CHAPTER FOUR

The Psychedelic Adventures of Alan Watts

Stanley Krippner

In 1963, I presented an extremely controversial paper at an international conference on general semantics at New York University. The presentation concerned LSD-type substances and how, if administered properly, they could help a person reestablish contact with what general semanticists call the "extensional world:" those aspects of nature that each culture filters and constructs through its own lenses and vocabularies.

Immediately after my talk, I noticed a tall woman wearing a large green hat with a floppy brim supported by a white cane, limping rapidly down the aisle. She wore a necklace of potbellied Buddhas, and earrings decorated with the same. Her first questions to me were, "Do you know Tim Leary? Do you know Alan Watts?" I acknowledged that I knew them both, having attended a reception for Watts when I was a volunteer participant in Leary's Harvard University psilocybin research project.

This colorful woman's name was Virginia Glenn, and I discovered that she had been in the crowded room at the 1961 convention of the American Psychological Association when I first heard Leary discuss psychedelics. After attending the symposium, I had written Leary a letter volunteering my services as a research participant in his study. It was pure serendipity that I arrived the weekend of Watts' reception and Leary graciously invited me to the event. At the sit-down pot-luck dinner Watts entertained the group by answering questions and giving short monologues on a variety of topics ranging from education in England (the land of his birth) to Eastern philosophy.

Watts was a key figure in the life of Virginia Glenn. Upon discovering that she had acute diabetes, she decided to commit suicide but changed her mind after hearing a taped lecture by Watts. In the early 1950s, she traveled between Chicago, Cleveland, New York City, and Washington, DC, playing her collection of Alan Watts' tapes for anyone interested in hearing them. She first met Watts in 1957 while working as a waitress in New York City. By then her diabetes

was critical, sending her into frequent comas, and resulting in an incurable infection in her right foot. Despite her suffering, Virginia never complained about her condition. She began to schedule talks and seminars for Watts who looked upon her as a *Bodhisattva*—a living Buddha. I was living in New York City at the time and helped Virginia arrange Watts' lectures, an essential task because she was legally blind.

On July 3, 1970, Virginia and I had dinner in Greenwich Village; she had just returned from Boston where the physicians had examined her thoroughly and, as she put it, had "readjusted my chemicals." She reached into her ever-present carrying bag to pull out a number of articles and announcements she knew would interest me. The next day, Virginia went into a coma, was rushed to a hospital, and died. Alan Watts was in Europe at the time, but on his return he wrote:

> What always interested me was her discrimination and good taste in a dimension thronged with charlatans. . . . Above all, Virginia's genius was to bring together people who . . . would fertilize each other's insight and imagination. She must have been the catalyst of hundreds of friendships. (Watts, 1970, pp. 1–2)

The lasting fruits of my relationship with Alan Watts are a testament to Virginia's divine gift. Her talent of introduction would prove to be a lifelong benefit and the reason I can now write about Alan Watts with such personal perspective.

In this chapter, I suggest that Watts' integrated outlook on individual and transpersonal identity, cultivated through his peculiar upbringing, his interest in Anglican Catholicism and various Asian philosophies, and the randomized series of personal collisions that marked his life, laid a sturdy groundwork for his exploration of psychedelic matters. Undoubtedly, his overweening attachment to material and scientific explanations was counterpart to his experiences of mysticism, but he levied novel and profound attacks on accepted wisdom that served as a prologue to later developments. Although rife with contradiction, the complex intervention of his life in his work and vice versa, was partially responsible for the fertility of his thought.

THE ADVENTURES BEGIN

In 1958, after returning to the United States from lecturing at the C. G. Jung Institute in Zurich, Alan was conversing with Aldous Huxley and Gerald Heard. Alan's two companions were exuding greater tranquility and compassion than in previous meetings which they attributed to their ingestion of mescaline and LSD. Shortly thereafter, Watts was invited to take part in an experiment involving the ingestion of LSD under the direction of Dr. Keith Ditman, then

in charge of LSD research at the Department of Neuropsychiatry at UCLA. A goal of the research was to see if ingestion of LSD would invoke mystical experiences in the participants.

Watts considered himself as adventurous with respect to mysticism and open to trying virtually any set of procedures used to unlock such types of awareness, but he initially thought it highly improbable that chemical substances could induce anything resembling an authentic mystical experience. He subsequently described his first LSD experience as aesthetically entertaining, but not spiritual in character. What he did experience, however, was a heightened perceptual awareness, especially of nature, with profuse and vivid colors in leaves and flowers, elaborate patterns of grass on the lawn, trees luminous in a radiant sun, and a sky reflecting the primordial essence of blue (Watts, 1973). Alan explained this experience as a temporary interruption of the usual tendencies toward selective attention in everyday life perception (Watts, 1960a).

Alan once told me that his mother introduced him to the world of color, flowers, and design. In his autobiography, he wrote that she inhabited a "magical world of beauty" despite the "wretched fundamentalist Protestantism she had half-heartedly inherited from her parents" (Watts, 1973, p. 8). Watts' father has been described as a gentle, tolerant, and humorous man (Furlong, 2001). The couple remained devoted to each other all their lives, settling in a cottage surrounded by a large garden. The garden's flora and fauna were allowed to grow wild into "an almost tropical swamp" rather than being tamed and manicured, as were other gardens of that era (Watts, 1973, p. 17). Watts wrote:

> My mother and father brought me up in a garden flutant with the song of birds. They decided, however, that I should be educated as . . . an intellectual, directed toward the priestly, legal or literary professions. As soon as I was exposed . . . to these disciplines, which were studious and bookish, I lost interest and energy for the work of the garden, though I remained enchanted with the flowers and the fruit. (p. 24)

Perhaps the interruption of selective attention during Watts' initial exposure to LSD brought forth, and allowed him to reconnect with, his childhood experiences of the natural world.

Watts experienced his first LSD experiment in the office of the supervising psychiatrist, Keith Ditman, whom Alan trusted and described as having good professional judgment. Watts would eventually point out that the most important quality of an individual leading a drug session is a feeling of assurance in the circumstances that can be recognized by people in the heightened condition of awareness that the psychedelics encourage. He argued, however, that psychedelic experimentation should be done in a supportive and homey atmosphere rather than in a sterile clinic or regimented laboratory situation that may leave

the participants feeling they are located in insecure or unfriendly confines thus leading to problematic or negative experiences (Watts, 1965).

The New Alchemy

During the ensuing year after his first psychedelic experience, Watts experimented with the drug again, a half dozen times, at the invitation of two psychiatrists, Michael Argon and Sterling Bunnell, at the Langley-Porter Clinic in San Francisco. In light of these subsequent experiences, he was "reluctantly compelled to admit that—at least in my own case—LSD had brought me into an undeniably mystical state of consciousness" (Watts, 1973, p. 399). As described in his essay, "The New Alchemy" (Watts, 1960a), the most extraordinary aspect regarding experiences on psychedelics is that various domains of consciousness, usually seen as fundamentally irreconcilable in everyday awareness, such as thinking and feeling, practicality and mysticism, reason and poetics, appear rather to harmonize and enrich one another, thus pointing to a way of living in which humanity "is no longer an embodied paradox of angel and animal, or reason fighting against instinct, but a marvelous coincidence in whom Eros and Logos are one" (p. 153). The beauty, the visions, the sense of mystical unity made him conclude that such chemicals were to be approached with much care and on the order of a religious sacrament.

Alan was already well schooled in the sacred rituals of the Anglican church. As an altar boy he carried the train of the Archbishop of Canterbury during his enthronement. As a priest he served as a liturgy master at a "pontifical Solemn High Mass" at Canterbury Cathedral. Watts was an expert on Anglican sacramental procedures, having perfected his liturgy skills at Seabury-Western Theological Seminary and through subsequent Episcopal ministry at Canterbury House on the campus of Northwestern University. During these years, he wrote a substantive monograph on *The Meaning of Priesthood* (1946), and composed a cutting edge book on *Myth and Ritual in Christianity* (1953) after leaving the Episcopal church. Despite resigning from the church, Watts maintained a lifelong commitment to a spiritual vocation, once writing to Episcopal Canon, Bernard Iddings Bell, in October 1950: "I know that I am a priest forever and have no thought whatever of going back to a former state" (Watts, 1973, p. 246). Alan, incidentally, officiated a strikingly beautiful wedding ceremony for my wife and me at Spencer Memorial Presbyterian Church in Brooklyn, New York, in 1966.

I remember Timothy Leary cautioning during a weekend retreat at his Millbrook commune in summer 1965, saying that "an LSD trip is a frightening experience. If you're not ready to look at yourself and your ambitions, your lusts, desires, and pride through a clear amplifying lens, stay away from psychedelic experience" (cited in Krippner, 1975, p. 38). In his autobiography, Watts (1973) mentioned that his religious training and spiritual formation guided him

during his more treacherous and untoward psychedelic journeys. Elsewhere, he recollected an LSD experience of looking at "surely one of the most horrendous products of human imagination," the painting of *The Last Judgment* by Van Eyck. Under ordinary circumstances, Van Eyck's depiction is gruesome and terrifying, and is exponentially more so in the sway of LSD. Yet Watts (1960a) knew that "union with the Good that is beyond good and evil" leaves one "no longer moved by the terror of hell" (pp. 148–149). On another occasion, Easter Sunday at Timothy Leary's home in the early 1960s, Alan Watts led an LSD session in the form of an Anglican liturgy replete with New Testament readings and communion supper, including sacramental bread and wine. Leary (1998) subsequently described Alan's guidance as "High Church psychedelic":

> Alan Watts is highest Anglican. Precise, ceremonial, serene, aesthetic, classic, aristocratic with a wink. The ancient rituals executed perfectly with a quiet twinkle in the eye. My understanding of marijuana and LSD is mainly due to my listening to and watching Alan. (p. 105)

In addition to his renown with Eastern philosophies, Alan's wisdom with psychedelics was deeply informed by his Anglican training.

The Trip to Harvard

When I arrived in Cambridge in April 1962, for my first psilocybin experience as a participant in Leary's psychedelic research at Harvard University, Alan generously shared the insights he had acquired through his psychedelic sittings when "the veil is lifted." He warned of the need for looking at these new perceptions afterward with temperance. Although some remarkable insights may linger, he pointed out, other experiences may appear as completely unintelligible. Watts' accounts of his experiences with LSD and his thoughts about its possibilities, as well as its potential misuse, were often cited in his books, essays, tapes, and lectures. His central text on psychedelic experience, *The Joyous Cosmology*, was first published in 1962 (with a foreword by Leary and Richard Alpert). It remains one of the most vivid phenomenological accounts of psychedelic experience in print. In this book, Watts identified a pattern to his psychedelic experiences consisting of undulations of personality ranging from a sense of individual identity, to an expanded unity with a primordial Self, and back again. This "play of life" unfolds first as a cynical game of self/other one-upmanship that transforms into a situation where "humor gets the better of cynicism" and "finally, rapacious and all-embracing cosmic selfishness turns out to be a disguise for the unmotivated play of love" (Watts, 1965, p. 89).

Contemporaneous with the publication of *The Joyous Cosmology*, Watts received a two-year travel and study fellowship from the Department of Social Relations at Harvard University where he was already involved with Leary's

psychedelic research. One of Alan's main projects during this fellowship at Harvard was his book, *The Two Hands of God* (Watts, 1963b). This text was an exposition of the "Myths of Polarity," the symbolic representations of dualities (e.g., good–evil, light–dark, self–other) and their underlying unity found in various cultural narratives and stories. *The Two Hands of God* reads like an unfolding psychedelic adventure. It begins with myths and images dealing with the inner unity of opposites, moving on to myths reflecting the "cosmic dance" of good and evil, followed by the disappearance of inner unity in the mythologies of absolute dualism, and concluding with myths that reconnect and restore the experience of inner union.

Watts (1963b) described *The Two Hands of God* as emerging from many years of interest in the relations between opposites. Indeed, in 1939, Alan presented a paper on the reconciliation of opposites in Asian philosophy and Jungian analytical thought entitled "The Psychology of Acceptance." During that time in his life, Alan also was fascinated by the seeming conflict in Mahayana Buddhism regarding the relative merits of effort versus faith in spiritual practice. He published his solution to this problem in the *Review of Religion* in 1941. This paper had a tremendous personal impact on Watts as he came to recognize parallel issues in Christianity. This insight inspired him to attend seminary and study for ordination as a priest in the Episcopal church (Watts, 1973), a vocation that would substantively inform his understanding of psychedelics many years later.

While at Harvard, Watts inevitably ran into B. F. Skinner, the noted behaviorist. Watts often spoke of "the skin encapsulated ego" that is transcended during mystical experience, drug induced or not. He saw, moreover, the sense of unity that is heightened by psychedelics "carries Gestalt psychology, which insists on the interdependence of figure and background, to its logical conclusion in every aspect of life and thought" (Watts, 1973, p. 399). This perspective allowed him to discover what he felt was "the flaw" in Skinner's behaviorist system. Watts observed in his autobiography:

> I saw that his [Skinner's] reasoning was still haunted by the ghost of man as a something—presumably a conscious ego—determined by environmental and other forces, for it makes no sense to speak of a determinism unless there is some passive object which is determined. But his own reasoning made it clear, not so much that human behavior was determined by other forces, but rather that it could not be described apart from those forces and was, indeed, inseparable from them. It did not seem to have occurred to him that "cause" and "effect" are simply two phases of, or two ways of looking at, one and the same event. It is not, then, that effects (in this case human behaviors) are determined by their causes. The point is that when events are fully and properly described they will be found to involve and contain processes

> which were at first thought separate from them, and were thus called causes as distinct from effects. Taken to this logical conclusion, Skinner is not saying that man is determined *by* nature, as something external to him; he is actually saying that man *is* nature, and is describing a process which is neither determined nor determining. He simply provides reason for the essentially mystical view that man and universe are inseparable. (Watts, 1973, pp. 404–405)

He explained his insights during a lecture to the Social Relations Colloquium at Harvard on April 12, 1963, where he identified certain passages from Skinner's writings that were "the purest mysticism, which might have come straight from Mahayana Buddhism" (Watts, 1963a, p. 63). Skinner did not attend this lecture and I doubt he wanted to be seen as a mystic, but Watts nevertheless offered profound and innovative insights into Skinner's behaviorist approach to psychological life. (For a brief discussion of Skinner vis-à-vis Watts, see Claxton, 1981, pp. 131–139.)

Mutual Concerns

Because I had met Watts through Leary (but owed our friendship to the ministrations of Virginia Glenn), we discussed Leary's projects on several occasions. We both began to be concerned at the direction of what Watts (1973) called Leary's "enthusiasm" for altered states of consciousness. Psychedelics radically lift one out of a taken-for-granted sense of the world such that the usual and mundane affairs of life can seem ridiculous and absurd. Watts pointed out that psychedelic substances can induce an acute reaction to "pomposity." People chatting "memorandumese," or engaging political, scientific, or religious jargon sound so preposterous that it is easy to break out in laughter. This phenomenon, in fact, emerged during my first psychedelic session when we decided to study the impact of psilocybin on intellectual performance. I tried giving a test of mental ability to one of my co-participants but, after 30 minutes, my assessment questions evoked strong laughter from each of us and we subsequently abandoned the project. Likewise, Alan and I saw that Timothy was losing interest in constructively addressing criticisms of his work. His passion for psychedelics was compromising the scientific integrity of the research, rendering him more and more distant from the expected academic standards and practices at Harvard University.

Watts' (1973) autobiography reveals a similar kind of incident from his own childhood. As a youth of thirteen, Alan accompanied the family of a boyhood friend on an extended summer vacation to France. "The very moment we stepped off the boat," Alan said, "I felt a vivacious, sunny human atmosphere that was quite new to me and luminously exhilarating" (Watts, 1973, p. 81). During this journey, Alan experienced a novel culture, cuisine, and lifestyle that

liberated him from what he considered as a staid English provincialism. Upon returning from this trip, "the curriculum, the sports, and the ideals of King's School, Canterbury, seemed, with some few exceptions, to be futile, infantile, and irrelevant" (p. 81).

Leary eventually became a charismatic religious leader to his own circle of friends and students. Although Leary was well trained in psychology, he knew very little about the possible snares of religious studies and mystical practices. As Watts (1973) pointed out:

> The uninstructed adventurer with psychedelics, as with Zen or yoga or any other mystical discipline, is an easy victim of what Jung calls "inflation," of the messianic megalomania that comes from misunderstanding the experience of union with God. It leads to the initial mistake of casting pearls before swine, and, as time went on, I was dismayed to see Timothy converting himself into a popular store-front messiah with his name in lights, advocating psychedelic experience as a new world-religion. (p. 407)

Gary Fisher (2005) recounted the story about Watts and Leary on their way to the Civic Auditorium in Santa Monica, California, for a large psychedelic gathering, and musing about what the placards for the event should say: "Alan Watts said, 'Oh Tim, Just say it like it is—Timothy Leary: The Second Coming' . . ." (p. 109).

Watts (1973) clearly saw that Leary "was moving to a head-on collision with the established religions of biblical theocracy and scientific mechanism, and simply asking for martyrdom" (p. 408). Alan could easily have recognized this kind of trajectory from his own life experience. During his adolescence, Watts arrived at a turning point as he was on the academic track to Oxford from King's School in Canterbury. His veritable passion for Zen Buddhism combined with misgivings about the Western view of reality inspired a rapidly developing boredom with the established academic curriculum. After reading *Zarathustra*, he composed essays in the voice of Nietzsche on a university scholarship examination judged by the graders as nonsensical. Watts had foreclosed on an opportunity for advancement to an undergraduate university degree (Watts, 1973).

Life with Leary, as we both saw it in his Newton Center and Millbrook communes was by no means lackluster, even though, as Watts (1973) noted, it was difficult to comprehend how individuals, having seen the magnificence of psychedelic revelation, could be so oblivious to the displeasure of incessant messiness, with dilapidated furniture, dirty floors, and disheveled beds. I recall having dinner at Millbrook when half a dozen dogs rushed into the room. Instead of shooing them away, our hosts simply held the food above their heads, commenting, "They have as much right to this space as we do." Yet, I

agreed with Watts, "through all this, Timothy himself remained an essentially humorous, kindly, lovable, and (in some directions) intellectually brilliant person" (p. 408).

THE ONTOLOGICAL STATUS OF PSYCHEDELIC EXPERIENCE

Alan Watts was one of the primary theoreticians of the psychedelic era. Indeed, he published one of the most important and influential books of his career, *Psychotherapy East and West,* in 1961. It introduced the postwar generation of clinicians to a completely new dimension of the therapeutic process—the appeal to spiritual experience as the crux of personality change. Modern scientific psychotherapy could now be informed by Asian religious disciplines, with potential results on consciousness dramatically different than that produced by orthodox psychoanalysis and behaviorism. Watts lectured on this and other topics at Columbia, Yale, Cornell, Chicago, and elsewhere around the world. These travels brought Alan into public and private discussion with many leading members of the psychiatric profession, and he found himself astounded by what appeared to be their real fear of altered modes of awareness. Watts (1973) had assumed that psychiatric professionals would possess a familiarity with otherwise uncharted regions of the mind, but his review of the scientific literature revealed "only maps of the soul as primitive as ancient maps of the world . . . accompanied with little more solid information than 'Here be dragons' . . ." (p. 413).

The prevailing psychoanalytic and behaviorist theories of that era were unequipped to deal with psychedelic experience. In fact, there was a fundamental lack of regard for the whole issue of consciousness. Behaviorists insisted that "consciousness" and "mind" were beyond the bounds of science, and neo-behaviorists showed virtually no interest in human subjective experience. These psychologists saw the individual as a sort of computer with stimulus inputs and behavioral outputs. They could only note that LSD and similar substances made behavior seem unpredictable by creating a short-circuit in the computer. On the other hand, psychoanalysts, influenced by a Freudian worldview, played down the impact of conscious processes on human action. Psychedelic chemicals were seen as provoking "toxic schizophrenic reactions." The role of psychedelic substances was not readily understandable in the language of the Freudian paradigm informed by an outdated mechanistic physics of the nineteenth century. A large number of psychoanalysts thought of the human psyche as a "hydraulic pump" in which libido (sexual energy) that is inhibited in one part of the mind eventually erupts in an alternative part of psychological life. The psychoanalyst functioned as a kind of plumbing engineer by routing the flow of libidinal energy toward socially appropriate outlets. The ebb and flow of perceptual experiences and cognitive insights that distinguish

the psychedelic journey were hard to situate on the hydraulic pump designs and so were considered by the psychiatric community as resembling psychotic symptoms (Krippner, 1967).

Additionally, many psychiatrists and psychologists, as individuals and scientific professionals, considered themselves as separate and detached observers in their field of study and in everyday life. Their outlook of separateness lagged far behind the insights of twentieth-century sciences informed by quantum physics and field theory. These perspectives implied that every human being, and every facet of human existence, is an integral aspect of the world. Watts (1964a) therefore asked: "How is twentieth-century man to gain a feeling of his existence that is consistent with twentieth-century knowledge?" (p. 128). His answer was that psychedelic substances may facilitate the elicitation of an alternative feeling of self, affording the initial heightening of awareness to lift an individual out of the ordinary confining of "I" to a hazy location inside and bounded by the skin of the body.

Watts combined his insights about psychedelics with the sophisticated models of consciousness described in Buddhist and Hindu texts; models that encompassed altered states of consciousness in a more optimistic and comprehensive fashion than allowed by the psychiatric jargon of his time. He often said that his own psychedelic experiences, where a sense of individual identity expands to a cosmic-consciousness, had the flavor of Hindu mythology. Hinduism regards the universe as an immense drama in which a Single Player enacts all the roles. Each role is a particular persona or mask. The sensation of being only this one particular self/role is due to the Player's complete assimilation in the "cosmic drama" and in each and every role (Watts, 1974). Alan recognized that psychedelic substances can expand awareness beyond the usual limited sense of identity toward an immediate feeling of connectedness and "play" of the larger process. Alan saw, moreover, that this overall connectedness and inclusiveness was consistent with the newer twentieth-century "field theories" in the natural and social sciences: "The mystic's subjective experience of his identity with 'the All' is the scientists objective description of ecological relationship, of the organism/environment as a unified field" (Watts, 1964a, p. 129).

In the twenty-first century, thanks in part to Watts' pioneering triangulation of Eastern thought, modern science, and psychedelic experience, the fields of psychology and psychiatry have been opened up to a panoply of spectrums (Krippner & Welch, 1992; Wilber, 1977), models (Kokoszka, 2007; Lancaster, 2004), and typologies (Cardena, Lynn, & Krippner, 2000; Metzner, 1998) of consciousness—something virtually absent in the 1960s. Even contemporary behavior analysts are opening up to the study of mystical experience (Hayes, 1997). Watts' insights, moreover, continue to resonate with postmodern approaches to consciousness studies because "postmodernity requests that scientists question their own assumptions, and learn from non-Western perspectives, alternative conscious states, and narratives of exceptional human experience" (Krippner

& Winkler, 1995, p. 255; Krippner, 2000), all of which are thematic issues in Alan's writings. Such an approach allows us to break the traditional (objectivist) natural science taboos against studying human subjectivity in order to establish a fresh and innovative science of consciousness (e.g., Wallace, 2000).

The Problem of Neuropolitics

The decade of the 1960s began as a promising time for psychedelic research. Eventually, however, there was mounting governmental regulation and prohibition of substances that afford altered states of consciousness on the grounds that psychedelics are dangerous to those who use them. The irony, as Watts (1973) pointed out in his autobiography, was that legal prohibition created its own self-fulfilling prophecy by instigating fears of criminal prosecution manifesting as intense feelings of paranoia while under the influence of psychedelics. Watts was deeply worried, and rightly so, that prohibited access to LSD and similar substances would inspire the manufacture of the psychedelic counterpart of bootlegged liquor. These chemicals, sans appropriate content and dosage, could be fabricated for use in unsuitable settings devoid of any expert guidance.

The common explanation for prohibition of psychedelics is that concerns about the medical safety of these substances, rather than social or political reasons, prompted the government crackdown (Novak, 1997). An alternative interpretation is that psychedelics were outlawed because they radicalized individuals using them (Dyck, 2005). As I suggested elsewhere (Krippner, 2006a), the contributions of LSD and comparable substances in generating social and cultural transformation in the United States and around the world has been underrated, particularly in connection with fostering innovative approaches to protesting the Vietnam War, advocating the civil rights of racial minorities and women, liberating gay and lesbian lifestyles, and enlivening the deep-ecology movement. Every one of these issues reflects a transformation of awareness, a novel and innovative way of thinking, feeling, and behaving that emerged in the psychedelic 1960s. Reverberations of this new consciousness and its influences can be seen in the present calls in the United States to end the war in Iraq, to save and protect threatened species and their habitats, to alleviate global climate change, to make medical marijuana available to patients in need, and to undo the draconian drug laws that choke the American prison system and side track law enforcement from channeling its labors in opposition to grave criminal and terrorist acts that jeopardize public safety.

In a rather prescient essay entitled "Who Will Run Your Nervous System?" Watts (1964b) elaborated the problem of *neuropolitics*, an issue anticipated by Leary, Litwin, Hollingshead, Weil, and Alpert (1962) and now resonating at the contemporary intersection of neuroscience, religion and political discourse (e.g., Connolly, 2002; Leary, 2006; Moosa, 2007; White, 1982). Watts recognized the emerging capacity to effectively mold and shape human personality

and emotion through chemical means. Alan confronted the issue of just what kinds of feelings or human character should be cultivated, and who among the many invested parties gets to decide such questions. Although he saw that governments would undoubtedly seek to regulate the use of psychedelics, and that psychiatry was the profession usually mandated to prescribe and dispense these substances, Watts argued that it would likely have to be acknowledged that transfiguring awareness and identity, whether it be through prayer, Yoga, meditation, or psychedelic substances, is primarily a religious problem and is entitled the same legal protection as the right to worship.

In April 1966, however, government authorities led by G. Gordon Liddy raided Leary's Millbrook commune. They searched the premises, confiscated property, and arrested Leary and three others on charges of marijuana possession. A few months later, LSD was made illegal by government legislation. In 1968, responding to the legislative prohibition of LSD, Watts wrote an article on "Psychedelics and Religious Experience" for the *California Law Review* that was reprinted in a compilation of his essays (Watts, 1971). Watts concluded:

> To the extent that mystical experience conforms with the tradition of genuine religious involvement, and to the extent that psychedelics induce that experience, users are entitled to some constitutional protection. Also, to the extent that research in the psychology of religion can utilize such drugs, students of the human mind must be free to use them. (p. 95)

Forty years later, we are seeing the fruits of advocacy by Watts and others as peyote, psilocybin mushrooms, and ayahuasca are currently used as sacraments in both old and new religious institutions (Roberts, 2001), while legally sanctioned psychedelic research has finally resumed in the United States and elsewhere around the world (Friedman, 2006; Krippner & Sulla, 2000).

Friedman suggests this renaissance of research activity "could herald the singularly greatest change in modern psychology's future" (p. 54) due, in part, to the capacity for psychedelics to evoke spiritual and transpersonal experiences in certain settings. Similarly, Richards (2005) sees the resurgence of interest in psychedelics as a "frontier in the psychology of religious experience that could prove to have profound implications for advancing our understanding of spiritual dimensions of consciousness" (p. 377). However, I offer the following caveat: I often use the term *potential entheogen* rather than *entheogen* in reference to psychedelics in order to acknowledge that ingesting the substances will not always evoke a spiritual or mystical experience. The term *entheogen* implies "bringing forth the God within" but the factors of personal mind-set and socio-environmental setting have a complexity greater than the substances themselves such that calling them *entheogen* seems to guarantee something that may not

necessarily be delivered, especially to the naive or misguided user (Krippner, 2006b; see also, Krippner, 1968; Richards, 2008).

LIFE ON THE S. S. VALLEJO

When I moved from New York City to San Francisco in the early 1970s, I maintained my relationship with Watts, attending parties and assisting at his seminars on the Sausalito houseboat known as the *S. S. Vallejo*. Alan and his third wife, Mary Jane ("Jano"), had been sharing the vessel with the lively and eccentric collage artist, Jean Varda, since 1961. (Varda died in 1971.) The S. S. Vallejo is where Watts and a nexus of friends originated the Society for Comparative Philosophy from whom I was able to secure, with the assistance of Virginia Glenn, a grant for my dream research at Maimonides Medical Center (Krippner, 1993; Ullman, Krippner, & Vaughn, 1973). In February 1967, the Vallejo was the site of the legendary countercultural discussion between Watts, Allen Ginsberg, Leary, and Gary Snyder that came to be known as the "Houseboat Summit." As I remember it, the conversation centered around the question of whether individuals should "drop out" and join the counterculture or should the counterculture just go ahead and take over society at large.

Through my visits, I deepened my friendship with Alan and Jano, but developed a growing concern about their incredible consumption of alcohol. On one occasion, Watts greeted me at his houseboat with the news, "Jano and I have given up booze, but come in and have some sparkling cider with us." I was delighted with the news and told them how much I enjoyed their newly discovered beverage. However, on my next visit, the apple concoction had disappeared and the "demon rum" had triumphed once again.

I remember attending an elegant social gathering with Watts shortly after his relapse. His hostess was a society matron in Sausalito, and he had fortified himself for the event with at least two bottles of wine. When we arrived at her door, I had to support Watts because he was completely unable to stand upright. I guided him to the nearest chair where he sat, resplendent in an Oriental gown, affecting an enigmatic smile that passed for deep wisdom. People asked him questions and he gave short answers, few of them to the point of the query. But the questioners would often remark, "I have never heard such wise comments put in so few words." I refrained from telling them that those few words were all that Watts was capable of delivering in his condition. Perhaps, as Richard Price commented, "Alan could always play Alan, drunk or sober" (cited in Anderson, 1983, p. 273).

Alan once suggested that a consequence of seeing through the illusion of the ego "may not be behavior along the lines of *conventional* morality. It may well be as the squares said of Jesus, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drinker, a friend of . . . sinners!' . . ." (Watts, 1966/1989, p. 21). For me, it was ironic that

he would enjoy a lunch replete with healthy fruits, fish, and vegetables, and then negate much of the nutritional benefit with copious amounts of alcohol while chain-smoking cigarettes. Once I dared to ask him about these addictions and he blithely replied, "Well, I'm a very oral being—I like to drink, smoke, talk, and kiss." I suggested that he might emphasize the talking and kissing. After laughing at the suggestion, he commented that those two pastimes required a partner or audience while smoking and drinking did not. Here I am reminded of a dream involving Alan and his houseboat that was reported elsewhere in detail (Krippner, 1975). The dream occurred after reading a section of *The Odyssey* and listening to a musical based on the story:

> I was . . . on the ocean. . . . The craft was Alan Watts's boat, the S.S. Vallejo, and it held, as well as myself and Watts, Virginia Glenn and the Grateful Dead. Watts was steering the barge and it was approaching a large, dangerous rock. And on that rock were sitting two beautiful Sirens with banners draped across their bosoms just as if they were contestants in a bathing beauty contest. They were singing, "We can tell you anything, anything at all. We will give you everything, come on and have a ball!" . . . The Sirens' banners had letters printed on them. . . . Virginia was too blind to read those letters, the Dead were too stoned, and Watts was too drunk. I told them all what was in store for us if we headed toward the Sirens and warned them of the impending tragedy. Nevertheless, Watts kept steering his boat straight toward the rocks. I screamed, "Can't you see what's happening? The barge is heading for disaster! We're done for, doomed, finished!!!" . . . Watts replied, "But the girls are so lovely and their music is so beautiful." Then pulling himself together for a moment, Watts mimicked a gruff sea captain, saying, "If we really are going to crash, I will consider it an honor and a duty to go down with my ship!" He laughed loudly, took another belt of booze, and passed out. (pp. 94–95)

A biographer described life on the S. S. Vallejo as "Alan Watts' bohemia, a rich compendium of sights and smells and women and ideas, and liquor and LSD and pot and irreverent people who were all doing their thing" (Stuart, 1983, p. 205). This imagery is also reminiscent of Watts' lifestyle during his young adulthood in London where he was affiliated with a cadre of intellectual seekers known as the "Wild Woodbines," with philosopher, Dmitrije Mitrinovic, at the social center of the group. Although this network focused primarily on a live-for-the-moment revelry, it was Mitrinovic who one evening offered a discourse on "the mutual interdependence of all things," an idea that proved to be influential in Alan's writings on Asian philosophy and psychedelics in later years (Watts, 1973).

There are, in addition, events from childhood that seem to foreshadow the intertwining of alcohol (and tobacco) and Eastern philosophy in Alan Watts' life and work. Francis Croshaw, the patriarch of the family with whom Watts vacationed in France as a thirteen-year-old, bought Alan his first alcoholic drink on that excursion. Croshaw, moreover, whom Watts (1973) described as a smoker of large Burmese cigars, had an extensive library and recognizing Alan's interest in Asian philosophy, especially Buddhism, started lending him texts and engaging lengthy conversations accentuated with red wine and stogies.

In his adolescence, Alan would eventually surprise his parents and classmates by rejecting Christianity and declaring himself a Buddhist. He saw the Christian God of his youth as seeking to undercut life's *gaiete d'esprit* with overbearing authority. It was, therefore, a tremendous liberation for him to identify with people outside of the Christian tradition who did not have that particular sense of deity. Reminiscing on those early years, Watts (1973) wryly commented (in a colloquial tone that now seems anachronistic): "I knew that the Buddha had taken a dim view of wenching and boozing, but he never called it a *sin*—a damnable offense against ultimate reality. It was just one's own way of delaying *nirvana*—if that was what you wanted to do" (p. 93).

In Mahayana Buddhism, one who delays their ascendance to nirvana in order to continue benefiting the welfare of others is called a *Bodhisattva*. I would not be the first to suggest that, in light of Alan's life and work in the fields of psychology, philosophy, and religion, he was indeed a Bodhisattva for the West (Foster, 1986). Virginia Glenn would surely concur with this sentiment, but Alan once cautioned his readers not to confuse the "philosopher as artist" with the preacher. The role of the philosopher as artist, which he considered himself to be, "is to reveal and celebrate the eternal and purposeless background of human life. Out of simple exuberance or wonder he wants to tell others of the point of view from which the world is unimaginably good as it is, with people just as they are" (Watts, 1960b, p. 33). When the philosopher is forced into the role of preacher and viewed as a moralist or reformer, "the truth of what he says is tested by his character and his morals . . . whether he depends upon 'material crutches' such as wine or tobacco . . . or falls in love when he shouldn't, or sometimes looks a bit tired and frayed at the edges" (p. 31). Alan was not a preacher.

IN RETROSPECT

Watts contrasted his use of alcohol and psychedelics, saying. "personally, I am no example of phenomenal will power, but I find that I have no inclination to use LSD in the same way as tobacco or wines and liquors. On the contrary, the experience is always so fruitful that I must digest it for some months before entering into it again" (Watts, 1960a, p. 153). Alan described in his autobiography the end of his psychedelic adventures with these words:

> In sum I would say that LSD, and such other psychedelic substances as mescaline, psilocybin, and hashish, confer polar vision; by which I mean that the basic pairs of opposites, the positive and the negative, are seen as the different poles of a single magnet or circuit . . . so that the voluntary and the involuntary, knowing and the known, birth and decay, good and evil, outline and inline, self and other, solid and space, motion and rest, light and darkness, are seen as aspects of a single and completely perfect process. The implication of this may be that there is nothing in life to be gained or attained that is not already here and now. . . . Polar vision is thus undoubtedly dangerous—but so is electricity, so are knives, and so is language. (Watts, 1973, pp. 399–400)

It is impossible to fully discern whether the sense of divination, polarity, and contradiction that governed Watts' life from childhood is the result of reminiscence or that which makes it important, but Watts (1973) himself wrote the following:

> I carry over from childhood the vague but persistent impression of being exposed to hints of an archaic and underground culture whose values were lost to the Protestant religion and the industrial bourgeoisie, indeed to the modern West in general. This may be nothing but fantasy, but I seem to have been in touch with lingering links to a world both magical and mystical that was still understood among birds, trees, and flowers and was known—just a little—to my mother and perhaps to one or two of my nursemaids. (p. 37)

In 1973, I had a telephone call from Joan Tabernik, Watts' daughter. She wanted to discuss alternatives to stimulant drugs as a treatment for children with learning disabilities, an area in which I had worked for many years. We made an appointment to see each other on November 16 at Sonoma State University where I was scheduled to give a colloquium. Tabernik was unable to keep our appointment; her father died in his sleep the previous night. It was my sad duty to tell the university community of Watts' death before I began the seminar.

Watts' final European lecture and seminar tour apparently exhausted him, and he died on his return to California. But disturbing news reached me from one of the seminar participants. "Alan was drunk most of the time, and both during the seminar and at meals made lewd comments about the women in the group. Some women were flattered, but others were disgusted." I knew that Watts was quite aware of his alcoholism. By the late 1960s he was living with an enlarged liver and was hospitalized while suffering from delirium tremens (Furlong, 2001). Two decades earlier he had written the following in

The Wisdom of Insecurity:

> One of the worst vicious circles is the problem of the alcoholic. In very many cases he knows quite clearly that he is destroying himself, that for him, liquor is poison, that he actually hates being drunk, and even dislikes the taste of liquor. And yet he drinks. For dislike it as he may, the experience of not being drunk is worse. It gives him the "horrors" for he stands face to face with the unveiled, basic insecurity of the world. (Watts, 1951, pp. 79–80)

After his death I was told by a mutual acquaintance that Watts had registered for the experimental LSD psychotherapy program at Spring Grove Hospital in Maryland, a program known to have helped many alcoholics initiate their recovery. But his request came too late, an unfortunate circumstance because LSD psychotherapy was an intervention that he could have appreciated and accepted.

Michael Murphy, co-founder of Esalen Institute, offered an appropriate eulogy for Alan. He said:

> If you wanted a marriage performed, a building or a bathtub blessed, a Mass celebrated (in the High Episcopalian manner, with Roman and Orthodox touches added), a Buddhist prayer invoked for the New Year, or a grace said at meals, he was usually the first person we asked. Sometimes when he came to lead a seminar, we would find him in the kitchen, preparing one of his well-known dishes or admiring the latest vegetables from the Big Sur garden or letting us know that the cooking wasn't up to our usual standards.
>
> So he taught us by who he was. We learned from his infectious, outrageous laughter, from his virtues and his faults, from his sense of play and his eye for the binds we would get ourselves into. He was our gentlest and most joyous teacher. (cited in Krippner, 1975, p. 196)

I deeply value my relationship with Alan Watts, and learned a great deal from his seminars, his writings, and our conversations. He often described himself as "an entertainer" and predicted "fifty years after I am dead, nobody will remember me." But Saybrook Graduate School has established an Alan Watts professorship (that I currently hold), awarded several Alan Watts scholarships to students, and offers a course on his life and work. I was one of several speakers at two memorial celebrations of Watts' life and work arranged in San Francisco by our mutual friend, Robert Shapiro, who was instrumental in establishing the Alan Watts professorship at Saybrook. At one of these events I described Watts' personality typology: people are either "prickles" or "goos."

However, most people were either "prickly goos" or "gooey prickles." I also noted that the God that made most sense to Watts was a "two-handed God," a "hide-and-seek God," a deity that I described as a "now you see Her, now you don't" God. "God" may be a word we use to describe transcendent trickery, the ultimate deconstructing of boundaries, and paradoxically the unifying of all divisions. This is the God of fluidity, of change, of transcendence—the very Dao itself (Krippner, 2002).

Watts once translated "Tao" as "not forcing," and this statement characterized his life. Others may disagree, but I doubt that Watts had a rigorous, well-developed meditative regimen that he practiced faithfully. Indeed, in our discussions it seemed to me that he had gained much of his knowledge of meditation though extensive reading and informal conversations with such spiritual teachers as Christmas Humphreys and D. T. Suzuki rather than through long-term instruction. Nonetheless, perhaps more than any other writer, Watts brought the spiritual wisdom of the East to the United States and other Western countries. Watts' books, tapes, articles, and lectures initiated both scholarly dialogue and personal transformation that affected hundreds of thousands of men and women, including me and my circle of friends. Leary (1999) called Alan "the smiling scholar of the acid age. . . . Cool, gracious, never ruffled, chuckling to share with us his amused wonder at God's plans for the planet and, with quizzical eye, glancing to see if we will catch on" (p. 100). Like all of us, he had his shortcomings, inconsistencies, and personal demons, but what he accomplished is an admirable record for one lifetime and, in one form or another, his legacy continues.

REFERENCES

Anderson, W. T. (1983). *The upstart spring: Esalen and the American awakening*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Cardena, E., Lynn, S. J., & Krippner, S. (Eds.). (2000). *Varieties of anomalous experience*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Claxton, G. (1981). *Wholly human: Western and Eastern visions of the self and its perfection*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Connolly, W. E. (2002). *Neuropolitics: Thinking, culture, speed*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Dyck, E. (2005). Flashback: Psychiatric experimentation with LSD in historic perspective. *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, *50*(7), 381–388.

Fisher, G. (2005). Treating the untreatable. In R. N. Walsh & C. S. Grob (Eds.), *Higher wisdom: Eminent elders explore the continuing impact of psychedelics*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Foster, M. (1986). A Western Bodhisattva. In R. Miller & J. Kenny (Eds.), *Fireball and the lotus: Emerging spirituality from ancient roots* (pp. 135–149). Sante Fe, NM: Bear and Co.

Friedman, H. (2006). The renewal of psychedelic research: Implications for humanistic psychology. *The Humanistic Psychologist*, *34*(1), 39–58.

Furlong, M. (2001). *Zen effects: The life of Alan Watts.* Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths.

Hayes, L. J. (1997). Understanding mysticism. *The Psychological Record*, *47*, 57–596.

Kokoszka, A. (2007). *States of consciousness: Models for psychology and psychotherapy*. New York: Springer.

Krippner, S. (1963, August). *Consciousness expansion and the extensional world*. Paper presented to the International Society for General Semantics, New York.

Krippner, S. (1967). Afterword. In P. G. Stafford & B. H. Golightly, *LSD: The problem-solving psychedelic*. New York: Award Books.

Krippner, S. (1968). Of hell and heavenly blue. In R. Metzner (Ed.), *The ecstatic adventure* (pp. 46–54). New York: Macmillan.

Krippner, S. (1975). *Song of the siren: A parapsychological odyssey.* New York: Harper & Row.

Krippner, S. (1993). The Maimonides ESP-dream studies. *Journal of Parapsychology*, *57*, 39–54.

Krippner, S. (2000). Research methodology in humanistic psychology in the light of post-modernity. In K. J. Schneider, J. F. T. Bugental, & J. F. Pearson (Eds.), *The handbook of humanistic psychology* (pp. 259–304). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Krippner, S. (2002). Dancing with the trickster: Notes for a transpersonal autobiography. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, *21*, 1–18.

Krippner, S. (2006a, January). *Consciousness and the mythologies of society.* Paper presented at LSD: Problem Child and Wonder Drug, An International Symposium on the Occasion of the 100th Birthday of Albert Hoffman, Basel, Switzerland.

Krippner, S. (2006b, January). *The future of religion*. Paper presented at LSD: Problem Child and Wonder Drug, An International Symposium on the Occasion of the 100th Birthday of Albert Hoffman, Basel, Switzerland.

Krippner, S., & Sulla, J. (2000). Identifying spiritual content in reports from ayahuasca sessions. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, *19*, 59–76.

Krippner, S., & Welch, P. (1992). *The spiritual dimensions of healing: From tribal shamanism to contemporary health care*. New York: Irvington Press.

Krippner, S., & Winkler, M. (1995). Postmodernity and consciousness studies. *Journal of Mind and Behavior*, *16*(3), 255–280.

Lancaster, B. L. (2004). *Approaches to consciousness: The marriage of science and mysticism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Leary, T. F. (1998). *Politics of ecstasy*. Berkeley, CA: Ronin. (Original work published 1968)

Leary, T. F. (1999). *Turn on, tune it, drop out*. Berkeley, CA: Ronin.

Leary, T. F. (2006). *Neuropolitique*. Tempe, AZ: New Falcon.

Leary, T., Litwin, G., Hollingshead, M., Weil, G., & Alpert, R. (1962). The politics of the nervous system. *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, *18*(5), 26–27.

Metzner, R. (1998). *The unfolding self: Varieties of transformative experience*. Novato, CA: Origin Press.

Moosa, E. (2007). Neuropolitics and the body. In G. ter Haar & Y. Tsuruoka (Eds.), *Religion and society: An agenda for the 21st century* (pp. 47–60). Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill.

Novak, S. J. (1997). LSD before Leary: Sidney Cohen's critique of 1950's psychedelic drug research. *Isis*, *88*(1), 87–110.

Richards, W. A. (2005). Entheogens in the study of religious experience: Current status. *Journal of Religion and Health*, *44*(4), 377–389.

Richards, W. A. (2008). The phenomenology and potential religious import of states of consciousness facilitated by psilocybin. *Archives for the Psychology of Religion*, *30*(1), 189–199.

Roberts, T. B. (Ed.). (2001). *Psychoactive sacramentals: Essays on entheogens and religion*. San Francisco: Council on Spiritual Practices.

Stuart, D. (1983). *Alan Watts*. Briarcliff Manor, NY: Stein & Day.

Ullman, M., Krippner, S., & Vaughn, A. (1973). *Dream telepathy: Experiments in nocturnal ESP*. New York: Penguin.

Wallace, A. B. (2000). *The taboo of subjectivity: Towards a new science of consciousness*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Watts, A. W. (1939). *The psychology of acceptance*. New York: Analytic Book Club.

Watts, A. W. (1941). The problem of faith and works in Buddhism. *Review of Religion*, *5*(4), 385–402.

Watts, A. W. (1946). The meaning of priesthood. *Advent Papers*, No. 7. Boston: Church of the Advent.

Watts, A. W. (1951). *The wisdom of insecurity*. New York: Pantheon.

Watts, A. W. (1953). *Myth and ritual in Christianity*. New York: Vanguard Press.

Watts, A. W. (1960a). The new alchemy. In *This is IT; and other essays on Zen and spiritual experience* (pp. 125–153). New York: Pantheon.

Watts, A. W. (1960b). This is IT. In *This is IT; and other essays on Zen and spiritual experience* (pp. 15–39). New York: Pantheon.

Watts, A. W. (1961). *Psychotherapy East and West*. New York: Pantheon.

Watts, A. W. (1963a). The individual as man/world. *The Psychedelic Review*, *1*(1), 55–65. (Paper presented to the Social Relations Colloquium, Harvard University, April 12, 1963)

Watts, A. W.(1963b). *The two hands of God: The myths of polarity*. New York: George Brazilier.

Watts, A. W. (1964a). A psychedelic experience: Fact or fantasy. In D. Solomon (Ed.), *LSD: The consciousness-expanding drug* (pp. 119–131). New York: Putnam.

Watts, A. W. (1964b). Who will run your nervous system? *The New Republic*, *150*(22), 15–16.

Watts, A. W. (1965). *The joyous cosmology: Adventures in the chemistry of consciousness*. New York: Vintage Books.

Watts, A. W. (1970, November). Virginia Glenn—1931–1970. *Bulletin of the Society for Comparative Philosophy*, pp. 1–2.

Watts, A. W. (1971). Psychedelics and religious experience. In *Does it matter? Essays on man's relation to materiality* (pp. 78–95). New York: Vintage.

Watts, A. W. (1973). *In my own way: An autobiography*. New York: Vintage.

Watts, A. W. (1974). The cosmic drama. In *The essence of Alan Watts* (M. J. Watts, Ed., pp. 173–193). Millbrae, CA: Celestial Arts.

Watts, A. W. (1989). *The Book: On the taboo against knowing who you are*. New York: Vintage. (Original work published 1966)

White, E. (1982). Brain science and the emergence of neuropolitics. *Politics and the Life Sciences*, *2*(1), 47–60.

Wilber, K. (1977). *The spectrum of consciousness*. Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House.