in the psychedelic revolution are rediscovering cosmological Christianity as well as reading the I Ching, consulting oracles, engaging in yoga, reciting Buddhist, Taoist, and Hindu chants, meditating on nature and mystical unity, and speaking of cosmic forces, strange vibrations, and spherical archetypes.

We have always had with us in our society occultists, astrologists, and people of exotic faith systems. But there seems to be something qualitatively more telling about our culture when even so small a portion of (largely middle class) young people come up with such a radically different world view. These people are living in the kind of truth system which Sorokin has called "ideational," and which, for years, he has predicted will replace the overripe "sensual" truth system which has dominated Western culture for the past several centuries.¹⁴

I don't want to say that "this is it! " -- that a symbolic transformation toward a new world view has fully taken place, but I do want to suggest that there seems to be something more than a fad or a phase in the life cycle going on, and that this something runs deeper than the ingestion of hallucinatory drugs. I think that, because of their historical location, a considerable portion of today's youth can perceive that we are "running out of era." These people are busy inventing a new myth, that is, a new reality.

NOTES

1. Susanne K. Langer, Philosophy in a New Key, Cambridge Harvard University Press, 1942.
2. Karl Mannheim, Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge, Ch. 7, "The Problem of Generations," London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1952
3. Ludwig Marcuse, "The Oldest Younger Generation," in The New Partisan Reader, New York, 1953.
4. Kenneth Keniston, The Uncommitted, New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1965.
5. J. I. Simmons and Barry Winograd, It's Happening, Santa Barbara; Laird Publications, 1966.
6. Ibid., p. 13.
7. Herbert Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man, Boston: Beacon Press, 1966, p.256.
8. Richard Kostelanetz, "Understanding McLuhan (In Part)", The New York Times Magazine, January 29, 1967
9. Marshall McLuhan, "Five Sovereign Fingers Taxed the Breath," in Edmund Carpenter and Marshall McLuhan (editors), Explorations in Communications, Boston: Beacon Press, 1960, p. 208.
10. Marshall McLuhan, "Address at Vision 65," Mimeographed.
11. There has been a considerable amount of literature on the religious nature of the psychedelic drug experience. See, for example, "Psychedelic Drugs and Religion," Volume 1, Issue 2 of the Journal of Psychedelic Drugs.
12. This notion of religion as a cultural symbol system which articulates world views and meaning is expressed clearly in the extensive writing of Clifford Geertz.
13. See Thomas Luckmann's, The Invisible Religion: The Transformation of Symbols in Industrial Society, New York: The MacMillan Company, 1967.