



CHRISTOPHER PARTRIDGE

HIGH CULTURE

DRUGS, MYSTICISM, & THE PURSUIT
OF TRANSCENDENCE IN
THE MODERN WORLD

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the Pursuit of Transcendence in
the Modern World*



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OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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Published in the United States of America by Oxford University Press
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, United States of America.

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CIP data is on file at the Library of Congress
ISBN 978-0-19-045911-6

1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2

Printed by Sheridan Books, Inc., United States of America

For Alex, Crossy, and Jeff

Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| <i>Acknowledgments</i> | xi |
| Introduction | i |
| 1. Technologies of Transcendence | 9 |
| Technologies of the Self | 9 |
| Psychedelic Gnosis and the Transcendence of Ordinary Consciousness | 12 |
| Perennialism and the Experience of Oneness | 17 |
| Shamanism and <i>Ekstasis</i> | 19 |
| Concluding Analysis: The Drug Problem? | 23 |
| 2. Opium Dreams | 30 |
| Opium in Britain in the Early Nineteenth Century: Some Background Notes | 30 |
| The Art of Dreaming | 34 |
| The English Opium-Eater | 38 |
| Opium and the Orient: Fear and Fascination | 46 |
| Concluding Comments | 56 |
| 3. Anesthetic Revelation | 60 |
| A Ladder to the Heaven of Heavens | 61 |
| Syntax, Surgery, and Celestial Visions | 68 |
| Benjamin Blood's Anesthetic Revelation | 71 |
| Anesthesia and the Society for Psychical Research | 74 |
| Concluding Comments | 84 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| 4. Hashishdom | 88 |
| Cannabis and Clinical Research in the Nineteenth Century | 89 |
| The Old Man of the Mountain and the Assassins | 95 |
| Artificial Paradises | 102 |
| The American Hashish-Eater | 107 |
| Concluding Comments | 121 |
| 5. Occultism in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries | 125 |
| Mesmerism, Hashish, and Somnambulism | 126 |
| Dowameskh, the Orient, and Neoplatonic Esotericism | 136 |
| Abstinence and Ambivalence | 144 |
| Theosophical Reflection | 150 |
| Discourses of Decadence | 155 |
| W.B. Yeats, Maud Gonne, Drugs, and Fin de Siècle Occultism | 159 |
| The Highs and Lows of a Drug Fiend | 166 |
| A Note on Drugs and Post-Crowleyan Thelemic Thought | 182 |
| Concluding Comments | 186 |
| 6. The Antipodes of the Mind | 191 |
| Psychedelic Research: Some Background Notes | 192 |
| A Mystic and a Scientist | 201 |
| Mysticism, Sacred, and Profane | 213 |
| Concluding Comments | 224 |
| 7. Revolution in the Head | 225 |
| Adventures in the Chemistry of Consciousness | 226 |
| A Religious Set and Setting | 240 |
| Notes on the Counterculture | 249 |
| Millbrook and Psychedelic Religion | 252 |
| The Neo-American Church | 261 |
| The Psychedelic Sacrament | 271 |
| Turning On and Turning East | 273 |
| Concluding Comments | 284 |
| 8. Psychedelic Shamanism | 288 |
| Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy | 289 |
| The Long Trip and the Origin of Religion | 291 |

| | |
|----------------------------|-----|
| The Sorcerer's Apprentice? | 308 |
| Alien Dreamtime | 318 |
| Concluding Comments | 334 |

| | |
|--------------|-----|
| <i>Notes</i> | 343 |
|--------------|-----|

| | |
|--------------|-----|
| <i>Index</i> | 437 |
|--------------|-----|

Acknowledgments

THIS IS ONE of those books that had a long gestation period. Had it not been for a sabbatical granted by the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Lancaster University, it would still be a series of scattered notes, annotated texts, and half-baked ideas. Likewise, I am thankful to the staff of Lancaster University library for their help in securing some relatively obscure material. I am grateful to Cynthia Read at Oxford University Press for her encouragement. I also want to extend my gratitude to Joan Kleps and members of the Original Kleptonian Neo-American Church for their generous assistance. Finally, my understanding of psychedelic mystical states has been greatly assisted by those who have, over the years, generously shared their profound and often life-changing experiences with me.

Introduction

Who will ever relate the whole history of narcotics?—It is nearly the history of “culture,” of our so-called high culture!

—FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE¹

That humanity at large will ever be able to dispense with Artificial Paradises seems very unlikely The urge to transcend self-conscious selfhood is . . . a principal appetite of the soul.

—ALDOUS HUXLEY²

WHO HAS NOT, from time to time, longed to “transcend self-conscious selfhood”? Surely we can all recognize what Allen Ginsberg referred to as the “gnostic impulse,” the urge to leave everyday life behind and slip through the looking glass into another world of immersive experiences.³ Many people have found the use of psychoactive drugs an effective method of opening up new meaning-making spaces. This is a book about their experiences. It traces key moments in psychedelic history from the turn of the nineteenth century up to the present day.

While people take drugs for a number of different reasons, some of which are complex, it needs to be borne in mind that underlying the high culture of modernity are, as Aldous Huxley put it, men and women who “lead lives at the worst so painful, at the best so monotonous, poor and limited that the urge to escape, the longing to transcend themselves if only for a few moments” has become “one of the principal appetites of the soul.”⁴ As Leslie Iversen, visiting professor of neuropharmacology at Oxford University, noted, “As a species, we have a unique propensity to seek out mind-altering chemicals People in both rich and poor countries seem to have a constant desire to alter their state of consciousness . . . and to forget the troubles of everyday life.”⁵ While accurate figures are almost impossible to obtain, it is clear that recreational drug use is rising. For example, between 1998 and 2008, users of opiates rose

from 12.9 million to 17.35 million, users of cocaine rose from 13.4 million to 17 million, and users of cannabis rose from 147.4 million to 160 million.⁶ High culture is often also a culture of tragic misadventure.⁷ As the Czech psychiatrist and psychedelic researcher Stanislav Grof found, “a consuming need for transcendence seems to be the core problem of alcoholism and narcotic drug addiction.”⁸ The problem is that “for a hurting individual who is desperately looking for help and is incapable of accurate discrimination, the resemblance [between mystical states and inebriation] seems close enough to seduce him or her into systematic abuse.”⁹ Grof, we will see, made a distinction between altered states induced by psychedelics, which he understood to be genuinely mystical and psychologically beneficial, and states induced by alcohol and opiates, which are fundamentally detrimental to physical, psychological, and spiritual health.

This brings us directly to the subject of this book. Psychoactive substances induce states of transcendence that frequently are invested with mystical significance. As Robert Masters and Jean Houston found during their research in the early 1960s:

When we examine those psychedelic experiences which seem to be authentically religious, we find that during the session the subject has been able to reach the deep integral level wherein lies the possibility of confrontation with a Presence variously described as God, Spirit, Ground of Being, Mysterium, Noumenon, Essence, and Ultimate or Fundamental Reality. In this confrontation there no longer is any question of surrogate sacrality. The experience is one of direct and unmediated encounter with the source level of reality, felt as Holy, Awful, Ultimate, and Ineffable.¹⁰

Drug-induced states of transcendence, of course, need not be interpreted in this explicitly religious sense. Certainly they are not all interpreted in terms of a relationship to a single transcendent reality. Nevertheless, such experiences of transcendence, whether induced by drugs or not, do tend to lead to a suspicion that, to quote Peter Berger, “there is *an other reality*, and one of ultimate significance for man, which transcends the reality within which our everyday experience unfolds.”¹¹ We will see that William James, for example, following his inhalation of nitrous oxide in the 1880s, was persuaded that “the world of our present consciousness is only one out of many worlds of consciousness that exist, and that those other worlds must contain experiences which have a meaning for our life also.”¹² In using the slippery term “transcendence,” I am

not simply referring to encounters with deities, or to those experiences that lead individuals to “the impression that they are in contact with something boundless and limitless, which they cannot grasp, and which utterly surpasses human capacities.”¹³ Although these understandings typically inform the interpretation of drug-induced states of transcendence, my starting point is simply the meaning-making experience itself, the experience of that which is Other, of that which is beyond the ordinary, the finite, and the everyday.

THE LURE OF that which is beyond the ordinary is conspicuous within human culture. Central to what might be understood as a bias toward enchantment is “occulture.” Like culture, occulture is part of everyday lived experience. Much as in premodern magical cultures, in modern societies occulture typically includes nonsecular discourses that thrive beyond the privileged cultures of “official” religion. Occultural ideas are “occulted” in the sense that they are othered as profane, ephemeral, or irrational by the dominant discourses of both secular and nonsecular institutions. Occulture also refers to the everyday processes by which particular nonsecular meanings emerge, are disseminated, and become influential in societies and the lives of individuals.¹⁴

Whether one considers the paranormal phenomena encountered by characters in popular literature, television series, or films, or the patchwork of ideas circulated within popular music, or simply urban legends and shared anomalous experiences, the everyday culture of modernity is saturated with discourses that transgress the secular. Popular culture circulates occultural content and opens up spaces within which new constructions of the nonsecular emerge. Psychedelic occulture—often central to “high culture”—has been particularly fertile in this respect.

This can be related to Howard Becker’s discussion in his 1953 essay on cannabis use, in which he argued that users “learn to be high.”¹⁵ That is to say, the user “learns to smoke it in a way that will produce real effects . . . learns to recognize the effects and connect them with drug use,” and “learns to enjoy the sensations he perceives.”¹⁶ The point here is that it’s not simply a case of recognizing that a particular drug has altered one’s perception, which would be difficult for even the most inattentive mind to ignore, but rather that one learns that *this* is what *this* drug *does*.¹⁷ As we will see, while there are always a number of available interpretations of the effects of powerful psychoactive substances, these are typically informed by what, as Becker says, could “properly be called a drug culture, a widely shared body of knowledge about what [a particular drug] is, how to use it effectively, what experience that might

produce, which results you should enjoy,” and so on.¹⁸ This is high culture, which is important, because not only does it reduce the incidence of unpleasant effects, but it does so by providing a vocabulary and an interpretative framework that help users both to expect certain experiences and to make sense of them. Moreover, not only are techniques, technologies, and interpretations shared within high culture, but psychedelic occulture constructs the experience as enchanted reality. As we will see in Chapter 1 and particularly Chapter 7, this type of thinking is often discussed in relation to the “set” (the user’s mind-set) and the “setting” (the physical and sociocultural environment within which the drug is taken).

CONCERNING THE TERMINOLOGY: ALTHOUGH the discussion begins at the turn of the nineteenth century, I have doggedly stuck with “psychedelic,” coined in 1956 by the British psychiatrist Humphry Osmond in a letter to Huxley. While the Greek *ψυχή* (*psyche*) refers to “soul” as well as aspects of “the self,” he defined it more broadly as “mind-manifesting.”¹⁹ This is helpful, I think, in that analyses of drug-induced altered states often slip easily between the worlds of psychology, psychiatry, and religion.

It is preferable to that other increasingly popular term, “entheogen,” which, as Terence McKenna opined, is “a clumsy word freighted with theological baggage.”²⁰ Regardless of whether or not it is a “clumsy word,” there is no doubt that its relationship to particular “theological” currents within occulture limits its usefulness. It was coined in 1979 by a small group of scholars—Carl Ruck, Gordon Wasson, Jeremy Bigwood, Danny Staples, and Jonathon Ott—several of whom had become well known for their work in seeking to trace continuities among religion, mythology, ancient cultures, and ethnobotany. Led by Ruck, the group settled on the elision of *ἐνθεός* (*entheos*, “full of god, inspired, possessed”) and *γενέσθαι* (*genesthai*, “to become”) to produce a portmanteau that meant something along the lines of “to generate god within.” Of course, as Wouter Hanegraaff has noted, the word makes no reference to drugs, strictly speaking—just as “psychedelic” does not.²¹ However, its standard meaning is directly related to a belief that one is “‘filled,’ ‘possessed’ or ‘inspired’ by some kind of divine entity, presence or force.”²² This definition was confirmed by its inclusion in the *Oxford English Dictionary* in June 2007: “a psychoactive substance which is used in a religious ritual or to bring about a spiritual experience.” So McKenna was right: in a way that “psychedelic” does not, “entheogen” theologizes chemically induced experiences of transcendence.

Furthermore, it is perhaps worth noting why it was thought necessary to introduce yet another neologism. It was the direct result of a feeling of unease arising from conservative prejudice. Wasson in particular wanted to distance his interest in psychoactive substances from the countercultural quest for altered states. The principal problem with the word “psychedelic,” the group argued, was that it was “associated with the behavior of deviant or revolutionary groups.”²³ They bemoaned that it had “become so invested with connotations of the pop culture of the 1960s” that they could no longer refer to “a shaman’s taking of a ‘psychedelic’ drug.”²⁴ The rationale for the argument is of course flawed, as all arguments founded on prejudice tend to be. There is no reason one cannot use the same term to refer to the same type of substance used by different people for similar reasons in different cultural contexts. In disagreeing with this, however, Wasson exposed his prejudice: “We should treat the ‘entheogens’ with the respect to which they were richly entitled. As we undertake to explore their role in the early history of religions, we should call them by a name unvulgarized by hippy abuse.”²⁵

There were, of course, a number of other, less “vulgar” terms that might have been used—and, of course, which might have been used in this book instead of “psychedelic.” However, many of these were coined within clinical contexts and therefore tended to pathologize rather than theologize. (This was, as we will see, also a concern of some nineteenth-century occultists, such as the Spiritualist Louis-Alphonse Cahagnet.) “Hallucinogen” is a good example.

We commonly refer . . . to the alteration of sensory perceptions as “hallucination” and hence a drug that effected such a change became known as an “hallucinogen.” . . . The verb “hallucinate,” however, immediately imposes a value judgment upon the nature of the altered perceptions, for it means “to be deceived or entertain false notions.” . . . How can such a term allow one to discuss without bias those transcendent and beatific states of communion with deity that numerous peoples believe they or their shamans attain through the ingestion of what we now call “hallucinogens”?²⁶

This highlights a problematic bias in the use of the term “entheogen.” If “hallucinogen” carries too much baggage of one variety, “entheogen” carries too much of another variety, referring as it does to “the condition that follows when one is inspired and possessed by the god that has entered one’s body.”²⁷

Interestingly, while “entheogen” was originally intended to be used in the narrow sense of “only those vision-producing drugs that can be shown to have figured in shamanic or religious rites,” Ruck, Wasson, Bigwood, Staples, and Ott suggested that it might have a wider application.²⁸ Presumably because they were keen to see “psychedelic” replaced by “entheogen,” they argued that the latter term should be used of “other drugs, both natural and artificial, that induce alterations of consciousness similar to those documented for ritual ingestion of traditional entheogens.”²⁹ It was not surprising, then, that the term “entheogen” soon found its way into the psychedelic occulture from which those who coined it had sought to distance themselves. By the end of the 1990s, a neo-hippie entheogenic high culture emerged that focused on indigenous traditions and the sacramental use of natural hallucinogens. And so almost everything Wasson found distasteful about the word “psychedelic” currently applies to “entheogen.” Even within popular music, artists across a range of genres, from ambient to black metal, have embraced the terminology to promote the spiritual use of hallucinogens.³⁰ While the term seems to have retained its original reference to broadly shamanistic paranormal experiences, it is informed by meanings drawn from psychedelic occulture. So why not just stick with “psychedelic”? We all know what it means!

Unlike “entheogen” or “hallucinogen,” the term “psychedelic” has been widely used for more than sixty years within scientific, clinical, religious, creative, and recreational contexts. As such, it is not encoded in the same narrow way with particular meanings. While it does, of course, retain countercultural baggage from the 1960s (as “entheogen” now does from the 1990s), it is a far more flexible term.³¹ This is important for the scholarly analysis of psychoactive substances, because the modern history of psychedelic experiences is a history that transgresses the boundaries we like to erect between the worlds of psychiatry, psychology, spirituality, creativity, and recreation. Exploring the borderlands opened up by psychoactive substances requires a term more capacious than either “hallucinogen” or “entheogen.” Just as the term “states of transcendence” encourages consideration of the breadth of experience induced by psychoactives, so the term “psychedelic” does not blinker analysis.

It should also be noted that while I want to apply the term “psychedelic” to all drug-induced mystical states, not all drugs used to induce such states are “psychedelics.” Opium, for example, is not. While the majority of the book does concern the principal psychedelics, such as LSD, psilocybin, DMT, and mescaline, the discussion is not limited to this class of drugs.

THE “CHEMICAL GENERATION” was a term used of the drug-fueled youth culture of the 1990s, having been initially applied to a group of writers whose work betrayed an intimacy with that particular high culture. *Trainspotting*, Irvine Welsh’s surreal and scabrous tale about Scottish junkies, is perhaps the most well-known example.³² However, as with the term “the psychedelic sixties,” this isolation of a specific period and a specific subculture is misleading. Drug use isn’t limited to the odd decadent decade or to certain impious groups that periodically coalesce in societies. As Richard Davenport-Hines has commented, “Intoxication is not unnatural or deviant. Absolute sobriety is not a natural or primary human state.”³³ Every generation is a chemical generation. We are a chemical species. Whether one consults the recent findings of the Global Drug Survey, the work done by agencies such as the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, or the many excellent social histories of drug use, it is clear that humans have a complex and inextricable relationship with psychoactive substances.³⁴ It is hardly surprising that a bewildering array of books and articles have been written on the history of drug-taking, the effects of drugs on human behavior, the nature of addiction, drug policy, the drug trade, the science of drug-induced subjective experiences, pharmacology, the cultural significance of drugs, and so on. It is a little odd, therefore, that comparatively little analysis of the psychedelic experience has been provided by scholars of religion. A number of excellent studies have been written since the 1960s, with several worthwhile contributions in recent years, but there is still much work to be done.³⁵ Indeed, this is the first overview of the modern period from the turn of the nineteenth century focusing explicitly on induced transcendent states from the perspective of religious studies.

It should be noted that while there are numerous religious communities that make use of psychoactive substances, such as Santo Daime, the Native American Church, and Rastafarianism—on which there has been some excellent research—this book focuses on the development of psychedelic mystical thought primarily through an analysis of the accounts of individuals. For example, while I have published research on Rastafarianism, I have only briefly discussed its sacramental use of cannabis.³⁶ This is not to say that there is no discussion of organized religion in the book. There is. But it is not a book about “new religions” and psychoactive substances. In terms of its scope and approach, to some extent it can be read as a “religious” companion to Sadie Plant’s *Writing on Drugs* or Marcus Boon’s *The Road of Excess*.³⁷

Finally, I am also fully aware that I have not discussed every significant thinker to have recorded a drug-induced experiences of gnosis since the turn

of the nineteenth century. Likewise, I am conscious of the fact that I have not referenced every interpretation of the psychedelic experience. The amount of material produced by those who have had such experiences is daunting, if sometimes exhilarating. While I have sought to represent as well as I can the distinctiveness of the experiences discussed, in the final analysis there is a great deal of overlap. Hence my aim has been to pick out those key thinkers and movements that represent the dominant currents in modern psychedelic thought. And while the book is clearly a scholarly study, I hope it is accessible enough to provide a useful introduction to the subject. Certainly, if it does nothing else, I hope the following chapters will inspire new research into this fascinating area of human experience.

I

Technologies of Transcendence

*Who among us does not dream of breaking open the gates
of the mystical realm?*

—GEORGES BATAILLE¹

OVER THE PREVIOUS two centuries, and particularly since the 1960s, the West has witnessed an increasingly expansive literature on psychoactive substances, some of which discusses their apparent ability to induce, as William James put it, “religious mysticism pure and simple.”² This understanding of psychedelic experience is a good example of what Michel de Certeau called the psychologization of mysticism.³ Particularly since James’s *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), Certeau argued, discussions of mysticism have focused on subjective experience and have become detached from religious institutions, traditions, and dogma: “The Absolute the mystics spoke of is . . . regarded as an obscure, universal dimension of man, perceived or experienced as a reality hidden beneath a diversity of institutions, religions and doctrines.”⁴ The Absolute became “something without limits, infinite, in a word, oceanic.”⁵ Consequently, mysticism “had for its place an *elsewhere* and for its sign an *anti-society* which nevertheless would represent the initial ground of man.”⁶ Mystical experience came to be understood as a universal feature of human experience that could be induced by individuals and studied from within. Again, this describes much of what will be discussed in the following pages.

Technologies of the Self

Technology (from the Greek τέχνη, *techne*) is any repeatable practice that maximizes the efficiency of life. Technology, in other words, is an extension of life’s potential. The term “technologies of transcendence,” while admittedly inspired by Mircea Eliade’s discussion of “techniques of ecstasy” (see below), was principally informed by Michel Foucault’s entirely unrelated discussion of “technologies of the self.”

For Foucault, “the subject” is “dead,” in that rather than being an independent source of meaning, it is constructed by discourses, institutions, and power relations. Particularly in his earlier work, he was so exercised by the effects of power on the body that humans were no longer understood to be social agents, but rather were reduced to passive bodies unable to act meaningfully in an autonomous sense. Unlike much of the thought discussed in the following pages (but not all of it), he insisted that there is no autonomous, transcendent subject that operates apart from its context. The subject and its identity are historical and cultural constructions. Consequently, his work was understandably criticized for its lack of a cogent theory of subjectivity, in that it denied the potential for personal agency and self-determination. By 1980, however, he had begun to complement this earlier, largely negative understanding of power as prohibitive and repressive with a more positive understanding of power in terms of technologies of subjectification. He understood these “technologies of self” as practices and techniques by means of which subjects actively construct their own identities. Because the subject and its identity are historical and cultural constructions, they are not fixed. Rather, the subject is fluid and constantly in the process of modification as it engages with what he referred to as “games of truth”—“an ensemble of rules for the production of the truth.”⁷ There are, he argued, “games of truth which take on the form of science or which refer to a scientific model, or games of truth like those that can be found in institutions or practices of control.”⁸ He became interested in the relationship between games of truth and the construction of the subject.

He identified four types of technologies that “human beings use to understand themselves”: technologies of production, technologies of sign systems, technologies of power, and technologies of the self.⁹ He focused on the final two. The former of these had occupied his thought throughout much of his career, and the latter became increasingly important toward the end of his life. “Technologies of power,” such as religion, “determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivizing of the subject”; “technologies of the self . . . permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and the way of being, so as to transform themselves.”¹⁰ Of course, the two are bound together in a continually negotiated relationship: “They are patterns that [the individual] finds in his culture and which are proposed, suggested and imposed on him by his culture, his society and his social group.”¹¹ Because technologies of domination and technologies of the self rarely function separately, “the critique of what we are is

at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them.”¹² Put differently, technologies of the self engender questions about how we might transcend the limits imposed on us by anonymous structures, networks of knowledge, and social and cultural institutions. While subjects are never fully able to transcend the influence of technologies of domination, technologies of the self do provide them with the possibility to interrogate and subvert them. It is in this countercultural sense that I find Foucault’s thought so helpful. We can think of psychoactive substances as subversive “technologies of transcendence.”

Those who use psychedelics tend to understand them as technologies that have the power to induce a transcendence of the hegemonic forces of domination. “I speculated in fictional terms,” noted Aldous Huxley in a discussion of his book *Island*, “about the ways in which a substance akin to psilocybin could be used to potentiate the non-verbal education of adolescents and to remind adults that the real world is very different from the misshapen universe they have created for themselves by means of their culture-conditioned prejudices.”¹³ Interestingly, we will see in Chapter 7 that Timothy Leary—as well as others such as Robert de Ropp¹⁴—thought of the psychedelic experience in terms of the subversion of “game reality,” a concept not entirely dissimilar to Foucault’s notion of “games of truth.” Psychoactive substances are able to expose technologies of domination. In so doing, they neutralize or at least weaken hegemonic social forces and thereby open up new ways for individuals “to understand themselves.”¹⁵

At this point, it’s worth noting that although Foucault didn’t write a great deal about drugs, he was certainly alive to their significance: “It’s a subject that interests me greatly, but one which I’ve had to put aside—the study of the culture of drugs or drugs as culture in the West from the beginning of the nineteenth century.”¹⁶ Indeed, as is fairly well known, he was himself no stranger to psychoactive substances, having used cannabis, LSD, and possibly opium. He first took LSD at Zabriskie Point in Death Valley National Park while listening to Stockhausen on a portable tape player. According to James Miller, he later identified this moment as “the greatest experience of his life—an epiphany that climaxed a series of similarly intense ‘limit experiences’ in the gay community in San Francisco.”¹⁷ Although David Macey has noted that “reports from those who claim that he told them that it changed his life should probably be treated with some skepticism,” it was undoubtedly a significant event.¹⁸ For example, some months later, in a conversation with Claude Mauriac, he recalled an “unforgettable evening on LSD,” during

which he took “carefully prepared doses, in the desert night, with delicious music, nice people and some chartreuse.”¹⁹ More significantly, as Sadie Plant has noted, it would seem that LSD introduced him to

a shortcut between and beyond the categories of illusion and reality, the false and the true. It induced an accelerated thinking that “no sooner eliminates the supremacy of categories than it tears away the ground of its indifference and disintegrates the gloomy dumbshow of stupidity” to the point at which he encounters a “univocal and acategorical mass” that is not only “variegated, mobile, asymmetrical, decentered, spiraloid, and reverberating, but causes it to rise, at each instant, as a swarming of phantasm-events.” The processes speed up: structures are displayed, shattered, and surpassed in swift succession, and “as it is freed from its catatonic chrysalis, thought invariably contemplates this indefinite equivalence transformed into an acute event and a sumptuous, appareled repetition.” . . . Judgment is left in abeyance. The usual criteria need not apply.²⁰

A psychoactive substance can be a subversive technology of transcendence, in that it induces a state of consciousness “freed from its catatonic chrysalis.” The point is that, as Plant put it, “Foucault’s careful genealogies of modern power are underwritten by the conviction that it is only such dispassionate and suspended states from which the working of the world can be perceived.”²¹

Psychedelic Gnosis and the Transcendence of Ordinary Consciousness

This Foucauldian perspective concerning states of consciousness liberated from their catatonic chrysalises brings us back to Allen Ginsberg’s comment regarding the “gnostic impulse” in psychedelic culture.²² While gnostic currents have been traced throughout history,²³ originally Gnosticism was an ancient form of religion based on gnosis (Greek γνῶσις)—personal “knowledge” or “insight,” the experience of which was understood to redeem the self from its imprisonment within material existence. In some early texts, gnosis, understood as “knowledge of the self,” was conflated with “knowledge of God,” which was discussed using the image of a “divine spark” that had become trapped in matter and when “redeemed” returned to its divine source. The principal structures of Gnosticism are informed by a radical dualism: “matter and spirit, light and darkness, good and evil; the opposition

between this-worldly imprisonment and other-worldly salvation; the linking of psychology, ontology, and soteriology in the paired categories of sleep/awakening, forgetting/remembering, ignorance/knowledge (*gnosis*).²⁴ What psychedelic thinkers such as Ginsberg perceived was that drugs not only provide a way of transcending the treadmill of existence but often induce profound visionary moments. It is as if the experiencer is suddenly awakened by a revelation, an exposure to *gnosis* that demands a new understanding of reality. As Wouter Hanegraaff has noted, they function like the “red pill” in the film *The Matrix*.²⁵ The fog of illusion clears and a more expansive, truer vision of reality dawns. Because of this, psychedelic states are interpreted as moments of gnostic redemption that awaken the user from the sleep of ignorance. As Leary put it, “The LSD session . . . is an overwhelming *awakening* of experience.”²⁶ Just as Huxley “had taken mescaline in a garden and shucked off the mind and *awakened* to eternity,”²⁷ so Leary’s own experience left him “feeling exhilarated, awed, and quite convinced that [he] had *awakened from a long ontological sleep*. This sudden flash awakening is called ‘turning on.’”²⁸

Because we are, Leary insisted, “prisoners of the cognitive concepts and intellectual strategies which are passed on from generation to generation,”²⁹ modern psychedelic gnostics have, like Huxley, reflected on “the ways in which a substance akin to psilocybin could be used to potentiate the nonverbal education of adolescents and to remind adults that the real world is very different from the misshapen universe they have created for themselves by means of their culture-conditioned prejudices.”³⁰ Drugs enable individuals to transcend discourses of domination in society. Even if high cultures are eventually profaned and subjected to that domination, the drug experience per se tends to subvert taken-for-granted realities that determine who we are, how we relate to others, and our interpretation of the world. As I have argued elsewhere, this is why, in modern Western societies, high cultures are always countercultures. They challenge systems of meaning reified as “common sense.”³¹ We can understand this in terms of the subversion of hegemonic “plausibility structures.” As Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann have discussed, socio-cultural contexts are formative in the construction of systems of meaning.³² We are socialized into particular understandings of the world that determine what we accept as plausible.³³ As we come to depend on the cogency of these “plausibility structures” we develop a sense that what we believe is natural and taken for granted. For example, “the reality of the Christian world depends upon the presence of social structures within which this reality is taken for granted and within which successive generations of individuals are socialized in such a way that this world will be real *to them*.” Consequently, “when this

plausibility structure loses its intactness or continuity, the Christian world begins to totter and its reality ceases to impose itself as a self-evident truth.”³⁴ In a similar way, psychedelic gnosis challenges those systems of meaning into which we have been socialized. As Hanegraaff has argued, psychedelic drugs

are credited with the capacity of breaking mainstream society’s spell of mental domination and restoring us from blind and passive consumers unconsciously manipulated by “the system” to our original state of free and autonomous spiritual beings . . . In short, they are seen as providing *gnosis* in a “gnostic-dualistic” rather than a “hermetic” sense: a salvational knowledge of the true nature of one’s self and the universe, which does not just open the individual’s spiritual eyes, but liberates him from the dominion by the cosmic system.³⁵

In order to unpack these ideas a little, it will be helpful to consider James’s “four marks” of mystical experience: “ineffability,” “noetic quality,” “transiency,” and “passivity.” Beginning with the first of these, the core issue for James, frequently expressed in mystical and Gnostic literature, is the difficulty communicating the content of altered states to those whose thought is limited by ordinary consciousness and the constraints of taken-for-granted constructions of reality.³⁶ Because they are “discontinuous with ordinary consciousness,” argued James, they are difficult to communicate to those who have only experienced “ordinary consciousness.”³⁷ For example, Leary, who was keen to make his psychedelic “insights available to others,” felt the need to “apologize for the flimsy inadequacy of [his] words. We just don’t have a better experiential vocabulary.”³⁸ Gordon Wasson bemoaned his inability to communicate the gnosis he experienced during the “bemushroomed” state. He was “confined within the prison walls of everyday vocabulary . . . How do you tell a man born blind what seeing is like?”³⁹

This sense of ineffability is rooted in a gnostic dualism. There are two forms of consciousness, argued Huxley, two realities, one of which, the “Old World,” inhibits an understanding of the occulted, transcendent “Other World.”⁴⁰ Consequently, even psychedelic experiences of nonduality are typically understood within a dualistic interpretative framework, in that an understanding of the oneness of all requires the transcendence of the everyday.⁴¹ As Hanegraaff has commented regarding the understanding of gnosis in late antiquity, “What might look like irreconcilable differences or even contradictions—the so-called ‘monistic’ and ‘dualistic’ passages being the most frequently discussed example—may instead be interpreted as reflecting

successive levels of understanding, what is true on one level being less than perfectly true on a higher level. And furthermore, if 'rational discourse' represents a lower level in principle, as frequently repeated by the sources, then one should not be surprised to find that strict logical consistency is not their very first priority."⁴² Gnosis is required to shift from one frame of reference to another.

This brings us back to the primacy of experience. As Hanegraaff points out, "When it comes to grasping the true mysteries of divinity, the sources never cease to emphasize the total inadequacy of discursive language." It is, he notes, "precisely this point that is crucial to understanding what *gnosis* is all about. It implies that theoretical discussions . . . were considered of strictly secondary importance. As formulated in the Hermetic writings, reasoned discourse (*logos*) simply 'does not lead as far as the truth.'"⁴³ Likewise, the problem for scholars of mysticism, noted Evelyn Underhill, is that they try "to describe from without that which can only adequately be described from within; which is as much as to say that only mystics can really write about mysticism."⁴⁴ For example, while James encountered "depth beyond depth of truth" following his inhalation of nitrous oxide, as he emerged from the experience the truth seemed to "fade out," escaping rational thought: "if any words remain over in which it seemed to clothe itself, they prove to be the veriest nonsense." Consequently, "no adequate report of its contents can be given in words In this peculiarity mystical states are more like states of feeling, than states of intellect. No one can make clear to another who has never had a certain feeling, in what the quality or worth of it consists." Hence, "it follows from this that its quality must be directly experienced; it cannot be imparted or transferred to others."⁴⁵ This experience is described several times by Tom Wolfe in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*. Recalling his time reporting the drug-fueled adventures of Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters, he noted that the problem was always "how to tell it! How to get it across to the multitudes who have never had this experience themselves? *You couldn't put it into words*. You had to create the conditions in which they could feel an approximation of *that feeling*, the sublime *kairos*. You had to put them into ecstasy."⁴⁶ The only way others could understand the experience was for them to take the drug themselves.

As indicated above, psychedelic states are frequently interpreted as moments of redemptive illumination. They have, insisted James, a noetic quality. While psychedelic gnosis is ineffable, a "sense of profound meaning having been there persists." Consequently, psychedelic states need to be understood as "states of knowledge . . . states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by discursive intellect. They are illuminations, revelations, full of

significance and importance,” and “they carry with them a curious sense of authority for after-time.”⁴⁷ Experiencers “have been ‘there,’ and know. It is vain for rationalism to grumble about this. If the mystical truth that comes to a man proves to be a force that he can live by, what mandate have we of the majority to order him to live in another way?”⁴⁸ Again, the concept of “gnosis” is a helpful way of thinking about the noetic quality of the psychedelic experience. As Stanislav Grof concluded, while it is “totally and clearly beyond rational comprehension” and thus difficult to convey meaningfully, “even a short experiential exposure to it satisfies the subject’s intellectual, philosophical, and spiritual craving. All of the questions that have ever been asked seem to be answered, and there is no need to question further.”⁴⁹ Rick Strassman notes that “the import and momentousness of the experience stands alone in our history. It may serve to focus the rest of our life toward the contemplation, filling out, and working through of the insights obtained.”⁵⁰

That being said, as James noted, the experience of psychedelic gnosis is transient: “Mystical states cannot be sustained for long.”⁵¹ Although drugs such as LSD induce significantly longer periods than the “hour or two” with which James was familiar, they quickly “fade into the light of common day.”⁵² While “some memory . . . always remains,” recollection of the experience is attenuated.⁵³ It’s not simply that users do not have the linguistic and conceptual tools to convey accurately the gravity of the experience, but also that they find its details difficult to recall. Although a powerful impression remains, as soon as the experience is over it begins to dissipate and elude capture. As Wolfe comments, the details of the psychedelic experience are “indescribable, because words can only jog the memory,” which quickly degrades.⁵⁴

James’s final mark of mysticism, “passivity,” concerns the radical self-surrender of the experiencer’s will: “When the characteristic sort of consciousness once has set in, the mystic feels as if his own will were in abeyance, and indeed as if it were grasped and held by a superior power.”⁵⁵ This, too, is a common perception during psychedelic states. Once the psychoactive substance has been ingested and “the characteristic sort of consciousness . . . has set in,” there is a “deep letting go” as it takes control of the mind.⁵⁶ Accounts of psychedelic experiences typically include phrases such as “I was shown”; something “appeared to me”; “I distinctly felt I was being lifted”; I “drifted helplessly.”⁵⁷ As Terence McKenna says of DMT, “once smoked, the onset of the experience begins in about fifteen seconds. One falls immediately into a trance. One’s eyes are closed At that point one arrives in a place that defies description.”⁵⁸ There is little sense of personal agency in McKenna’s account: one has one’s eyes closed, one falls into a trance, and one arrives in a

reality that is Other. As with the understanding of gnosis in antiquity, there is a sense in which understanding is “given to us by an act of God.”⁵⁹

Perennialism and the Experience of Oneness

Discussions of psychedelic states often report an ineffable, uniform, transcultural core experience of *unio mystica*. This, of course, is common within mysticism. In mystic states, says James, “we both become one with the Absolute and we become aware of our oneness. This is the everlasting and triumphant mystical tradition, hardly altered by differences of clime or creed.”⁶⁰ As Walter Stace argued, “In this general experience of a unity, which the mystic believes to be in some sense ultimate and basic to the world, we have the very inner essence of all mystical experience.”⁶¹ Likewise, for Huxley, mystical states “can be achieved only by the annihilation of the self-regarding ego, which is the barrier separating the ‘thou’ from the ‘That.’”⁶² (We will be turning to Huxley’s thought on induced mystical states and the objections raised against it in Chapter 6.) This was certainly the “Hegelian” experience of James following his inhalation of nitrous oxide:⁶³

Looking back on my own experiences, they all converge towards a kind of insight to which I cannot help ascribing some metaphysical significance. The keynote of it is invariably one of reconciliation. It is as if the opposites of the world, whose contradictoriness and conflict make all our difficulties and troubles, were melded into a unity. Not only do they, as contrasted species, belong to one and the same genus, but *of the species*, the nobler and better one, *is itself the genus, and so soaks up and absorbs its opposite into itself*.⁶⁴

It is, he says, this “monistic insight, in which the *other* in its various forms appears absorbed into the One,”⁶⁵ that constitutes “the keynote of all mysticism.”⁶⁶

Furthermore, as we have seen, because the experience of *unio mystica* is ineffable, transcending ordinary states of consciousness—being, in this sense, precognitive and beyond signification—it is not subject to social and cultural influences. To repeat James’s words, the experience per se is “hardly altered by differences of clime or creed.” When considered alone, isolated from socio-cultural contexts, as well as from any subsequent analysis and interpretation, “there is about mystical utterances an eternal unanimity, which brings it about that the mystical classics have . . . neither birthday nor native land.”⁶⁷

Likewise, much mysticism induced by psychoactive substances, which is typically informed by Romantic Idealism, tends to interpret experiences of transcendence ontologically rather than as socially constructed. That is to say, drugs introduce users to an objective ontological phenomenon underlying their experiences. For example, a number of influential thinkers within the modern history of psychedelic mysticism have argued that a transcultural perennial philosophy can be established on the basis of a pure experience, unmediated by conceptual frameworks and uninfluenced by the social relationships of which we are a part.⁶⁸ This is essentially what Arthur Versluis has recently referred to as “immediatism”:

Spontaneous, direct, unmediated spiritual insight into reality (typically with little or no prior training), which some term “enlightenment.” Strictly speaking, immediatism refers to the claim of a “pathless path” to religious enlightenment—the immediatist says “away with all ritual and practices!” and claims that direct spiritual awakening or enlightenment is possible at once.⁶⁹

Within psychedelic immediatism, the assumptions seem to be as follows: (a) mystical experiences are universal, and (b) they are unmediated and homogeneous; consequently (c) it matters little how they are arrived at. A drug is simply a biochemical key that opens the door to inner space, which, detached from external sociocultural influences, induces much the same experience in whoever takes the drug.

From the Foucauldian perspective discussed above, the fundamental problem such perennialism faces is the claim to transcend ordinary consciousness, thereby effectively ignoring the epistemic importance of linguistic and sociocultural contexts in the construction of conceptual frameworks.⁷⁰ As the Scottish theologian John Oman insisted many years ago, all theologies are “the products of human reasoning; and some theologies, especially of the mystical kind, and not least when most professing independence of all human thinking, are merely the imposing of speculative ideas upon experience.”⁷¹ While not denying the transformative power of altered states of consciousness, the broadly gnostic notion that humans are able to experience “pure consciousness,” free from the sociocultural conditioning of embodied existence, makes little sense.⁷² To experience *is* to interpret! As Don Cupitt has argued, “There is no such thing as ‘experience’ outside of and prior to language.”⁷³ Any understanding of psychedelic gnosis needs to keep this in mind.

As we will see, this relates directly to what is now widely referred to in psychedelic literature as “set and setting.”⁷⁴ That is to say, induced experiences of transcendence can only properly be understood in relation to both the user’s mind-set (the “set”) and the physical and sociocultural environment within which the drug is taken (the “setting”). As Walter Pahnke noted in his influential doctoral dissertation (the experiments for which were done under the supervision of Leary), “Set is defined as expectation, mood, mental attitude and past experience of the subject; setting is the external environment and atmosphere and includes the expectations of the investigator.”⁷⁵ Drug-induced visionary experiences are never simply a consequence of biochemistry (crucially important though this is).⁷⁶ As noted in the Introduction, there is a sense in which, following Howard Becker, users “learn to be high.”⁷⁷ The psychedelic experience is the product of an interaction between the psychoactive substance and the user’s expectations, psychological state, and sociocultural milieu. It is from this perspective, informed by social constructionism, that I understand the importance of set and setting. For example, although Leary, Ralph Metzner, and Richard Alpert may not have been *au fait* with social constructionism when writing *The Psychedelic Experience*, it is not difficult to read it in this way:

The drug dose does not produce the transcendent experience. It merely acts as a chemical key—it opens the mind, frees the nervous system of its ordinary patterns and structures. The nature of the experience depends almost entirely on set and setting. Set denotes the preparation of the individual, including his personality structure and his mood at the time. Setting is physical—the weather, the room’s atmosphere; social—feelings of persons present towards one another; and cultural—prevailing views as to what is real. It is for this reason that manuals or guidebooks are necessary. Their purpose is to enable a person to understand the new realities of the expanded consciousness, to serve as road maps for new interior territories which modern science has made accessible.⁷⁸

Shamanism and Ekstasis

Shamanism, as Eliade famously defined it, “= techniques of ecstasy.” Regardless of any concerns we might have regarding both his methodology and his problematic construction of shamanism, his understanding of the

shaman as one who “specializes in a trance during which his soul is believed to leave his body”⁷⁹ has been enormously influential, not least in psychedelic occulture.⁸⁰

The term “ecstasy” is taken from the Greek *ekstasis* (ἐκστασις), meaning “to be located outside,” to “transcend,” or to be “displaced from” the embodied self. We can also understand this as, to use Berger’s definition, being situated “outside of the taken-for-granted routines of everyday life.”⁸¹ This experience can be read in terms of the “gnostic impulse.” Typically, ecstatic states are treated as special in the history of religions, in that they tend to function as important verifiers of moments of gnosis. As I. M. Lewis has noted, while ecstatic states are by no means uniformly encouraged in all religions, “it is difficult to find a religion which has not, at some stage in its history, inspired in the breasts of at least some of its followers, those transports of mystical exaltation in which man’s whole being seems to fuse in a glorious communion with the divinity.”⁸² In psychedelic occulture it is claimed that, throughout religious history, various psychotropic substances have been used as technologies to induce *ekstasis*. As Michael Harner discussed in his early work on shamanism, “The use of hallucinogenic agents to achieve trance states for perceiving and contacting the supernatural world is evidently an ancient and widespread human practice. In using powerful hallucinogens, an individual is brought face to face with visions and experiences of an overwhelming nature, tending strongly reinforce his beliefs in the reality of the supernatural world.”⁸³ Theodore Roszak has also suggested that “Techniques of consciousness alteration may be—along with grammatical speech—the oldest of all technologies. No society has been without its ritualized repertory of exercises and chemical means for elevating perception and sensibility into an extraordinary new key.”⁸⁴

It is unsurprising, therefore, that the recent fascination with the ritual use of psychoactive substances in the modern Western imagination is very often linked to a Romanticized interest in shamanism.⁸⁵ This is not only because psychoactive plants have been used within shamanic cultures but also because, as Graham Harvey notes, “absolutely anything and everything can be (indeed, probably has been) labeled ‘shamanic’ or ‘shamanism.’”⁸⁶ Certainly, since the 1960s—and as we will see in Chapter 8—the idea of the “shaman” has become a popular nexus, linking discourses about an ancient religious past, contemporary animism, mystical experience, countercultural religio-politics, boundary crossing, and “power plants.” In particular, central to the psychedelic construction of shamanism is the notion of “magic flight” or “the journey to sacred realms.”⁸⁷ This is hardly surprising, of course, in that not

only is ecstatic journeying central to shamanism, but the psychedelic experience itself has consistently been thought of in terms of a journey, “a trip,” or “getting out of your head.” As Harner commented in 1973, “One of the most typical aspects of the shamanistic experience is the change into another state of consciousness, often called a trance, with the shaman feeling that he is taking a journey. During the past few years it has become common to speak of ‘taking a trip’ with a psychoactive substance, and this is no coincidence.”⁸⁸

Tripping as an ecstatic experience meant that shamanism wasn’t the only discourse plundered by those wanting a guide to the journey within. As we will see in Chapter 7, the most influential guide for the traveler to “new realms of consciousness”⁸⁹ is *The Psychedelic Experience*, which was written in 1964 by Leary, Metzner, and Alpert and draws heavily on Walter Evans-Wentz’s 1927 translation of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead (Bardo Thödol)*.⁹⁰ In an attempt to provide “road maps for new interior territories,”⁹¹ it furnished readers with a contemporary psychological interpretation of the *Bardo Thödol*, which constructed the psychedelic experience as a method of travelling “beyond ego-consciousness.” Indeed, the vocabulary it introduced contributed significantly to high culture in the 1960s, including, to some extent, subsequent understandings of psychedelic shamanism.

Typically, however, within psychedelic shamanism, the journey is understood not in terms of progressing from one state of consciousness to another but rather in terms of traveling from one reality to another. To this end, Castaneda, a key influence on psychedelic shamanism, distinguishes between “ordinary” and “nonordinary” reality.⁹² The altered state to which one is transported exists “in a continuum of reality.” Whereas Leary, Metzner, and Alpert explained that hallucinatory visions are “your own thought-forms made visible and audible,” “radiances of your own intellect” that do not “exist in reality” but are “only within your skull,” shamanism offered a rather different reading of the psychedelic experience.⁹³ An altered state can be thought of as an objective, alternate reality to which one can travel and with which one can engage in much the same way that one engages with quotidian reality. Indeed, nonordinary reality is, insists Castaneda, “only slightly different from the ordinary reality of everyday life.”⁹⁴ While there are differences between the two realities, there is a sense in which, for all its weirdness and apparent ephemerality, nonordinary reality is stable. This is partly because “the component elements of nonordinary reality,” argues Castaneda, reflecting on his own use of psychoactive plants, “were similar to the component elements of ordinary reality, for they neither shifted nor disappeared, as would the component elements of ordinary dreams. It seemed as if every detail that made up

a component element of nonordinary reality had a concreteness of its own, a concreteness I perceived as being extraordinarily stable.”⁹⁵ Although drug-induced altered states are “nonordinary,” they cannot be considered “hallucinations,” for they are not ephemeral dream states, but rather “concrete aspects of the reality of everyday life.” Given this, we should behave “toward these states of nonordinary reality not ‘as if’ they were real, but ‘as’ real.”⁹⁶ This led some to a form of psychedelic shamanistic perennialism in which nonordinary reality is unaffected by sociocultural difference. Because our particular historical circumstances are transcended, we experience not only the same nonordinary reality as others who have taken the same drug, but also the same nonordinary reality that our ancestors visited.

Regardless of how altered states are interpreted within high cultures, shamanic discourses provide many with an evocative way of articulating their experiences. For example, since co-authoring *The Psychedelic Experience*, Metzner himself has made much use of shamanic perspectives. Although he understands “the existence of multiple worlds” in terms of “realms of consciousness,”⁹⁷ nevertheless shamanism is useful as a “practice of healing and divination that involves the purposive induction of an altered state of consciousness, called the ‘shamanic journey,’ in which the shaman enters ‘nonordinary reality’ and seeks knowledge and healing power from spirit beings in those worlds.”⁹⁸ Metzner is here drawing on one of the principal beliefs in psychedelic shamanism, namely, that nonordinary reality is “utilizable.”⁹⁹ In other words, psychedelic gnosis has a practical application. It can be “put into service” because there is a close causal relationship between ordinary reality and nonordinary reality: “actions in alternate reality can affect ordinary reality.” Indeed, one can, notes Joan Townsend, “journey in alternate reality to gain help and direction from the spirits and other entities that dwell there.”¹⁰⁰ Similarly, Harner makes the point that a shaman can be understood as one who seeks the help of spirits “in their own world . . . for the purpose of helping others. In these journeys the shaman collects valuable information, makes contact and talks with teachers, works with power animals or guardians, helps the spirits of the dead, assists people to make the transition over to a land of the dead, and generally has adventures that he or she consciously experiences and can later recall and interpret to members of the community.”¹⁰¹

Finally, “one of the most interesting things about shamanism,” argues Harner, “is that it is very democratic. All have the potential to get spiritual revelation directly from the highest possible (and nonordinary) sources if they have the methods The human mind, heart, and spirit are lying

dormant, waiting . . . to come alive.”¹⁰² Of course, this conception of shamanic democracy is, as Robert Wallis has noted, primarily Western, in that in indigenous cultures access to “the way of the shaman” is limited to those for whom it is a vocation.¹⁰³ Even so, Harner’s thesis makes good sense within Western psychedelic thought, in that, with few exceptions, technologies of transcendence enable anyone to open the door to the way of the shaman. Nonordinary reality can be added to everyone’s itinerary of places to visit. In “going to the same spiritual sources that tribal shamans have from time immemorial,” drugs can introduce anyone to “the way of the shaman.” Consequently, those who use psychedelics are not “pretending to be shamans.” If people “get shamanic results for themselves and others in this work,” insisted Harner, “they are indeed the real thing. Their experiences are genuine and their articulations of those experiences are essentially interchangeable with the accounts of shamans from non-literate tribal cultures. The shamanic work is the same, the human mind, heart, and body are the same; only the cultures are different.”¹⁰⁴ Of course, as with perennialism, in dismissing cultural differences so easily, Harner betrays a basic misunderstanding of the role of culture in the shaping of experience. Still, it is a common conviction within psychedelic milieux that individuals are able to step beyond their sociocultural conditioning into the enchanted world of nonordinary reality.

Concluding Analysis: The Drug Problem?

The aim of this chapter has been to provide a preliminary overview of drugs as technologies of transcendence along with some analysis of the principal ways in which psychedelic states have been interpreted. The significance of these ideas will become apparent in the following chapters.

While many volumes have been devoted to examining the nature and significance of mystical experience, there is no doubt that psychoactive substances do induce what are commonly understood by experiencers to be mystical states. As Robert Masters and Jean Houston found, “in a setting providing religious stimuli, from seventy-five to ninety percent [of psychedelic subjects] report experiences of a religious or even mystical nature.”¹⁰⁵ For example, Jane Dunlap (the pseudonym of Adelle Davis) noted that “what has been amazing to those of us experimenting with hallucinogens has been the apparent ability of many people in all walks of life to have a sudden partial lifting of the veil between what we usually call consciousness and a mental state in which such great unity and completeness is felt that a permanent attitude of optimism toward life may sometimes be crystallised in a moment.” In particular, “many subjects have

reported religious revelations in which God became a reality. Furthermore, their lives have been significantly and permanently changed by the realization of a kind of divine love which they found within themselves.”¹⁰⁶ Indeed, while the setting is enormously important, some have argued that induced religious experiences can happen in ostensibly nonreligious contexts. Oscar Janiger, for example, who carefully avoided anything that might be interpreted as a religious setting in his experiments, found that “some 24 percent of his LSD volunteers nonetheless experienced a mystical or spiritual encounter In many instances, they felt themselves rise beyond their usual realm of understanding into a ‘new dimension,’ what one report calls the Eternal Now, where time is meaningless. For many, this transcendent plane was shot through with a sense of sacredness or presence of God.”¹⁰⁷ As one popular badge produced in the mid-1960s declared, “God Is Alive in a Sugar Cube”—LSD was often taken on a sugar cube.¹⁰⁸ Another badge from the same period urged people to “Make Acid a Sacrament.”¹⁰⁹

While this understanding of the uniqueness of psychedelic gnosis is important, it needs to be borne in mind that preparing the setting in a certain way does not mean that one can account for the content of an individual’s set and, therefore, for the way that individual interprets the setting. The simple experience of sunlight might, in certain circumstances, depending on a person’s set, be interpreted theologically.¹¹⁰ Nevertheless, like James, on the basis of such evidence many have felt able to conclude, with Stace, that it is not a matter of the psychedelic state “being *similar* to mystical experience; it *is* mystical experience.”¹¹¹ In other words, “the fact that the experience was induced by drugs has no bearing on its validity.”¹¹² This is an important point.

This identification of altered states as “religious” raises a number of questions for theologians and scholars of religion. On the one hand, as discussed above, the fact that experiencers are embodied social animals means that certain natural processes are involved in all their experiences of transcendence. As John Bowker has argued, factors relating to brain function and social construction are directly relevant to the human “sense of God.”¹¹³ How could they not be? Mystical experiences, Michael Stoeber notes, “are influenced in part by subjective, psychological processes that are grounded in and dependent upon the individual’s socio-religious history.” He continues, “The emotional and cognitive frameworks of the mystic do influence the kind of experiences she can have. The socio-religious history of the mystic affects not only the way she will interpret the experience, but also the experience itself.”¹¹⁴ Moreover, as Huxley was keen to point out,

it is a matter of historical record that most contemplatives worked systematically to modify their body chemistry, with a view to creating the internal conditions favourable to spiritual insight. When they were not starving themselves into low blood sugar and a vitamin deficiency, or beating themselves into intoxication by histamine, adrenalin, and decomposed protein, they were cultivating insomnia and praying for long periods in uncomfortable positions, in order to create the psychophysical symptoms of stress. In the intervals they sang interminable psalms, thus increasing the amount of carbon dioxide in the lungs and the blood stream, or, if they were Orientals, they did breathing exercises to accomplish the same purpose.¹¹⁵

Similarly, Jerome Kroll and Bernard Bachrach discuss the close relationship between medieval mystical experiences and the religious practices of mortification, such as laceration of the flesh, sleep deprivation, and extreme starvation. These harsh, self-injurious techniques were clearly effective in the production of states of transcendence simply because such behavior has specific “physiological effects upon various functional systems of the body, such as measurable changes in hormonal levels, basal temperature, and immune mechanisms.” In other words, “altered brain physiology is nothing else than an altered state which, in turn, is reflected both behaviorally and subjectively as altered states of consciousness.”¹¹⁶ Hence, Christian mystics used certain techniques and technologies to “move to a higher spiritual plane.”¹¹⁷

In what sense is the psychedelic method of altering brain physiology different? Both face similar philosophical problems. One is not more secure than the other. If ascetic techniques of transcendence are able to induce an experience of “a higher spiritual plane,” why not psychedelic technologies? Likewise, if one method is dismissed as little more than induced projection based on social and cultural cues, why not the other?

Such questions are often inadequately addressed by those who claim that mystical states are *sui generis* and, therefore, belong to a special category. This rhetoric resists any erosion of the special status of religious experience by what are dismissed as “reductionistic” approaches. As Kroll and Bachrach comment, “Questions about the psychology of intense mysticism and heroic asceticism have . . . been affected by the religious partisanship and emotionality that arise when one considers in detail the other-worldliness of the mystics.”¹¹⁸ Mystical experience is in a special category of its own and cannot therefore be reduced to the manipulation of brain chemistry. This emphasis on the *sui generis* nature of religious experience is often supported by a crude dualism. Hence,

as Hanegraaff has commented, there is an assumption that “religion is generally supposed to be about spiritual realities, not material ones.” Consequently, “the claim that modifying brain activity by chemical means might be a religious pursuit seems counterintuitive.” As he says, “It comes across as a purely technical and quasi-materialist trick that cheats practitioners into believing that they are having a ‘genuine’ religious experience.”¹¹⁹ Alan Watts made a similar point in 1960: the difficulty with psychedelics “is found to rest upon semantic confusion as to the definitions of ‘spiritual’ and ‘material.’”¹²⁰ In other words, part of the concern about psychedelics is rooted in a false opposition of spirit and matter.

It’s also worth noting here the underlying influence of the Protestant ethic. Max Weber famously discussed the value attached to disciplined hard work in the West, which, especially in Calvinism, is directly related to salvation, in that duty, employment, and prosperity are a sign of one’s election.¹²¹ Religion, too, requires commitment and effort. Drugs are therefore problematic technologies because they suggest a quick route to mystical states. They bypass effort. This type of thinking is, for example, evident in one of the most influential drug writers of the modern period, Charles Baudelaire:

If the Church condemns sorcery and magic, it is because they are contrary to the intentions of God, because they abolish the accomplishments of time, and would render the conditions of purity and morality superfluous—and because the Church will accept as legitimate and true only those riches earned by assiduous good intention. The gambler who has found a sure means of winning is called a swindler; what then should we call the man who wishes to purchase happiness and genius for the price of a few coins? In the very infallibility of the means lies its immorality, just as the supposed infallibility of magic lies in the diabolical stigma with which it is attached.¹²²

There is something fundamentally worthwhile to be gained from the effort given to religious and cultural work that is denied to the person who seeks to arrive at the same destination by a psychedelic shortcut.

Related to this point is the Christian doctrine of revelation. Until relatively recently, throughout the modern period there has been a sense not only that psychoactive substances circumvent divinely ordained religious effort but also that they circumvent the divine initiative in the acquisition of religious knowledge. God has the freedom to reveal himself to whomever he wants. The Scottish theologian Hugh Ross Mackintosh summarized this

position as follows: “A religious knowledge of God, wherever existing, comes by revelation; otherwise we should be committed to the incredible position that a man can know God without his willing to be known.”¹²³ Indeed, all human attempts to gain access to the celestial sphere and to sacred knowledge unaided by God are ultimately a repetition of the sin of Adam and, therefore, destined to end in failure. This, of course, often informs the Christian condemnation of magic and divination, with which drug use has been implicated.¹²⁴ In the final analysis, as Sybille Bedford commented regarding the concern with which Huxley’s work was received, the use of psychedelics “goes against the grain of what is left of our Christian or Puritan tradition.”¹²⁵

Furthermore, the case for psychedelic mysticism in the West has not been helped by the so-called war on drugs—a term coined by Richard Nixon in 1969 as an attempt to promote drug prohibition to the same status of Lyndon Johnson’s “War on Poverty.” Moral panics and misinformation have created an environment within which, for better or worse, certain psychoactives are demonized.¹²⁶ Since the 1960s, this has been exacerbated by the close association of psychoactive substances with the hippie counterculture. Indeed, as discussed in the Introduction, the fact that the use of psychoactive substances became embedded in countercultural discourses even led some of those involved in psychedelic research to coin new terminology. It is unsurprising that the very suggestion of “psychedelic religion” is received by many as a perverse contradiction, a dangerous confusion of the sacred and the profane.

As Hanegraaff has noted, studies of drug-induced mysticism tend to be “perceived as pertaining to a negative ‘waste-basket category’ of otherness associated with a strange assortment of ‘magical,’ ‘pagan,’ ‘superstitious’ or ‘irrational’ beliefs: and, as such, they are automatically seen as different from ‘genuine’ or ‘serious’ forms of religion.”¹²⁷ However, as indicated above, objections to psychedelic mysticism are difficult to sustain. Bearing in mind that the use of various techniques and technologies are common within the history of mysticism, it is clear that the rejection of the religious legitimacy of psychoactive substances has less to do with objective and informed scholarly analysis and more to do with theological and cultural bias. Indeed, often when drugs are mentioned their illegitimacy is simply assumed as a given. For example, David Brown, in a discussion of the theological significance of popular music in his widely read *God and Grace of Body*, comments on the “problematic” song by Primal Scream, “Higher than the Sun.” It is problematic simply because “the ‘religious’ lyrics and accompanying music were almost certainly intended to encourage a drug-induced state *rather than anything to do with religion*.”¹²⁸ First, there is no “almost certainly” about it. This is a psychedelic

song: "Hallucinogens can open me or untie me / I drift in inner space free of time / I find a higher state of grace in my mind."¹²⁹ Second, perfunctorily dismissing the song as having nothing to do with "religion" misunderstands its interpretation of the psychedelic experience. It is a misunderstanding rooted both in the unacknowledged prejudices mentioned above and also, I suggest, in an inadequate understanding of the nature of religious experience.

Concerning this last point, some help is provided by Bowker, for whom "religious experience" is not an "entity." Rather, it is much more helpfully understood as "a state of excitation and arousal which is labeled and interpreted by available cues."¹³⁰ Heightened emotional states cannot be understood apart from the contexts in which they are embedded and the minds that interpret them. They are "religious" if they are labeled "religious." Bowker was, in other words, fully persuaded of the crucial significance of set and setting: "It must be emphasized that . . . the importance of the set is not controversial This was so well attested that it scarcely needs illustrating; it is what Leary has called 'the engineering of ecstasy.'¹³¹ His point is simple. The set can be manipulated by physiological arousal and by the setting in which that arousal takes place. Heightened emotional states can be "made deliberately suggestive of the appropriateness of religious labeling."¹³² Hallucinogens act "not as innovatory of concepts in abstraction but as reinforcement or confirmation of concepts already formed, or in the process of formation."¹³³ Quoting Seymour Kety, he insists that "no drug ever introduces a new function into an organism; it merely accentuates or inhibits or otherwise modifies a function which already exists. We cannot expect drugs to introduce anything new into the mind or into behaviour, but merely to accentuate or to suppress functions in behaviour which are already present."¹³⁴ This can be applied to other techniques used to induce heightened emotional states. Certainly, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that subjectively realistic experiences of an independent, exogenous agent can be produced in the brain without any involvement of such an agent. So experiences of an encounter with the divine or other spiritual entities may simply be the result of a number of mundane factors, including brain chemistry, set, and setting.

While Bowker is willing to accept that such experiences may very well be social, cognitive, and neural constructions, he is a Christian theologian and wants to argue that the notion of divine agency cannot therefore be explained away. If, for example, God does exist, we should expect divine agency not to bypass cognition but rather to act through it. So while the nature of religious experience cannot adequately be understood without reference to a range of disciplines, the reality of the object of belief cannot be dismissed by those

disciplines. It is therefore reasonable to argue that drugs might function as technologies of transcendence, *but* in so doing they are not introducing any substantially novel content into the experiencer's world of meaning. They are rather providing spaces within which religious and philosophical concepts already available can be explored and developed. Moreover, because of the nature of religious experiences, we cannot "comment on the validity, truth, or reality of the objects of belief within those universes of meaning, because they are derivative from, and dependent on, those universes of meaning for the interpretation of their effect; and this is so, even when those objects are believed to be the ground of certain manifest experiences." Bowker continues, "Reality or unreality has to be established or argued on a much wider range of issues."¹³⁵ If Bobby Gillespie of Primal Scream felt inspired to articulate his psychedelic experience in religious terms, there are no good reasons why we should not label it "religious." The observer is not in a position to make a judgement about the nature of Gillespie's experience simply on the basis of the method he used to induce it.

Opium Dreams

*For on honey-dew hath he fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise.*

—SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE¹

AT WHAT POINT during the modern period should one begin writing a history of drugs and transcendence in the Western world? There are, I think, few better moments than the publication in 1821 of Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*. As William Burroughs pointed out, "No other author since has given such a completely analytical description of what it is like to be a junky from the first use to the effects of withdrawal."² However, while this is important, there was, we will see, far more to De Quincey than his prominence as a junky. Not only was he the first to construct opium-eating as an identity rather than simply an activity, but he understood intoxication as both a moment of transcendence and a gnostic event. However, before we turn to De Quincey, something needs to be said about his social context.

Opium in Britain in the Early Nineteenth Century: Some Background Notes

It is perhaps difficult nowadays for us to appreciate the appeal and prevalence of opium use in early nineteenth-century Europe. That said, accounts betray a conspicuous ambiguity. While addicts were often demonized and represented as lost to Satan in private worlds of degradation, opium itself, "if taken in a proper manner" (as De Quincey advised), was considered by many not to be particularly injurious to body or soul.³ Indeed, some believed that it could be of great benefit to both. Even though it had its detractors, many felt that it was preferable to wine—certainly it was more affordable. De Quincey considered it a far superior intoxicant: "Whereas wine disorders the mental faculties,

opium, on the contrary . . . introduced amongst them the most exquisite order, legislation and harmony. Wine robs a man of his self-possession: opium greatly invigorates it. Wine unsettles and clouds the judgment . . . opium, on the contrary, communicates serenity and equipoise to all the faculties.”⁴ Hence, while addiction was beginning to be recognized as a serious problem during the early nineteenth century, many felt that there was much value to be gained from its ministrations. This ambivalence is evident in De Quincey’s writing, in that while he is keen “to display the marvelous agency of opium,”⁵ he did not wish to be accused of encouraging drug abuse: “I have yet to learn that anyone . . . was inoculated by me . . . with a first love for a drug so notorious as opium.” He even referred to it as a “perilous medicine.”⁶

Disturbing though the psychological and social effects of opium were to those of De Quincey’s contemporaries who took the time to think about them, it was widely used throughout all levels of British society, ostensibly for medicinal reasons, but also recreationally.⁷ Not only was it cheaper than alcohol, but there was no restriction on its usage until the first Pharmacy Act of 1868. Anyone who wanted a little opium for the weekend would find it as difficult to acquire as someone seeking to purchase a bar of chocolate nowadays. As Louise Foxcroft comments, it was sold by “an eclectic group of traders, including apothecaries, tailors, bakers, and rent collectors . . . The raw opium was often prepared in a shop with penny portions cut from a one-pound block and wrapped in packets. Many shopkeepers also sold their own preparations.”⁸ Popular brands, some of which were specially prepared for babies and children, included McMunn’s Elixir, Mother Bailey’s Quieting Syrup, Dover’s Powder, Godfrey’s Cordial, Dalby’s Carminative, Battley’s Sedative Solution, Lancaster Black Drop, Quaker’s Black Drop, and Kendal Black Drop. A well-known recipe for black drop, which was reputedly four times more potent than other readily available preparations, gives us some indication of what was being consumed:

Take of Opium *half a pound*; Vinegar *three pints*; Nutmeg, bruised, *one ounce and a half*; Saffron *half an ounce*. Boil them to a proper consistence; then add Sugar *four ounces*; Yeast *one fluidounce*. Digest for seven weeks, then place in the open air until it becomes a syrup; lastly, decant, filter, and bottle it up, adding a little sugar to each bottle.⁹

Of the black drop preparations, Kendal Black Drop (named after the English market town just south of the Lake District) is perhaps the most widely known, in that it seems to have been the favorite tippie of both De Quincey

and his friend and mentor Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Indeed, not only is it likely that Coleridge owes his addiction to it following his move to Keswick in 1800, but it almost certainly accounts for opium's increasingly tight hold on De Quincey during his time at Dove Cottage—Wordsworth's former home at Grasmere, which he began renting in 1809.

Laudanum (opium dissolved in alcohol) was particularly popular and frequently used by both De Quincey and Coleridge. Taking its name from the Latin *laudare* ("to praise"), it was initially prepared by the sixteenth-century physician Paracelsus and popularized in the seventeenth century by the English physician Thomas Sydenham. "I cannot but break out in praise of the great God, the giver of all good things, who hath granted to the human race, as a comfort in their afflictions, no medicine of the value of opium, either in regard to the number of diseases it can control, or its efficacy in extirpating them." It is, continued Sydenham, "like a Delphic sword," for "it can be used for many purposes . . . Of cordials, it is the best that has hitherto been discovered in Nature."¹⁰ This general view of opium continued well into the nineteenth century. Consequently, although Britain was spared an epidemic of opium use, consumption increased significantly. "The per capita amount of opium imported into Britain for domestic consumption grew at a rate of just over 2 percent per year between 1831 and 1859," notes Terry Parssinen, and it is likely "that this steady rate of growth continued, at least through the 1870s. Meanwhile, the amount of *all* opium imported into Britain grew enormously. In the 1830s, opium imports averaged 91,000 pounds per annum; by the late 1860s, they averaged 280,000 pounds."¹¹

Needless to say, by the end of the century, the malign effects of the drug were conspicuous. This led to a significant shift in attitudes, as is evident in much late Victorian literature. "There were opium dens where one could buy oblivion, dens of horror where the old sins could be destroyed by the madness of sins that were new," writes Oscar Wilde in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890). Of the title character, Wilde writes, "The hideous hunger for opium began to gnaw at him. His throat burned and his delicate hands twitched nervously together."¹² Likewise, Charles Dickens, in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870), describes the Victorian opium den as "the meanest and closest of small rooms."¹³

Attitudes toward opium use as a profane activity were increasingly informed by an Orientalist discourse about Chinese culture as the polluting source of addiction in Western societies:¹⁴

Through the ragged window curtain, the light of early day steals in from a miserable court. He lies, dressed, across a large unseemly bed,

upon a bedstead that has indeed given way under the weight upon it. Lying, also dressed and also across the bed, not longwise, are a Chinaman, a Lascar, and a haggard woman. The two first are in a sleep or stupor; the last is blowing at a kind of pipe, to kindle it. And as she blows, and shading it with her lean hand, concentrates its red spark of light, it serves in the dim morning as a lamp to show him what he sees of her. "Another?" says this woman, in a querulous, rattling whisper. "Have another?"¹⁵

In late nineteenth-century America, the same concerns were frequently discussed. For example, Harry Hubbell Kane, a New York physician, claimed in 1882 in a widely read study of opium addiction that "the Chinese priesthood are addicted to the pipe . . . The 'opium pistol' (*yen tsiang*) is their God, the opium extract their heaven."¹⁶ Commenting on a visit to New York's "Chinese quarter," he tells his readers that "the streets are filthy and swarm with Chinamen, Malays, half-breeds, and mixed-tenement-house population." On entering one of these buildings, he noticed that "the whole place was rank with the odor of the drug."¹⁷ He continues: "The recumbent forms, the quiet faces half lit by the little opium lamps, the subdued conversation, the sizzling and bubbling of the pipes, served to impress us with astonishment, and suggested something uncanny." It was here, in the heart of the Chinese quarter, that "most of the Americans smoke, and . . . may be found here during the afternoon, night, and until early the next morning."¹⁸ This Orientalist discourse linking psychoactive substances to the East is, we will see, a pervasive feature of Western high culture and has had a formative influence on the interpretation of mystical states.

Dangerous though opium was increasingly recognized to be and sordid though the consequences of addiction often were, numerous privileged and creative minds were exposed to its ethereal effects during the nineteenth century. Elizabeth Barrett-Browning, Lord Byron, Wilkie Collins, George Crabbe, John Keats, Walter Scott, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Francis Thompson, and William Wordsworth all experimented with the drug. Although some literary critics, such as G. K. Chesterton, questioned nineteenth-century accounts of opium's visionary power,¹⁹ most would now accept that, while it doesn't have the hallucinatory potency of those substances usually identified as "psychedelic," opium does possess the ability to induce "manifestations or revelations of mental powers and states not ordinarily experienced."²⁰ As Coleridge himself said of his poem "Kubla Khan," it was "composed in a sort of Reveries brought on by two grains of opium."²¹ While the drug

undoubtedly degraded the very capacity to think, there can be little doubt that it made something of an impression on those who were regular users. How could it not?

The Art of Dreaming

"It is evident," notes Marcus Boon, "that many scholars of literary history prefer to think that the association of narcotics and writers goes back no further than De Quincey. For them, the heroes of the Enlightenment and earlier ages exist in a drug-free zone of literature and culture that was corrupted by the arrival of the Romantics."²² This is clearly not the case, as histories and anthologies of drug use make clear.²³ Drugs and addiction, like religion, are—for similar reasons—woven into the fabric of human culture. That said, something did change with the publication of De Quincey's sensational account of his esoteric and troubled relationship with opium. For the first time in English literary history, readers were presented with a book utterly devoted to recreational use of a psychodysleptic drug. De Quincey was, of course, not writing in a vacuum. Innovative though *Confessions* was, it was deeply indebted to the wider Romantic milieu, which, we will see, introduced much of what has since become central to the history of psychedelic thought.

As indicated above, in his introductory note to "Kubla Khan," Coleridge notes that the poem was revealed to him during an opium-inspired vision.

In the summer of the year 1797, the author, then in ill health, had retired to a lonely farmhouse between Porlock and Linton, on the Exmoor confines of Somerset and Devonshire. In consequence of a slight indisposition, an anodyne [opium]²⁴ had been prescribed, from the effects of which he fell asleep in his chair at the moment that he was reading the following sentence, or words of the same substance, in "Purchas's Pilgrimage":²⁵ "Here the Khan Kubla commanded a palace to be built, and a stately garden thereunto. And thus ten miles of fertile ground were inclosed with a wall." The author continued for about three hours in a profound sleep, at least of the external senses, during which time he has the most vivid confidence that he could not have composed less than from two to three hundred lines; if that indeed can be called composition in which all the images rose up before him as things, with a parallel production of the correspondent expressions, without any sensation or consciousness of effort. On awaking he appeared to himself to have a distinct recollection of the whole, and taking his pen,

ink, and paper, instantly and eagerly wrote down the lines that are here preserved.²⁶

Unfortunately, his writing was interrupted “by a person on business from Porlock,” who “detained . . . him above an hour.” This intrusion was to prove detrimental to the project. On returning to his room, he found “that though he still retained some vague and dim recollection of the general purport of the vision, yet, with the exception of some eight or ten scattered lines and images, all the rest had passed away like the images on the surface of a stream into which a stone has been cast.”²⁷ This account (regardless of whether or not it is fictional)²⁸ is interesting because it claims to relate a firsthand account of a poem composed as the direct result of an “opium-dream.”²⁹

However we understand the composition of “Kubla Khan,” it is certainly the case that the young Coleridge, prior to acquiring a habit, was fascinated by the visionary potential of the drug. As he commented in a letter to his brother in 1798, “Laudanum gave me repose, not sleep: but you, I believe, know how divine that repose is, what a spot of enchantment, a green spot of fountain and flowers and trees in the very heart of a waste of sands.”³⁰ His use of “repose” here is significant, in that it identifies, as Alethea Hayter discusses in her important study of Romanticism and opium use, “the euphoric condition which sets in fairly soon after taking a dose of opium in the early stage of addiction, and which is a waking state.” She notes that while many addicts will simply enjoy this phase as a welcome release from anxiety, in the Romantic imagination of Coleridge, “it produced a vision of paradisal beauty.”³¹ This is why the person from Porlock’s knock at the door was so unwelcome to a man desperately trying to commit his memories of paradise to paper. Having traveled far in his dreams, to an otherworldly, Oriental landscape beyond the reach of everyday cares, this person from Porlock now demanded his return and his attention concerning a mundane matter of business. This gnostic contrast between the everyday world and the enchanted world induced by psychoactive substances is a common theme in psychedelic thought.

In discussing this intrusion, Coleridge is expressing a typically Romantic-gnostic sense of the profanation of the enchanted world of the creative mind by the ingress of the mundanities of everyday life. Quotidian business was a persistent threat to inspiration, revelation, and creative genius. This renders quite stark the contrast between the inspiring and ethereal dreams of opium and the worldly intrusion of the prosaic person from Porlock. As David Perkins notes, “The motif of being drugged is . . . part of the *symboliste* myth of the poet That the man from Porlock comes ‘on business’ is also typical

of the *symboliste* ethos, in which ordinary life and ‘business’ were viewed as antithetical to poetry.”³²

Interestingly, this Romantic-gnostic contrast between the dream world and the everyday world informs De Quincey’s celebrated essay “On the Knocking at the Gate in *Macbeth*” (1823), although there it is examined through a darker lens. The essay—essentially a discussion of the psychology of violence—emerges from his long-standing and morbid fascination with the serial killer John Williams, who was believed to have committed seven murders over a period of twelve days in 1811 in London’s East End: the Ratcliff Highway murders. This macabre series of events, all of which took place in family homes, becomes a lens through which De Quincey examines Macbeth’s murder of Duncan. There is, he suggests, in the mind of the murderer a transcendence of the mundane, a transference from one form of consciousness to another. There is

a retiring of the human heart and the entrance of a fiendish heart . . . *Another world has stepped in; and the murderers are taken out of the region of human things, human purposes, human desires. They are transfigured . . . In order that a new world may step in, this world must for a time disappear.* The murderers, and the murder, must be insulated—cut off by an immeasurable gulf from the ordinary tide and succession of human affairs—locked up and sequestered in some deep recess: we must be made sensible that *the world of ordinary life is suddenly arrested—laid asleep—tranced—racked into a dread armistice: time must be annihilated; relation to things without abolished; and all must pass self-withdrawn into a deep syncope and suspension of earthly passion.*³³

These are the insights of an opium-eater—one who has experienced a transcendence of the world of the everyday, one who has been taken out the region of human things, human purposes, human desires. As Charles Baudelaire—who was deeply influenced by De Quincey and translated *Confessions* into French—put it several decades later: “Space is extended by opium; opium confers magical meaning on every tint, and gives a more significant resonance to every sound. Sometimes the landscapes open up and reveal magnificent horizons, full of light and colour, where, sparkling in the sun’s golden rain, oriental cities and divers buildings appear in the distant haze.”³⁴ The celestial joy of transcending embodied temporal existence is beautifully distilled by Jean Cocteau: “Everything one does in life, even love, occurs in an express train racing toward death. To smoke

opium is to get out of the train while it is still moving. It is to concern oneself with something other than life or death.”³⁵ Just as the “person from Porlock” knocked upon Coleridge’s door in order to discuss “business,” thereby unwittingly interrupting his reflection on the celestial sphere to which opium had taken him, so the knocking at the gate that startled Macbeth occasioned a return from darkness to the prosaic affairs of everyday life:

The world of darkness passes away like a pageantry in the clouds: the knocking at the gate is heard; and it makes known audibly that the reaction has commenced: the human has made its reflux upon the fiendish: the pulses of life are beginning to beat again; and the re-establishment of the goings-on in the world in which we live first makes us profoundly sensible of the awful parentheses that had suspended them.³⁶

This brings us directly to the ethereal, spiritual, and philosophical significance accorded to dreams in Romanticism.³⁷ As Hayter has argued, “All the Romantic writers thought that there was a strong link between dreams and the processes of literary creation. Dream theory, dreams as sources, dreams as technique, were important to them, and they valued and used their own dreams.”³⁸ During this period some who moved in Romantic circles, including scientists such as Thomas Beddoes and Humphry Davy, kept dream journals in order to analyze their dreams and apply what could be learned to everyday life.³⁹ On the one hand, dreams were, as Perkins comments, “an escape from realism, predesigned form, orderly sequence, and rational and ethical responsibility and were thus invested with the mystery and wonder also found in primitive myths, folk and fairy tales, and medieval romances.”⁴⁰ On the other hand, not only were they believed to be capable of revealing our secret emotions, but they might even “emerge from a reality deeper than ordinary reality, or express a mind within us that is more profound and aware than the conscious mind; dreams might rise from our inmost being where we are one with the all.”⁴¹

Hayter has helpfully identified three principal Romantic doctrines on dreams, which can, we will see, be traced through into the modern history of psychedelic gnosis: dreams are a revelation of reality; dreams can form and influence waking life; and the process of dreaming can be interpreted as a parallel and model of the process of poetic creation.⁴² First, as is evident in Coleridge’s frustration concerning the person from Porlock, for the Romantics “it was the life of dreams, rather than the world of the everyday, that was the realm of enlightenment.” That is, dreams are another way of

accessing ineffable gnosis. Hayter continues, "There one's eyes, clouded by the mists of ordinary waking life, might be purified by light from beyond, from the innermost sources of essential reality, and thence one might bring back to the waking world the restored perceptions of childhood, and reestablish a right relationship with Nature and with other men."⁴³ Second, if the first doctrine is accepted, then dreams can be understood as educative tools, providing insight into the nature of the everyday world and the self. Hence, they must be allowed to alter our relationship with the world. The impact of a dream should be nurtured in order to expand horizons and transform behavior. Finally, because in dreams there is, as in mystical states, a lack of agency, the dreamer is simply a passive observer of the creative power of his or her imagination. Ideas take shape, thoughts form, and visions manifest. In their dreams, poets were able to study the formation of imagery. They could "hear scattered sentences and lines of poetry, sometimes harsh and quacking like the voice of a ventriloquist, which were the sound of the mind at play among words as a tuning-up orchestra plays with notes. How odd, and seemingly unpoetic, are some of the sentences that writers have heard in dreams and hallucinations."⁴⁴ Again, this is fundamentally gnostic.

It is little wonder, therefore, that the power of opium was quickly linked in the Romantic mind to the processes of dreaming. Indeed, when Friedrich Sertürner first isolated the popular opiate morphine in 1804, he named it after Morpheus—the Greek god of sleep and dreams.⁴⁵ And it is unsurprising that De Quincey wrote *Confessions* in order "to reveal something of the grandeur which belongs *potentially* to human dreams."⁴⁶ It is this Romantic desire to induce dream states that can be identified as the genesis of modern psychedelic gnosis. For example, later in the century, Edward Bulwer Lytton, the idiosyncratic English poet, playwright, politician, occultist, and best-selling author, discussed with Wilkie Collins how opium was able to induce states during which inspiration for his occult novels was received.⁴⁷ According to Collins, he confessed that his *A Strange Story* (1862)—an occult novel that influenced Bram Stoker's *Dracula*—was effectively the result of laudanum intoxication.⁴⁸ In his Rosicrucian novel *Zanoni* (1842), he declares that there is an altered state, which is "not sleep . . . not delirium," but "the dream-wakefulness which opium sometimes induces."⁴⁹

The English Opium-Eater

As with many nineteenth-century opium-eaters, De Quincey began his opium-induced journey to inner space while seeking relief from an ailment.

His first use of it was in London in 1804 during an attack of neuralgia: "I awoke with excruciating rheumatic pains of the head and face, from which I had hardly any respite for about twenty days. On the twenty-first day, I think it was, and on a Sunday, I went out into the streets; rather to run away, if possible, from my torments, than with any distinct purpose. By accident I met a college acquaintance who recommended opium."⁵⁰ Although at that point he was simply interested in its analgesic properties, he was also aware of its esoteric reputation: "I had heard of it as I had of manna or of Ambrosia"⁵¹—the former being the "bread from heaven" miraculously provided for the Israelites on their desert journey to the Promised Land (Exodus 16:1–36; Numbers 11:1–19) and the latter being the immortality-bestowing food of Greek mythology. This initial perception of opium had a formative influence on his subsequent interpretation of its significance. Indeed, he immediately attached "a mystic importance . . . to the minutest circumstance connected with the place and the time, and the man (if man he was) that first laid open to me the Paradise of Opium-eaters."⁵² As in so many conversion narratives and descriptions of psychedelic transcendence, he makes a point of contrasting the celestial beauty of the moment with the mundanity of the context. The splendor of opium is discovered on a dreary, wet Sunday afternoon. Making his way home down Oxford Street, he noticed "a druggist's shop. The druggist—unconscious minister of celestial pleasures!—as if in sympathy with the rainy Sunday, looked dull and stupid, just as any mortal druggist might be expected to look on a Sunday." However, like some angelic being in human form, for De Quincey, there was far more to this dispenser of remedies than was immediately apparent:

When I asked for the tincture of opium, he gave it to me as any man might do: and, furthermore, out of my shilling, returned to me what seemed to be real copper halfpence, taken out of a real wooden drawer. Nevertheless, in spite of such indications of humanity, he has ever since existed in my mind as the beatific vision of an immortal druggist, sent down to earth on a special mission to myself. And it confirms me in this way of considering him, that, when I next came to London, I sought him . . . and found him not: and thus, to me, who knew not his name (if indeed he had one) he seemed rather to have vanished from Oxford-street than to have removed in any bodily fashion. The reader may choose to think of him as, possibly, no more than a sub-lunary druggist: it may be so: but my faith is better: I believe him to have evanesced, or evaporated. So unwillingly would I connect any

mortal remembrances with that hour, and place, and creature, that first brought me acquainted with the celestial drug.⁵³

So powerful were the effects of opium that its dispenser could only be thought of in mythic terms, as one who delivers bread from heaven.

De Quincey's initial experience of opium largely conforms to William James's discussion of conversion.⁵⁴ Central to James's understanding of this powerful religious experience is the notion of "attention." His argument is that the basic unit of mental life should be conceived in terms of a "field," at the center of which is a particular locus of attention—"the habitual centre of . . . personal energy."⁵⁵ Ideas that do not particularly interest an individual are located toward the periphery of that individual's mental field. That is why, says James, "it makes a great difference to a man whether one set of his ideas, or another, be the centre of his energy; and it makes a great difference, as regards any set of ideas which he may possess, whether they become central or remain peripheral in him." Consequently, "to say that a man is 'converted' means, in these terms, that religious ideas, previously peripheral in his consciousness, now take a central place, and that religious aims form the habitual centre of his energy."⁵⁶ While there has been much discussion of experiences of conversion since James, the point here is simply that De Quincey provides an account of his initial opium experience in terms that overlap significantly with those of James's convert. Although he had heard about the ambrosial qualities of opium, he had not previously considered them in any great depth. However, once the drug had been taken and he had experienced gnosis, it immediately occupied the centre of his mental field. He now knew what it was, as James put it, "to be converted, to be regenerated, to receive grace, to experience religion."⁵⁷ The broad contours of his description of his initial opium experience are little different from those of any other conversion narrative. He passes from ignorance to enlightenment, from a miserable condition to one of deep joy. That event changed everything.

I lost not a moment in taking the quantity prescribed. I was necessarily ignorant of the whole art and mystery of opium-taking: and, what I took, I took under every disadvantage. But I took it:—and in an hour, oh! Heavens! what a revulsion! what an upheaving, from its lowest depths, of the inner spirit! *what an apocalypse of the world within me!* That my pains had vanished, was now a trifle in my eyes:—this negative effect was swallowed up in the immensity of those positive effects which had opened before me—in the abyss of divine enjoyment

thus suddenly revealed. Here was a panacea—a φαρμακὸν νήπενθες for all human woes—here was the secret of happiness, about which philosophers had disputed for so many ages.⁵⁸

The opium-eater, he declared, “feels that the diviner part of his nature is paramount; that is, the moral affections are in a state of cloudless serenity; and overall there is the great light of the majestic intellect.” This, says the enthusiastic convert to psychedelic gnosis, “is the doctrine of the true church on the subject of opium: of which church I acknowledge myself to be the only member—the alpha and the omega.”⁵⁹

Inevitably, the memory of De Quincey’s conversion experience began to fade. While at first he was able to moderate his attendance at the church of opium, its sacrament gradually increased its hold on him, eventually becoming “a tyrant.” “The reader is aware that opium had long since ceased to found its empire on spells of pleasure; it was solely by the tortures connected with the attempt to abjure it, that it kept its hold.”⁶⁰ Initially, he was able to limit his intake to once every three weeks. However, he soon found that although he could renounce the drug for short periods, typically he couldn’t get through a day without at least 300 drops of laudanum. Indeed, during times when he was stressed or sought the creative assistance that he was convinced opium could provide, this escalated to 480 grains of opium or 12,000 drops of laudanum daily.⁶¹

His account of his introduction to and subsequent relationship with the drug, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, initially appeared in the *London Magazine* in 1821.⁶² It quickly became a cult classic. Some readers, of course, such as Thomas Carlyle, were scandalized by his account of recreational opium use: “Better, a thousand times better, *die* than have anything to do with such a Devil’s own drug!”⁶³ But as Robert Morrison says, “for scores of other readers, De Quincey’s account of his experience was almost as seductive as the drug itself, and his *Confessions* were embraced as an invitation to experimentation.”⁶⁴ Indeed, in 1823, “one doctor reported an alarming increase in the number of people dying from an overdose of opium, ‘in consequence of a little book that has been published by a man of literature.’”⁶⁵ Hayter has also drawn attention to its influence: “Anyone who has read many medical case-histories of opium addicts, in the nineteenth century and even up to today [1968], constantly meets references to De Quincey as having first aroused the addict’s curiosity about opium. Francis Thompson and perhaps Branwell Brontë were inspired to try opium by De Quincey’s work; so were several of the Americans, such as William Blair and Walter Cotton.”⁶⁶ Unnerved but

undeterred by such reports, De Quincey followed his “little book” with two further essays exploring opium addiction, “*Suspiria de Profundis*” (“Sighs from the Depths,” 1845) and “The English Mail Coach” (1849; originally intended to form part of “*Suspiria*”).⁶⁷ Together they provide an agonizingly lucid account of, as he put it, the “pleasure and pains” of opium addiction.

In particular, as we have seen, the early nineteenth-century Romantic was fascinated by opium’s ability “to assist the faculty of dreaming.”⁶⁸ Not only does De Quincey eloquently describe the dizzying heights that could be attained with opium, but he is also just as eloquent in his analysis of the drug’s ability to draw him down into the dark recesses of his psyche, forcing him to confront repressed memories of traumatic events: “Some things that had sunk into utter forgetfulness, others that had faded in visionary power—all rise as gory phantoms from the dust: the field of our earthly combats, that should by night have settled into peace, is all alive with hosts of resurrections.”⁶⁹ There is something fundamentally psychoanalytic about this interpretation of opium dreams. He demands from the reader, as Joel Faflak says, “no less than to follow [him] into the unconscious.”⁷⁰ Typical of the Romantic fascination with the power of memory and imagination, in “*Suspiria de Profundis*” and “The English Mail Coach,” he is transported back into his childhood and, particularly, to one of the most disturbing and formative events of his life: the loss, at the age of six, of his much-loved sister, Elizabeth. Opium even facilitated a conversation with the young De Quincey: “Many years are passed away since then; and you were a little ignorant thing at that time, hardly above six years old But your heart was deeper than the Danube; and, as was your love, so was your grief. Many years are gone since that darkness settled on your head; many summers, many winters; yet still its shadows wheel round upon you at intervals.”⁷¹ Indeed, aspects of his work on opium and memory can be read as a mystical account of his passing through a “dark night of the soul,” an embracing of disconsolation or what Martin Heidegger has referred to as the “readiness for anxiety.”⁷² That is to say, while obviously disturbing, there is something cathartic and redemptive about De Quincey’s experiences of transcendence. Opium, with its peculiar ability to stimulate the imagination and disable the will, forced him to trace those repressed memories that haunted his everyday life.

The minutest scenes of childhood, or forgotten scenes of later years, were often revived: I could not be said to recollect them; for if I had been told of them when waking, I should not have been able to acknowledge them as parts of my past experience. But placed as they

were before me, in dreams like intuitions, and clothed in all their evanescent circumstances and accompanying feelings, I *recognised* them instantaneously.⁷³

Indeed, like many ascetics, he embraced the pain his opium dreams visited upon him. As his daughter, Florence, recalled, “It was an accepted fact among us that he was able when saturated with opium to persuade himself, and delighted to persuade himself (the excitement of terror was a real delight to him), that he was dogged by dark and mysterious foes.”⁷⁴

Of particular interest is an enigmatic entity he refers to as the “Dark Interpreter”: “an intruder into my dreams.”⁷⁵ Guiding him on his journey within and helping him to understand the significance of his visions, this spectral figure is an ambiguous manifestation. On the one hand, De Quincey is aware that he is not some exogenous being with an independent existence, but rather “a mere reflex of my inner nature”⁷⁶—a projection of his unconscious.⁷⁷ On the other hand, there are times when he seems to act in ways that suggest he is actually in possession of his own will: “The Interpreter sometimes swerves out of my orbit, and mixes a little with alien natures. I do not always know him in these cases as my own parhelion.”⁷⁸ That is to say, rising from deep within De Quincey’s unconscious, the Dark Interpreter not only appears to know him better than he knows himself, but also seems to manifest as an independent entity.

What he says, generally is but that which *I* have said in daylight, and in meditation deep enough to sculpture itself on my heart. But sometimes, as his face alters, his words alter; and they do not always seem such as I have used, or *could* use. No man can account for all things that occur in dreams. Generally I believe this—that he is a faithful representative of myself; but he is also at times subject to the action of the god *Phantasus*, who rules in dreams.⁷⁹

The notion of guides that manifest in the hallucinating mind is not an unusual one within psychedelic history. As we will see particularly in Chapter 8, there are numerous accounts of encounters with “guides or teachers in nonordinary reality” that either reveal new information or assist in a process of interpretation.⁸⁰ Although many users would, in the final analysis, think of such teachers in terms not dissimilar to De Quincey’s understanding of the Dark Interpreter, others do invest them with complete independence as exogenous agents. “That human beings hear the paranormal voices of ‘others’ under

certain circumstances has been well-established for millennia," says Jim De Korne in his popular guide to the use of psychotropic plants. "Psychedelic shamanism has traditionally attributed these inner voices to 'teachers' residing within the substances themselves." He notes that "the obvious question is: do hallucinogenic plants actually embody 'entities,' or do they elicit aspects of the unconscious psyche that present themselves in this guise?"⁸¹ For De Quincey, in the final analysis, enigmatic though they are, such travel companions along the highways and byways of opium land "do not to tell you anything absolutely new." Rather, they simply "recall you to your own lurking thoughts—hidden for a moment or imperfectly developed."⁸² Having said that, "let no man think this a trifle. The machinery for dreaming planted in the human brain was not planted for nothing."⁸³ As we have seen, in accord with Romantic-gnostic theories of dreaming and the imagination, the Dark Interpreter and inner space are spiritually and philosophically important for De Quincey.

It's also worth noting that the imagination was significant, it being rooted in a particular Romantic conception of the individual. As Lilian Furst has discussed, "Just as the individual is the pivot of the Romantic universe, so within the individual the focal point is his imagination, his power to perceive and recreate the world according to his own inner vision . . . For in a cosmos literally centred on the individual's ego, it is necessarily the perceptions, reactions and feelings of that ego which alone matter."⁸⁴ In theology, this gnostic understanding of the self's unity with the divine ground of being was experienced through intuition, feeling, and imagination. Consequently, "true religion" was understood not in terms of institutions, traditions, and doctrines but, as Friedrich Schleiermacher famously defined it, as "a sense and taste for the infinite."⁸⁵ Religion is, he explained (in a way very similar to James's description of mystical states), "considered purely in itself, neither a Knowing nor a Doing, but a modification of Feeling, or of immediate self-consciousness."⁸⁶ As previously noted, it is precisely this type of experience that we can understand in terms of gnosis. Likewise, William Blake was able to insist that "the world of the imagination is the world of Eternity; it is the divine bosom into which we shall go after the death of the Vegetated body. This world of the imagination is Infinite and Eternal, whereas the world of Generation, or Vegetation, is Finite and temporal."⁸⁷ To repeat De Quincey's gnostic declaration: "Let no man think [inner space] a trifle. The machinery for dreaming planted in the human brain was not planted for nothing."

We need not spend time excavating the philosophical underpinnings of these evocative statements, as the point here is simply to draw attention to

the significance of the interior world for Romanticism and, in the case of De Quincey, the significance of opium for accessing that world. The faculty of dreaming, he says, which is ably assisted by opium, "is the one great tube through which man communicates with the shadowy. And the dreaming organ . . . *forces the infinite into the chambers of the human brain*, and throws dark reflections from eternities below all life upon the mirrors of the sleeping mind."⁸⁸ While he acknowledges that a number of "merely physical agencies can and do assist the faculty of dreaming almost preternaturally," including "intense exercise," opium is "beyond all others" the most effective. Indeed, the *Confessions* were written not only with the purpose of "exposing this specific power of opium upon the faculty of dreaming, but much more with the purpose of displaying the faculty itself."⁸⁹ This is why "opium is the true hero of the tale; and the legitimate centre on which interest revolves."⁹⁰ For if anyone were to ask him about his apparent ability "to dream more splendidly than others," his answer would be simple: "Because I took excessive quantities of opium."⁹¹

This, then, is why De Quincey should be considered the father of modern psychedelic mysticism. As M.H. Abrams says, "He saw not only a sanctuary, but a new sphere opened to his imagination in the glowing splendours it built 'upon the bosom of darkness, out of the fantastic imagery of the brain.'⁹² Prefiguring James's reflections on altered states of consciousness, as well as those of subsequent writers such as Huxley and Leary, he understood the drug in terms of a technology for the parting of "the veil between our present consciousness and the secret inscriptions on the mind."⁹³ Looking at it this way, he was able to

enter a new world as different from this as Mars may be; and one which ordinary mortals, hindered by terrestrial conceptions, can never, from mere description, quite comprehend. It is a world of twisted, exquisite experience, sensuous and intellectual; of "music like a perfume," and "sweet light golden with audible odours exquisite," where colour is a symphony, and one can hear the walk of an insect on the ground, the bruising of a flower. Above all, in this enchanted land man is freed at last from those petty bonds upon which Kant insists: space and time. Space is amplified to such proportions that . . . "infinity" is the only word adequate to compass it. More striking still, man escapes at last from the life of a transiency lamented by poets since time immemorial, and approaches immortality as closely as he ever can in this world; for he experiences, almost literally, eternity.⁹⁴

That is to say, in De Quincey's work there is abundant evidence of the Romantic search for an experience unfettered by the constraints of space and time. As the drug took hold, the Romantic-gnostic vision was realized:

Buildings, landscapes, &c. were exhibited in proportions so vast as the bodily eye is not fitted to receive. Space swelled, and was amplified to an extent of unutterable infinity . . . I sometimes seemed to have lived for 70 to 100 years in one night; nay, sometimes had feelings representative of a millennium passed in that time, or, however, of a duration far beyond the limits of any human experience.⁹⁵

The opium-dream allowed him to reflect on the world and particularly on his own history *sub specie aeternitatis*. With the divine assistance of opium, not only was he enabled "in a moment" to see his "whole life" spread out before him, but he had the time to scrutinize it "in its minutest incidents."⁹⁶ Moreover, it's important to understand that "this fantastic land is not the fleeting shadow of an ordinary dream, but is a reality nearly as vivid as actual experience. The important and almost neglected fact is that in 'the well of memory' the fragments of this land assume as legitimate a place as any recollections from life."⁹⁷

Opium and the Orient: Fear and Fascination

The poppy's image as a product of a decadent Orient was, we have seen, an increasingly common one during the nineteenth century. Indeed, well into the twentieth century, Chesterton was able to state that "nobody who knows the nineteenth-century literature can fail to notice that there was a curious effort, under the surface, to make . . . Asiatic drugs as normal as European drinks. It is a sort of subterranean conspiracy that ranges from the *Confessions* of De Quincey to *The Moonstone* of Wilkie Collins." Fortunately, he says, "tradition was too strong for it; and Christian men continued to prefer the grape of life to the poppy of death."⁹⁸ Although he goes some way beyond the evidence in claiming that there was a subterranean conspiracy to popularize opium, in so doing he reveals an area of anxiety about opium that is not always explicitly stated. Opium became a social concern, not only because it was considered to be detrimental to mind and body—"the grape of life" was also known to have its problems in that regard (as De Quincey himself was keen to point out)—but also because it was both unchristian and non-Western. Unlike wine, a drug with deep roots in Western Christian culture,

the “Asiatic drug” seemed to promise transport to spiritual worlds beyond those sanctioned by its theological gatekeepers.⁹⁹ Regardless of its addictive properties, the fact that opium was a quintessentially Oriental drug fixed it, like hashish, within a bewitchingly transgressive field of discourse. “Of all the carnal delights, that over which opium rules as the presiding genius is most shrouded in mystery,” wrote one anonymous Victorian observer in an article titled “East London Opium Smokers.” The author continues:

It is invested with a weird and fantastic interest (for which its Oriental origin is doubtless to some degree accountable), and there hovers about it a vague fascination, such as is felt towards ghostly legend and the lore of fairy land. There exists a strange yearning to make more intimate acquaintance with the miraculous drug concerning which there is so much whispering, and at the same time a superstitious dread of approaching it, such as, when it comes to the pinch, possesses the rustic believer in the efficacy of repeating a prayer backwards as a means of raising the Devil.¹⁰⁰

As this observation indicates, xenophobic suspicions of the Orient as a mysterious, profane space—evident in De Quincey’s politically conservative writings—were often confluent with a deep-seated fascination.¹⁰¹

If we bear in mind its bias toward transgression, it is unsurprising that Romanticism’s gnostic quest for transcendental subjectivity, for detachment from the physical limits of embodied existence, and for an unfettered imagination became focused on the visionary potential of an Oriental drug. The Romantics were, as Abrams says, “allured by the mystery inherent in the golden drug of Asia.”¹⁰² Although many considered Oriental lands to be, in Byron’s words, “very improvable”¹⁰³ and thus in need of the assistance of the Empire, they were also “*un-provable*,” or “potentially illusory.”¹⁰⁴ There was something ethereal and mystical about the Orient.

This brings us to the important nexus of Orientalism and Romanticism. Commenting on Friedrich Schlegel’s *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier* (1808), Edward Said makes the point that nowhere does the philosopher talk about the living, contemporary Orient. “When he said in 1800, ‘It is in the Orient that we must search for the highest Romanticism,’ he meant the Orient of the *Sakuntala*, the Zend-Avesta, and the Upanishads.”¹⁰⁵ Schlegel’s Orient was, in other words, imagined. Although he championed the Orient as a resource on which to build a philosophy capable of resisting the ruination of Western culture, his understanding of it was, in fact, a Romantic construction.

As Said argues, “The regeneration of Europe by Asia . . . was a very influential Romantic idea.” Both Schlegel and Novalis (Georg Philipp Friedrich von Hardenberg) “urged upon their countrymen, and upon Europeans in general, a detailed study of India because, they said, it was Indian culture and religion that could defeat the materialism and mechanism (and republicanism) of Occidental culture. And from this defeat would arise a new, revitalized Europe.”¹⁰⁶ The problem was that because they were viewing the Orient through a Romantic lens, it always bore a similarity to that with which they were already familiar and in broad agreement. For example, within much German Romanticism, “Indian religion was essentially an Oriental version of Germano-Christian pantheism.” What mattered “was not Asia so much as Asia’s *use to* modern Europe. Thus anyone who, like Schlegel or Franz Bopp, mastered an Oriental language was a spiritual hero, a knight-errant bringing back to Europe a sense of the holy mission it had now lost.”¹⁰⁷ In the final analysis, “the Orientalist makes it his work to be always converting the Orient from something into something else.”¹⁰⁸

As is now well known, Said’s thesis, which draws on Michel Foucault’s work, is that the relationship between the Occident and the Orient was one of power, within which the former used the latter for its own cultural ends—even if, in so doing, it was believed that the work done was for the sake of the latter. “The Orient was Orientalized not only because it was discovered to be ‘Oriental’ in all those ways considered commonplace by an average nineteenth-century European, but also because *it could be*—that is, submitted to being—*made* Oriental.”¹⁰⁹ In tracing the roots of Orientalism back to Romanticism, Said argued that there was actually little from Oriental cultures that contributed to the idea of “the Orient.” Rather, Orientalism is “produced and exists in an uneven exchange with various kinds of power, shaped to a degree by the exchange with power political (as with a colonial or imperial establishment), power intellectual (as with reigning sciences . . .), power cultural (as with orthodoxies and canons of taste, texts, values), power moral, (as with ideas about what ‘we’ do and what ‘they’ cannot do or understand as ‘we’ do).”¹¹⁰

While Said’s conception of Europe and Romanticism risks slipping into a form of Occidentalism similar to the essentializing Orientalism he attacks, and should therefore be read with caution, his understanding of a perceived polarity between East and West within Romanticism is important nevertheless. This, in turn, has encouraged understandings of the Orient as the exotic “Other,” as evident in popular depictions of “Eastern” religions, cultures, and societies: images of meditating Buddhist monks in saffron robes filtered through the mist of incense; exotic spiritual masters performing grueling

ascetic rituals; majestic camel trains making their way across rolling sand dunes; Coleridge's vision of the utopian Xanadu, the summer palace of the majestic Chinese emperor Kubla Khan; the Eastern eroticism described in the writings of Richard Burton and depicted in paintings such as John Frederick Lewis's *The Hhareen* (c. 1850), Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres's *Le Bain Turc* (1862), and Sir Frank Dicksee's *Leila* (1892).

Orientalism has, of course, also shaped the self-perception of the Occident. Whereas the East tended to be represented as mystical and exotic, if also backward and barbaric in certain fundamental respects, the West was understood to be technologically advanced and progressive. While many Westerners felt that they had an obligation toward the Orient to educate, to convert, and to encourage its moral advancement, others felt that it had much to offer in terms of spiritual and philosophical wisdom. For example, Abraham Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron—whose *Oupnek'hat* (the first European translation of the *Upanishads* in 1801 and 1802) became an influential sourcebook of Indian wisdom—insisted that “the philosophers of many countries, and in particular the representatives of German Idealism,” should

study the teachings of the *Oupnek'hat* from a philosophical angle, not just seeing them as testimony about ancient India, but also to consider them as a serious philosophical challenge . . . He included many comparisons with Western philosophical teachings, e.g., with Plotinus and the Gnostics . . . Anyone who carefully examines the lines of Immanuel Kant's thought, its principles as well as its results, will recognise that it does not deviate very far from the teachings of the Brahmins, which lead man back to himself and comprise him and focus him within himself.¹¹¹

While the term “Orientalism” has, particularly since the publication of Said's polemically charged work, become pejorative and contested, it was originally used simply to refer to this type of supposedly disinterested, objective study of the Orient. In this sense, the term can be traced back to the work of William Jones and the establishment of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in Calcutta in 1784.¹¹² A founding father of comparative linguistics, Jones's work on Sanskrit, along with that of Thomas Colebrooke, sought to establish Sanskrit's significance as the source of European languages.

This scholarship led not only to a flowering of interest in Indian history and culture but also to Romantic speculation about the Orient as the cradle of Occidental civilization. For example, not only did Romantics express

an admiration for Indian philosophical thought,¹¹³ but of particular significance was Johann Gottfried von Herder's thesis that "the archaic nature of the Hindu Vedas represented the origins of human civilization, the source of Indo-European mythology and language, and provided a window into the mysterious history of humankind."¹¹⁴ Such ideas cultivated a nostalgia for human origins and "authenticity"—which, we will see, became a central feature of much psychedelic thought. Once India was identified as "the cradle of civilization," there was, as is clearly evident in Herder's influential work, an allied tendency to understand its religion and culture ahistorically, as frozen in time, a throwback to the infancy of the human race. These ideas had a formative impact on the thinking of De Quincey, who wrote, "A young Chinese seems to me an antediluvian man renewed."¹¹⁵

This notion of the solid bedrock of Oriental civilization provided a welcome feeling of stability during a period when Western political and social sands were shifting. As Richard King comments, "While Europe and the New World were undergoing enormous social and political changes, India seemed to have remained unchanged for thousands of years, representing a crucial example of static archaism with which the dynamic modernity of the West could be successfully contrasted."¹¹⁶ This was certainly the case for De Quincey, who was deeply unnerved by widespread political instability. As Stuart Tave comments, his conservative politics was informed by the central experience of a lost paradise: "A great unity and balance that once existed is now lost forever in dark chance, and unresting, endless change."¹¹⁷ One can, therefore, understand the appeal of the timeless stability of the Orient:

The mere antiquity of Asiatic things, of their institutions, histories, modes of faith, &c. is so impressive, that to me the vast age of the race and name overpowers the sense of youth in the individual . . . Even Englishmen, though not bred in the knowledge of such institutions, cannot but shudder at the mystic sublimity of *castes* that have flowed apart, and refused to mix, through such immemorial tracts of time; nor can any man fail to be awed by the names of the Ganges, or the Euphrates.¹¹⁸

However, not only was De Quincey a man of his time, fascinated by the East, but he was also a particularly conservative and xenophobic example of Romantic Orientalism. A striking instance of this is related in a rather bizarre (and possibly imagined) account in his *Confessions* concerning the visit of a Malay man to Dove Cottage: "One day, a Malay knocked at my door. What business a Malay could have to transact amongst the English mountains,

I cannot conjecture.” Nor, I suspect, can anyone else. “The servant who opened the door to him was a young girl born and bred amongst the mountains, who had never seen an Asiatic dress of any sort: his turban, therefore, confounded her a little.”¹¹⁹ De Quincey observed the striking dissimilarities between his Asian visitor and the Westmorland girl who opened the door to him:

In a cottage kitchen, but paneled on the wall with dark wood, stood the Malay—his turban and loose trousers of dingy white relieved upon the dark paneling: he had placed himself nearer to the girl than she seemed to relish; though her native spirit of mountain intrepidity contended with the feeling of simple awe which her countenance expressed as she gazed upon the tiger-cat before her. And a more striking picture there could not be imagined, than the beautiful face of the girl, and its exquisite fairness, together with her erect and independent attitude, contrasted with the sallow and bilious skin of the Malay, enameled or veneered with mahogany, by marine air, his small, fierce, restless eyes, thin lips, slavish gestures and adorations.¹²⁰

Following a failed attempt by De Quincey to strike up a conversation using classical Greek (it being geographically closer to the Orient than English), the Malay lay on the floor and slept for an hour. Before the visitor left, De Quincey “presented him with a piece of opium,” for “to him, as an Orientalist, I concluded that opium must be familiar.” He was not wrong: “I was struck with some little consternation when I saw him suddenly raise his hand to his mouth, and . . . bolt the whole, divided into three pieces, at one mouthful. The quantity was enough to kill three dragoons and their horses.”¹²¹ Although a little concerned that he might have inadvertently killed his guest, De Quincey received no evidence that he had come to any harm. Hence he concluded that, being an Asian, the man was quite able to cope with large quantities of opium.

This incident is interesting not only because of what it reveals about De Quincey but also because of its subsequent Orientalizing impact on his opium experiences: “This Malay fastened afterwards upon my dreams, and brought other Malays with him worse than himself, that ran ‘a-muck’¹²² at me, and led me into a world of troubles.”¹²³ Under the influence of opium, De Quincey was frequently transported from the mountains of the English Lake District to the barbaric and superstitious lands of the Orient by the mystical agency of the Malay:

I have been every night, through his means, transported to Asiatic scenes . . . Southern Asia in general is the seat of awful images and

associations. As the cradle of the human race, it would alone have a dim and reverential feeling connected with it. But there are other reasons. No man can pretend that the wild, barbarous, and capricious superstitions of Africa, or the savage tribes elsewhere, affect him in the way that he is affected by the ancient, monumental, cruel, and elaborate religions of Indostan, &c.¹²⁴

He was, he says, “terrified by the modes of life, by the manners, and the barrier of utter abhorrence, and want of sympathy, placed between us by feelings deeper than I can analyze.” Consequently, if he found it difficult to make sense of his own travels on opium, he conceded that it would be particularly perplexing for his readers, who would not be able to “comprehend the unimaginable horror which these dreams of Oriental imagery, and mythological tortures, impressed upon me.”¹²⁵

Of particular interest regarding this fear and fascination of the Orient, is its dissolution into a dehistoricized, detemporalized, and despatialized idea. For example, in an evocative passage in *Confessions*, he recalls an altered state in which he “brought together all creatures, birds, beasts, reptiles, all trees and plants, usages and appearances, that are found in all tropical regions, and assembled them together in China or Indostan.”¹²⁶ The actual location matters little. It is simply an Oriental imaginary in which all cultures, historical periods and societies are conflated. He continues:

From kindred feelings, I soon brought Egypt and all her gods under the same law. I was stared at, hooted at by monkeys, by paroquets, by cockatoos. I ran into pagodas, and was fixed for centuries at the summit, or in secret rooms; I was the idol; I was the priest; I was worshipped; I was sacrificed. I fled from the wrath of Brahma through all the forests of Asia; Vishnu hated me; Seeva lay in wait for me. I came suddenly upon Isis and Osiris: I had done a deed, they said, which the ibis and the crocodile trembled at. I was buried, for a thousand years, in stone coffins, with mummies and sphinxes, in narrow chambers at the heart of eternal pyramids. I was kissed with cancerous kisses, by crocodiles, and was laid, confounded with unutterable abortions, among reeds and Nilotic mud.¹²⁷

Opium, in gathering Oriental signifiers together in a single, decontextualized vision, actualizes the degeneration of both the sublime and subjectivity.¹²⁸ For Edmund Burke, of course, “terror is the ruling principle of the sublime.”¹²⁹

However, in Burkean aesthetics, terror and the sublime are not synonymous. That is to say, if we are actually threatened by that which is terrifying, we are unable to appreciate it aesthetically. Because actual terror simply overwhelms our judgment, it is “incapable of giving any delight whatsoever,” it being “simply terrible.” This is the position of the individual threatened with immediate annihilation. However, “at certain distances, and with certain modifications,” terrifying events and objects “are delightful.”¹³⁰ Indeed, “delightful horror,” is, he suggests, “the most genuine effect and truest test of the sublime.”¹³¹ For Burke, “delight” is not “pleasure” as such, but rather it is the experience of being removed from the awfulness of the “terror.” The problem for De Quincey was that opium had removed the distance between East and West, past and future, subject and object, and immersed him in the terror of the Orient. He could no longer emotionally “delight” in the excitement of contemplating the exotic Otherness of the Orient, as he could when reading books and talking with friends, for now he was there. Furthermore, not only was he there, but his identity had been dissolved, so he became both idol and priest, both deity and sacrificial victim. He saw everything in a moment, and at the same time he was “fixed for centuries” in “secret rooms.” He was buried with mummies deep with the pyramids, while also fleeing from the wrath of Brahma in the forests of Asia.

This complex of fear and fascination is, for De Quincey, rooted in Herder’s perception of the Orient as the “cradle of civilization.” Because the Occident has its origins in the Orient, deep within the Western psyche are “antediluvian” survivals of an Oriental nature. Opium excavates these depths. That is to say, for De Quincey, “opium proves to be a kind of infernal archaeological tool that uncovers the not-so-deeply buried Oriental within the English.”¹³² However, while the Orient to which he is transported in his opium dreams clearly fascinates him, it is also separated from him by a “barrier of utter abhorrence.” Here De Quincey departs from German Romanticism. On the one hand, there is a stability to be found in looking back to the foundations of civilization, but on the other hand, opium is destabilizing in that it allows dark Oriental forces to emerge from within and to challenge all he holds to be sacred.

Coleridge has similar concerns. He is, however, less worried about the Oriental *beneath* the English, and more disturbed by the corrosive potential of the Oriental *within* the English. That is to say, he is worried about the ingestion of tainted substances that could result in cultural infection—including that “pernicious Beverage,” tea!¹³³ Barry Milligan notes an interesting point regarding a distinction Coleridge makes between the drinking

of contaminative Oriental substances and drinking, intellectually, from the resources of the “Mother Isle.” “By framing pure national identity as a by-product of wholesome mother’s milk, Coleridge indirectly takes part in an ongoing dispute over English childrearing customs.”¹³⁴ His point is that, as a result of an increase in the use of working-class wet nurses to breastfeed the babies of middle-class mothers, a debate arose as to whether weak morals might be transfused with the milk into the children. This anxiety “took on a national as well as class bias in the Indian colonies, where many English mothers resorted to native wet nurses or *ammahs*, but not without a nagging fear that, as one guide book for colonial wives put it later in the century, ‘the milk of ‘native women’ might contaminate an English child’s character.’”¹³⁵ As he argues, it is difficult not to read Coleridge’s “conflation of purity and Englishness in his metaphor of mother’s milk, for it is easy to imagine him portraying England as the good mother who nurses her children with a pure soul-nurturing milk whilst casting the Orient as the bad mother who serves up a rancid, character-degrading pernicious beverage.”¹³⁶

That said, Coleridge is, like De Quincey, a little more complex. For while this certainly identifies a prominent concern, as the quotation at the beginning of this chapter indicates, not only is he also fascinated by the Orient, but he depicts opium—that most Oriental of drugs—as the “milk of paradise.” Indeed, it is clear that this understanding of a drug so heavily coded with Oriental meaning is rooted in a wider intellectual appreciation of the East. As within Romanticism generally, he saw in Oriental thought an articulation of German Idealism and, more particularly, the monistic trajectory of Baruch Spinoza’s metaphysics. It is interesting, for example, that in the following passage he imagines meeting Spinoza, not in Europe, but in the rather unlikely location of the Arabian Desert:

If I begin a poem of Spinoza thus it should begin /

I would make a pilgrimage to the burning sands of Arabia, or &c
&c[,] to find the Man who could explain to me [how] there can be
oneness, there being infinite Perceptions—yet there must be a *oneness*,
not an intense Union, but an Absolute Unity.¹³⁷

Of particular significance in this respect are his recollections in a letter of 1797 regarding the powerful influence of *One Thousand and One Nights*, which he read with avid interest as a child.¹³⁸ Although his clergyman father greatly disapproved of Oriental tales and eventually forbade him to read them,¹³⁹ throughout his life he continued to nurture a fascination with quasi-Oriental

ideas, which he referred to as “the Brahman Creed.” “I should much wish, like the Indian Vishnu to float about along an infinite ocean cradled in the flower of the Lotus, & wake once in a million years for a few minutes—just to know that I was going to sleep a million years more.”¹⁴⁰ This scene, as Milligan says, “with its projected sleeper rocking within the cradle of an Oriental lotus on the infinite ocean encodes the Orient . . . as a rival mother to the English one; the would-be seafaring slumberer desires to return not to the lakes and seas of his English Mother Isle, but to the womblike cradle of the lotus on the infinite ocean of the Orient.”¹⁴¹

There is, however, an Orientalist ambivalence in Coleridge’s yearning for otherworldly bliss, and it comes to the fore in his reflections on opium. It was a technology of transcendence, “the milk of paradise” that was able to set him adrift on that “infinite ocean, cradled in the flower of the Lotus.” But it also introduced Oriental lethargy, which would, if it were allowed to, undermine everything that his Mother Isle had given him, inducing not an intellectual appreciation of Spinoza’s “Absolute Unity” but rather a sleepy regression into ignorance. It would, in other words, have an effect that is precisely the opposite of gnosis. His addiction to it thus became a matter of grave concern, spiritually, intellectually, and physically. Indeed, he began to see opium’s negative effects not only within his own body but throughout the body of the Mother Isle. Opium, therefore, quickly became representative of his fears of Oriental invasion. The Orient is infiltrating Britain through the tainted commodities Britons ingest, and opium “emerges as the oriental commodity most able to introduce a vindictive, consciousness-usurping Orient into the British body and mind and to convert them from British to Oriental.”¹⁴² His increasing consumption of laudanum led to nightmarish visions of Oriental incursions into his own inner space. Several times he describes it in terms of an occupying force. While it was initially benevolent and inspirational—an important agent in the construction of his consciousness—it quickly became tyrannical, as it had with De Quincey.

Whether it was understood to be a technology capable of summoning powerful forces from the Oriental depths underlying Western culture or whether it was believed to be capable of transfusing an Oriental virus into the intellectual bloodstream of Western individuals and societies, there was a sense in which opium was ontologically significant. As an “Asian drug,” it could, through the power of dreams, transport the user to another form of consciousness infused with the Oriental Other. As its users slipped away from everyday life in the West, they often (not always) traveled to an Oriental neverland—the court of Kubla Khan, Xanadu with its “stately pleasure

dome,” the cradle of civilization, the lotus drifting on an infinite sea, or the dark, fearful places of Oriental tyranny. It was not, it appears, simply a case of association, but rather the drug was thought to possess some peculiar quality that enabled the East to manifest in the mind of the user.

Concluding Comments

Not only were De Quincey’s early nineteenth-century accounts of the “fierce chemistry” and “exquisite pleasure” of recreational opium use the first of their kind, but, as we will see, they were peculiarly influential.¹⁴³ As David Courtwright discusses, while it is impossible to determine accurately the overall impact of De Quincey’s *Confessions* on rates of addiction, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the use of opium as a stimulus to the imagination was closely tied to his narratives. “Although the *Confessions* touched on many subjects, the passages contemporaries found most intriguing were those that dealt with De Quincey’s fantastic opium dreams.” It was, he says, “easy for the reader to conclude that he too might journey through fantastic inner realms if only he downed a little opium.”¹⁴⁴

We have seen that De Quincey was not alone in developing theories of opium as a technology of transcendence. His thinking in this regard was fundamentally indebted to the social and cultural contexts of early nineteenth century Europe, particularly Romanticism, Idealism, and Orientalism, which have likewise continued to have a formative influence on the history of drugs and transcendence in the modern world.¹⁴⁵

A central theme in the history of modern psychedelic thought is the notion that psychoactive substances initiate a transcendence of the mundane, occasioned by a migration from one form of consciousness to another. As a psychoactive substance begins to manipulate brain function and induce alterations in perception, mood, and consciousness, the self is, as De Quincey put it, transported to “another world . . . taken out the region of human things, human purposes, human desires.”¹⁴⁶ Indeed, as we will see in Chapter 3, this was precisely the experience that the chemist Humphry Davy was able to induce by inhaling nitrous oxide: a loss of “all connection with external things.” He records that he seemed to exist “in a world of newly connected and newly modified ideas.”¹⁴⁷ The key question concerns the nature of this other “world.” Although we have seen that, like James, De Quincey was typically hesitant about asserting its objectivity, in that he understood it to be primarily a construction of the mind, nevertheless he resisted accounting for it in entirely subjective terms.¹⁴⁸ Following Coleridge, there is an important

sense in which the imagination (drug-induced or not) can be interpreted as a dimension of reason in its peculiar function of comprehending both the whole in the parts and the parts as a whole. Not only does the imagination serve to animate the world, but in so doing it allows one to embrace the polarities of existence that often trouble the “scientific” mind directed to the phenomenal world of sense perception, which seeks to analyze, classify, measure, and dissect in order to understand. That is to say, the imagination seems to possess the ability to identify with a level of reality beyond that perceived by the senses.

Furthermore, while some grasp of this belief in the peculiar power of the disciplined imagination helps us toward an understanding of the Romantic fascination with altered states of consciousness, in the case of De Quincey we have seen, rather tantalizingly, the appearance of entities or manifestations within dream states that appear to have volitional independence and that seem to be able to reveal knowledge not previously known to the individual. Again, this prefigures certain later psychedelic discourses, particularly those that lean heavily on shamanic cultures.

This raises a question as to the ontological nature of drug-induced altered states, which became linked to Romantic understandings of the significance of dreaming and, later, to James’s theories of “other forms of consciousness” as well as to the scholarly analysis of mysticism. Regardless of the psychotherapeutic potential of such states, which is arguably significant,¹⁴⁹ the fact that they are often perceived as heterotopic spaces—“other spaces,” which exist alongside, but are distinct from hegemonic society and culture—has been central to much psychedelic discourse.

Foucault is helpful here as well. He identified two forms of space, “utopias” and “heterotopias.” The former are essentially unreal spaces that tend to present idealized forms of society, such as Coleridge’s Xanadu: “They present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down, but in any case these utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces.”¹⁵⁰ Heterotopias, on the other hand, are both “real spaces” and “counter-sites,” in that they “remain absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about.”¹⁵¹ That is to say, they exist alongside the spaces of mainstream society, but are distinguished from them. One might, for example, create a Zen garden in the center of London that is similar to such gardens found in Kyoto but which bears little relation to the life beyond the space it occupies. The two spaces are juxtaposed and remain intimately involved in the same world but are fundamentally separated from each other. As such, the Zen garden can function as an idealized critique of wider society, as well as an escape from the frenetic

hustle and bustle of everyday life. The boundaries between the two are particularly apparent when there is an incursion of one into the other. Imagine the throng of the city passing through the Zen garden. My point is simply that psychoactive drugs create inner utopias and heterotopias. On the one hand, a heterotopia, such as the summer capital of the Mongol ruler Kubla Khan, which Coleridge read about in “Purchas’s Pilgrimage,” can become a drug-induced, imaginary utopia:

*In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree:
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.
So twice five miles of fertile ground
With walls and towers were girdled round:
And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills,
Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;
And here were forests ancient as the hills,
Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.*

For De Quincey, although the power of opium lay in its ability to work with the “imagery of the brain,” in so doing it enabled access to Paradise: “Oh! just, subtle and mighty opium! . . . Thou buildest upon the bosom of darkness, out of the fantastic imagery of the brain, cities and temples beyond the art of Phidias and Praxiteles—beyond the Splendor of Babylon and Hekatómpylos . . . Thou only givest these gifts to man; and thou hast the keys to Paradise, oh, just, subtle, and mighty opium!”¹⁵² Here, the experience of a paradisiacal utopia is the result of an induced altered state of consciousness.

On the other hand, such inner spaces might be perceived as objectively real heterotopias, which exist alongside the empirical spaces of everyday life. Of course, Foucault was not speaking of “internal space,” although he recognized the importance of such spaces. However, because of the ambiguous nature of inner space within psychedelic discourse, the notion of heterotopias can be usefully applied to altered states.

Concerning the therapeutic potential of psychoactive drugs, we have seen that they can be thought of as technologies of transcendence, not simply in the mystical sense but also in the related sense that they enable individuals to “transcend”—that is, to give new meanings to and to reconfigure—their situations, as De Quincey was constrained to do regarding certain traumatic

formative events in his childhood. In a beautiful and insightful passage in "*Suspiria*" in which he addresses his younger self, he discusses the countless "mysterious handwritings of grief or joy which have inscribed themselves successively upon the palimpsest of your brain; and, like the annual leaves of aboriginal forests, or undissolving snows on the Himalaya, or light falling upon light, the endless strata have covered up each other in forgetfulness." He then makes the point that "by the searchings of opium, all these can revive in strength. They are not dead, but sleeping."¹⁵³ He continues, "The deep deep tragedies of infancy, as when the child's hands were unlinked for ever from his mother's neck, or his lips for ever from his sister's kisses, these remain lurking below all, and these lurk to the last."¹⁵⁴ Prefiguring James's reflections on altered states of consciousness, he understood the drug in terms of a gnostic technology for the parting of "the veil between our present consciousness and the secret inscriptions on the mind."¹⁵⁵

Finally, in relation to the above, it's also worth noting a comment made by De Quincey that emphasizes the importance of the sociocultural context of the user: "If a man 'whose talk is of oxen,' should become an Opium-eater, the probability is, that (if he is not too dull to dream at all)—he will dream about oxen."¹⁵⁶ De Quincey does not consider himself to be such a man. Rather, like Coleridge, he is, he insists, "a philosopher." His readers should, therefore, not be surprised that "the phantasmagoria of *his* dreams . . . is suitable to one who is in that character."¹⁵⁷ In other words, he stresses the importance of linguistic and sociocultural contexts in the construction of conceptual frameworks within which opium-eaters make sense of their experiences.¹⁵⁸ Regardless of the provocative ambiguity in his work, De Quincey questions the notion that humans are able to have narcotic dreams free from sociocultural conditioning.

Anesthetic Revelation

Nitrous oxide and ether, especially nitrous oxide, when sufficiently diluted with air, stimulate the mystical consciousness in an extraordinary degree. Depth beyond depth of truth seems revealed to the inhaler.

—WILLIAM JAMES¹

DURING THE NINETEENTH century there was a fascinating confluence of interest in medicine and metaphysics.² Central to this interest was the discovery of anesthetics. “You are told it will make you unconscious,” recalled Henry David Thoreau. “But none can imagine what it is to be unconscious: how far removed from the state of consciousness and all that we call ‘this world’—until he has experienced it.”³

The value of the experiment is that it does give you experience of an interval as between one life and another—a greater space than you have ever travelled. You are a sane mind without organs—groping for organs—which if it did not soon recover its old senses would get new ones. You expand like a seed in the ground. You exist in your roots, like a tree in winter. If you have an inclination to travel, take the ether: you go beyond the furthest star.⁴

Similarly, fellow Transcendentalist Margaret Fuller recorded her own experience of anesthesia during a tooth extraction. While the encounter was just as profound as Thoreau’s, her memory of it is less spatially oriented and more focused on that other cardinal psychedelic experience, temporal extension: “The moment my mind was in that state seems to me a far longer period in time than my life on earth does as I look back upon it.”⁵ Of course, while these accounts are interesting and tell us something about the reception of anesthesia during the nineteenth century, the Transcendentalists were never going to be psychedelic enthusiasts. Focused on the providential powers of

nature, they were more concerned to explore their own innate abilities—the “whole system of drugs” that had been “deposited” within the human body by its “Maker.”⁶ Hence, although some in 1960s high culture seized on Thoreau’s short reflections—one writer claiming not only that he would have appreciated the lyrics of Jefferson Airplane’s psychedelic classic, “White Rabbit,” but also that he “might have considered a dose of LSD or *cannabis sativa* . . . not a bad idea at all”⁷—this is to misunderstand Transcendentalism. As Ralph Waldo Emerson insisted, “Never can any advantage be taken on nature by a trick. The spirit of the world, the great calm presence of the Creator, comes *not* forth to the sorceries of opium or wine. The sublime vision comes to the pure and simple soul in a clean and chaste body.”⁸ Intoxicants inhibit the revelation of “that spirit which suffices quiet hearts.”⁹

Others, however, became convinced that anesthetics offered a more direct route to the “sublime vision” than the contemplation of nature.

A Ladder to the Heaven of Heavens

As a result of the experiments of the Cornish chemist Humphry Davy—the epitome of the Romantic natural philosopher¹⁰—both Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Robert Southey became bewitched by the effects of a recently discovered psychoactive gas. Prior to his invention of the miner’s lamp, his knighthood, and his presidency of the Royal Society, Davy was well known for his experiments with nitrous oxide (N₂O, “laughing gas”).

The Romantic interest in nitrous oxide was part of a wider interest in the properties of gases during this period. As Mike Jay has discussed, “Over the previous generation, chemists had shown that the air around them was not simply an inert backdrop to the world of matter, but a complex substance that could be teased apart into a still unknown number of separate elements, many of them with remarkable properties that could never have been guessed at from the air itself.”¹¹ By the early eighteenth century, the English clergyman and chemist Stephen Hales had already designed an experimental apparatus for collecting gas over water. However, although the term “gas” (from “chaos”) had been coined by Jan Baptist van Helmont, a Fleming Paracelsian chemist and mystic, to denote qualityless matter, the science was still at a very early stage.¹² Hales simply followed the consensus in believing that all gases were forms of air. The differences between “airs,” he argued, could be accounted for by invisible particles. For example, the fact that some were incapable of supporting life or were combustible was due to the respective prevalence of toxic or inflammable particles. It was the

Scottish chemist Joseph Black who first recognized that there were in fact distinct gases. Working with Black's theory of gases and using the apparatus designed by Hales, the English dissenting clergyman and polymath Joseph Priestley subsequently synthesized a number of (what he continued to call) "airs," including nitrous oxide in 1772—which he identified as "nitrous air, diminished." Priestley was rather perplexed as to the nature of the gas he had discovered, which he believed to be noxious, and so he ceased researching its properties, leaving it "as a mere gleaning, to the test of more scientific enquirers."¹³ One such enquirer was the American chemist Samuel Latham Mitchill, who renamed it "septon" but who also considered it to be "the corrupting principle, the source of disease and death."¹⁴

Davy read about Mitchell's experiments and disagreed. He synthesized the gas, tested it on living tissue, and demonstrated that it was no more putrefying than oxygen. Having thus proved his abilities as a chemist, he looked for interested parties who might be willing to employ him to carry out further experiments. Setting his sights high, he wrote to Thomas Beddoes, who had been seeking funding to develop the work of his Medical Pneumatic Institution, a research facility in Bristol, the aim of which was to study "factitious airs" and their medical applications. A radical and philanthropic thinker, Beddoes insisted that "there is nothing more urgent than to restore health and preserve life."¹⁵ On October 2, 1798—following the recommendation of the British engineer and member of Parliament Davies Gilbert, who knew Davy well, having been born in the same small Cornish town of Penzance—Beddoes appointed Davy to be his "laboratory superintendent." Beddoes also managed to secure adequate funds to purchase a property in Dowry Square, Hotwells, Bristol, and on March 21, 1799, he published a notice in the *Bristol Gazette* declaring the opening of a "New Medical Institution."

Davy immediately set about experimenting further with the gas. Once he had separated nitrous oxide from the more noxious nitric oxide, he decided to engage in a little self-experimentation. Using a green oiled-silk bag, he collected the gas emitted from heated crystals of ammonium nitrate, passed it through water vapor to remove impurities, and then inhaled it through a mouthpiece while his assistant, Dr. Kinglake, monitored his vital signs. The immediate and obvious dangers, notes Richard Holmes, were "that the ammonium nitrate would explode at a temperature above 400 degrees" and "that the first inhalations would kill him or permanently damage the linings of his lungs."¹⁶ Happily, however, his initial experiment didn't cause any explosions or adversely affect his breathing. Indeed, it was a great success and, following further experimentation, he was eventually able to conclude that because the gas appeared "capable of destroying pain, it may probably be used

with advantage during surgical operations in which no great effusion of blood takes place.”¹⁷ But initially it was the gas’s ability to induce euphoric states that impressed him.¹⁸ The following account of an experiment carried out on April 17, 1799, is a good example:

Having previously cleared my nostrils and exhausted my lungs, I breathed four quarts of nitrous oxide from and into a silk bag. The first feelings were familiar to those produced in the last experiment; but in less than half a minute, the respiration being continued, they diminished gradually, and were succeeded by a sensation analogous to gentle pressure on all the muscles, attended by a highly pleasurable thrilling, particularly in the chest and the extremities. The objects around me became dazzling and my hearing more acute. Towards the last inspirations, the thrilling increased, the sense of muscular power became greater, and at last an irresistible propensity to action was indulged in; I recollect but indistinctly what followed; I know that my motions were various and violent.¹⁹

This was only the beginning. Continued experimentation with greater amounts of nitrous oxide led to a lessening of the violent “motions” and to an increase in certain pleasurable feelings, including those of a visionary nature: “Sometimes I manifested my pleasure by stamping or laughing only; at other times, by dancing round the room and vociferating.”²⁰ And sometimes “sublime emotions connected with highly vivid ideas.”²¹ He describes, for example, “a pleasurable sensation” that “diffused itself over the whole body, and in the middle of the experiment, was, for a moment, so intense and pure as to absorb existence.”²² He even began to refer to the oiled-silk bag from which he inhaled the gas as a “paradise bag.” In words not entirely dissimilar to contemporary descriptions of opium dreams, he recalled that he “lost all connection with external things.” Moreover, he recorded that as he drifted away from the everyday world, “trains of vivid visible images rapidly passed through my mind, and were connected with words in such a manner, as to produce perceptions perfectly novel. I existed in a world of newly connected and newly modified ideas. I theorized—I imagined that I made discoveries.” When he finally emerged from “this trance,” he exclaimed to his assistant that “nothing exists but thoughts!—the universe is composed of impressions, ideas, pleasures and pains!”²³ Drawing on his knowledge of Idealist philosophy, he claimed, in effect, to be able to induce transcendent experiences of “the world as thought,” as discussed by George Berkeley. If reality was a product of the mind, then chemicals that had the power to alter mental states

also had the power to construct new universes. These and other radical ideas, along with the accounts of his experiments, were eventually introduced to the reading public in June 1800, in his first monograph, *Researches, Chemical and Philosophical; Chiefly Concerning Nitrous Oxide, or Dephlogisticated Nitrous Air, and Its Respiration*.

As well as attracting large numbers of the poor and needy—because their treatments were provided without cost—the Pneumatic Institution quickly became fashionable in Romantic circles. As well as Southey and Coleridge, “the younger Wedgwoods, and members of the Edgworth family were among those who sampled the delights of inspiring nitrous oxide under Davy’s superintendence.”²⁴ Indeed, because of its popularity within the Romantic milieu, which was considered by many to be a hotbed of radicalism, and also because of Beddoes’s own radical politics,²⁵ the Pneumatic Institution quickly came under the scrutiny of conservative publications such as the *Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine*, which attacked its work as the “trifles” of “pneumatic revelers.”²⁶ While such accusations were, of course, misleading, they did little to dampen the growing and enthusiastic interest in the metaphysical significance of the experiences induced by nitrous oxide. Southey even “remoarked that he supposed that the atmosphere of the highest of all possible heavens must be composed of this gas.”²⁷ Likewise, in a letter to Davy following his inhalation of nitrous oxide, Gregory Watt referred to the gas as “the ladder by which we may ascend to the Heaven of Heavens.”²⁸ It has even been argued by Marcus Boon that “literary experimentation with drugs had its birth in the friendship between Davy and Coleridge and the momentary possibility of a rapprochement between experimental chemistry, German Idealism, and Romantic poetics.”²⁹ Although the Romantic affair with opium and Orientalism was perhaps more significant in this respect, it is certainly true that “the first writers to discuss drug experiences were all familiar with the new German Idealist philosophy, which revealed a hitherto ignored intellectual significance in the altered states that drugs produced and provided a vocabulary for describing those states.”³⁰ As indicated above, Berkeley’s philosophical dictum, “the world is nothing but thoughts,” became for Davy a lived experience in the heterotopic dream worlds opened up by nitrous oxide.³¹

The gnostic impulse is evident in the early experiments with anesthesia. For example, it is significant that Davy eventually came to believe that, as Molly Lefebure says,

his “sublime” work in chemistry gave him a special insight into “the divine intelligence.” His visions were, almost all of them, involved in

one way or another with this mystery of higher intelligences, or an intelligence, wholly independent of human beings, immeasurably superior to any human intelligence, and removed at a great distance from human comprehension, both by space and time (time and space themselves being terms which, within the context of this superior independent intelligence, did not in fact have any meaning). Davy's visions carried him into fantastical immensities; experiences of a kind of interplanetary space travel, in the course of which, he flew or floated amongst heavenly universes, he encountered all manner of incredibly strange beings.³²

He even speculated that while "we are masters of the earth . . . perhaps we are slaves of some great and unknown beings. The fly which we crush with our finger . . . has no knowledge of man, and no consciousness of his superiority There may be beings, thinking beings, near us, surrounding us, which we do not perceive, which we can never imagine."³³ It is not surprising, therefore, that although he seems to have abandoned his scientific research into nitrous oxide by 1800, his relationship with the drug continued as an important technology in his quest for transcendence and gnosis. This is abundantly evident in his final, posthumously published, and enormously popular work: *Consolations in Travel, or The Last Days of a Philosopher* (1830), which is an idiosyncratic, imaginary trek through space and time, often accompanied by a mysterious figure akin to De Quincey's Dark Interpreter, who Davy referred to as "the Genius."³⁴

The term "genius," it is worth noting, was a pregnant and much debated concept in Romantic philosophy. It referred to, as Kant put it, "that peculiar guiding and guardian spirit given to man at birth from whose suggestion . . . original ideas proceed."³⁵ Simon Schaffer notes that, following Kant, within Romanticism "genius began to be understood, not as a peculiar capacity possessed by a creative artist, but as the power which possessed him. Imagery of divine fire and excessive power was used to analyze this phenomenon."³⁶ Indeed, not only was it an enigmatic force beyond human control, surpassing natural ability, but it was often articulated as approaching a form of madness.³⁷ It is not difficult to understand how one might construct a broadly gnostic theory of the relationship between drug-induced inspiration and the enigmatic forces of genius. Might psychoactives be able to push the mind beyond reason and open it up to genius?

In *Consolations in Travel*, other enigmatic interlocutors with the quality of "genius" also appear to Davy, particularly "the Unknown." Although he

doesn't explicitly mention nitrous oxide in this fascinating and often bizarre work, it is difficult to ignore the influence of induced altered states. It can easily be read as an early psychedelic text. For example, recalling a stay in Rome with friends, he notes the following: "When I was left alone, I seated myself in the moonshine, on one of the steps leading to the seats supposed to have been occupied by the patricians of the Coliseum at the time of the public games."³⁸ He then recalls his reflections on the passing of time and the processes of decay, before gradually slipping into a trance:

My reverie became deeper, the ruins surrounding me appeared to vanish from my sight, the light of the moon became more intense, and the orb itself seemed to expand in a flood of splendor. At the same time that my visual organs appeared so singularly affected, the most melodious sounds filled my ear, softer and yet, at the same time, deeper and fuller than I had ever heard in the most harmonious and perfect concert. It appeared to me that I had entered a new state of existence, and I was so perfectly lost in the new kind of sensation which I had experienced, that I had no recollection and perceptions of identity. On a sudden, the music ceased, but the brilliant light still surrounded me, and I heard a low but extremely distinct sweet voice, which appeared to issue from the centre of it.³⁹

This is the voice he identifies as belonging to that gnostic entity, "the Genius." "You, like all your brethren," says the Genius,

are entirely ignorant of every thing belonging to yourselves, the world you inhabit, your future destinies, and the scheme of the universe; and yet you have the folly to believe that you are acquainted with the past, the present and the future. I am an intelligence, somewhat superior to you, though there are millions of beings as much above me in power and in intellect as man is above the meanest and weakest reptile that crawls beneath his feet;—yet something I can teach you: yield your whole mind to the influence which I shall exert upon it, and you shall be undeceived in your views of the history of the world, and of the system you inhabit.⁴⁰

At that moment, says Davy, "the bright light disappeared, the sweet, harmonious voice, which was the only proof of a superior intelligence, ceased;

I was in utter darkness and silence, and seemed to myself to be carried rapidly upon a stream of air, without any other sensation than that of moving quickly through space.”⁴¹ Later in the book, he returns again to space travel with the Genius:

I saw through the bright blue sky, the moon and the stars and I passed by them as if it were in my power to touch them with my hand; I beheld Jupiter and Saturn as they appear through our best telescopes, but still more magnified, all the moons and belts of Jupiter being perfectly distinct, and the double ring of Saturn appearing in that state I have often heard Herschel often express a wish he could see it . . . I again heard the low, sweet voice of the Genius, which said, “You are now on the verge of your own system: will you go further or return to earth or return to earth?”⁴²

While Lefebure makes the point that Davy was “visionary by nature,” which is certainly the case, just as he was deeply influenced by Romanticism, her comment that several of his writings “carry a strong whiff of drug inspiration” needs to be given more weight than she allows.⁴³ As Holmes says, “His journal entries show that he was increasingly fascinated by the hallucinogenic properties of the gas, and its effects on human consciousness and perceptions.”⁴⁴ Just as opium was not an insignificant influence on the Romantic imagination of Coleridge, so nitrous oxide had a formative effect on the development of Davy’s own Romantic imagination. Induced altered states helped him to appreciate the universe as an object of delight, to experience the original unity of humanity and nature, and to perceive the mysterious force animating the material world, what Wordsworth called that “all-pervading Spirit, upon whom Our dark foundations rest.”⁴⁵

As the nineteenth century progressed, and following his move in 1801 from the Pneumatic Institution to take up a lectureship at the Royal Institution in London, Davy found his scientific interests shifting into other areas. While his discovery of the anesthetic potential of nitrous oxide had contributed significantly to his prominence in the nineteenth century, for reasons that are still unclear he failed to pursue it. As Holmes says, “The loss to human well-being, in the alleviation of terror and suffering on the operating table for another two generations, was incalculable.”⁴⁶ However, when it was eventually rediscovered as an anesthetic later in the century, users were not slow to exploit it as a technology of transcendence once again.

Syntax, Surgery, and Celestial Visions

Scientific experimentation into the anesthetic properties of nitrous oxide waned significantly following Davy's move to the Royal Institution. Moreover, unlike opium, the experience of nitrous oxide had little impact on Romantic literature and culture. This didn't mean that the wider popular interest in nitrous oxide inhalation also petered out; quite the opposite. During the first half of the nineteenth century, N₂O was increasingly used recreationally as a novelty under the name of "laughing gas." For example, as Jay discusses, "by 1824, nitrous oxide shows were part of the variety show at London's Adelphi Theater," which promised "Uncommon Illusions, Wonderful Metamorphoses, Experimental Chemistry, Animated Paintings etc."⁴⁷ Similarly, James Wynbrandt notes that by the early 1830s in the United States, audiences were being "introduced to laughing gas by a contingent of itinerant lecturers, travelling showmen who toured the country delivering presentations and demonstrations created to enlighten, entertain, and acculturate the public." As he says, "whether the content of these presentations was factual or spurious was typically of no great import in this form of performance art. What mattered was providing audiences with . . . excitement and titillation."⁴⁸

Such was its popularity that the "laughing gas" phenomenon was frequently discussed in the literature of the day. One of the most widely read books, as well as the earliest known record of the use of nitrous oxide as a dental anesthetic, was *Doctor Syntax in Paris or A Tour in Search of the Grotesque. A Humorous and Satirical Poem*, written by William Combe and illustrated by Thomas Rowlandson.⁴⁹ During a visit to Le Charlatan, a Parisian dentist, Syntax's wife, Molly, is offered nitrous oxide for pain relief:

*Said Syntax, "I have often heard
Philosophers with high regard
Speak of this nitrous inhalation,
and of its gay exhilaration."*

Clearly the popular connection between nitrous oxide and Romantic philosophy was firmly established by 1820. Indeed, it was not uncommon for Davy and Southey to be quoted on posters advertising nitrous oxide shows.⁵⁰ Encouraging Syntax and Molly to follow him into "an adjoining room" where the gas was being inhaled by other clients, Le Charlatan informs them

that they will “see the grave and wise enjoy an earthly Paradise,” such as the Romantics had described.

*They saw a group of aged men
Dancing like warlocks in a glen;
A band of ancient matrons too,
Were enjoying raptures new . . .*

Referencing both the Orientalist reading of opium within Romanticism and the apparent turn to this new, more effective Occidental technology of transcendence, Le Charlatan says:

*The Othman’s opium is vile fare,
Compared to this our heavenly air;
For you must know, your Laureate Poet,
Famed Southey, cares not who may know it,
But ’tis his fixt and firm opinion,
That when with Angels’ daring pinion
The soul has reached the highest heaven,
Such air as this will then be given
To fill it with immortal bliss.⁵¹*

Syntax and Molly are persuaded. How could they not be?

*So let us have a sweet foretaste
of what we hope with souls more chaste,
To breathe through a perpetual spring,
When Death has dropt his venom’d sting.⁵²*

They were not disappointed. They were transported to an enchanted realm of pleasure and away from “the realities of life.”⁵³ It is interesting that this popular, illustrated volume articulates not only the widely held conviction that nitrous oxide could generate feelings of pleasure but also, more significantly, that such pleasure was a foretaste of “immortal bliss”—a mystical experience of transcendence above the realities of everyday existence and toward the celestial realm. This is important because it was ideas such as these that fed into the formation of psychedelic occulture, which in turn go on to have a formative influence on individual psychedelic experiences—just as the

Romantic construction of induced transcendence shaped the fictional experiences of Syntax and Molly.

While *Doctor Syntax in Paris* provides evidence of nitrous oxide use in dentistry by 1820, the effective use of anesthetics was still little understood. Although many were aware of its analgesic properties, its significance was still primarily recreational. However, as the century progressed, medical professionals who had been entertained at public demonstrations began systematically to develop methods of surgical anesthesia. They had observed that those poor victims of entertainment under the influence of ether or nitrous oxide who had fallen off the stage or otherwise accidentally injured themselves during public demonstrations seemed unaware of their pain. As a result, the surgeon Crawford Long carried out the first successful operation using ether in 1842 when he removed a tumor from the neck of James Venable in Jefferson, Georgia.⁵⁴ Following Long, William Morton successfully used ether as a general anesthetic at Massachusetts General Hospital in 1846. Gradually the news of these surgical successes spread, particularly encouraged by the publication of Long's results in 1849.⁵⁵

However, the confluence of medicine and mysticism was conspicuous. Not only was this a genuinely revolutionary moment in the history of medicine, but contemporary accounts frequently conflated analgesic effects with the experience of transcendence. "Who could have imagined," wrote John Collins Warren, one of the foremost American surgeons of the nineteenth century, "that drawing a knife over the delicate skin of the face, might produce a sensation of unmixed delight? That the turning and twisting of instruments in the most sensitive bladder, might be accompanied by a delightful dream? That the contorting of ankylosed joints should coexist with a celestial vision?"⁵⁶ Similarly, another physician exclaimed that he regarded "etherization as one of the greatest *metaphysical* discoveries of the age. What extraordinary phenomena it presents! The understanding awake and conscious—the body impassive. *The soul becoming almost a stranger to this body*, even in this life."⁵⁷ While, as Joseph Gabriel says, "such comments seem odd to us today," in that "we are not used to associating anesthetics with celestial dreams or metaphysical implications," this was not uncommon in the nineteenth century—particularly within those circles influenced by Romanticism.⁵⁸ Anesthetics were clearly perceived as technologies of transcendence capable of lifting an individual out of an ailing body, away from pain, above the vale of tears through which we all must pass, and into some celestial realm above the everyday world governed by the limitations of space, time, corruption, and decay.

Benjamin Blood's Anesthetic Revelation

A couple of decades after Long's initial surgical breakthrough, anesthesia received its most effusive philosophical articulation as a technology of transcendence. Benjamin Paul Blood, an obscure and idiosyncratic thinker, self-published a pamphlet entitled *The Anaesthetic Revelation and the Gist of Philosophy*.⁵⁹ This rather odd little book might have passed unnoticed into history had it not been picked up by William James. As he later recalled, "I forget how it fell into my hands, but it fascinated me so 'weirdly' that I am conscious of its having been one of the stepping-stones of my thinking ever since."⁶⁰ It was "one of the cornerstones or landmarks" of his thought.⁶¹

An amateur philosopher, moderately successful poet, and "dialectic-mystic," Blood lived all his life alongside the Mohawk Rover in the small town of Amsterdam, New York.⁶² Relatively unknown though he was, he eventually established a circle of correspondence with some of the key thinkers of his day, including James, Emerson, Alfred Tennyson, Edmund Gurney (the English psychologist and psychical researcher), James Hutchison Stirling (the Scottish Hegelian philosopher), and Sir William Ramsay (who was awarded the 1904 Nobel Prize in Chemistry).

As with Thoreau, Fuller, and, of course, Dr. Syntax and Molly, Blood's reflections on "the anaesthetic revelation" were the result of a visit to the dentist.

It was in the year 1860 that there came to me, through the necessary use of anaesthetics, a Revelation or insight of the immemorial Mystery which among enlightened peoples still persists as the philosophical secret or problem of the world. It is an illumination of the cosmic centre, in which that field of thought where haunt the topics of fate, origin, reason and divinity glows for a moment in an inevitable but hardly communicable appreciation of the genius of being; it is an *initiation*, historically realized as such, into the oldest and most intimate and ultimate truth. Whoever attains and remembers it, or remembers of it, is graduated beyond instruction in "spiritual things"; but to those who are philosophically given it will recur as a condition which, if we are to retain a faith in reason, should seem amenable to articulate expression, for it is obviously what philosophers fail of.⁶³

This last point is an important one for Blood, whose work is an excellent example of psychedelic gnosticism. Psychoactive substances can be viewed

as necessary technologies in the philosopher's tool kit because altered states circumvent rational discourse and provide direct access to "the oldest and most intimate and ultimate truth," which can only be known experientially. In order to understand this articulation of psychedelic gnosis, we first need to appreciate the significant influence of English Romantic poetry on his thought. For example, it is interesting to read his 1854 poem *The Bride of the Iconoclast*. Clearly indebted to John Keats, replete with sensual imagery, it is an allegory of the progress of the soul that explores dream states and visionary moments within which the boundaries between the everyday world and a mythic otherworld dissolve: "Where truth dwells in nature's nakedness rough hewn and wild, would I hang these visions on the vacant walls of imagination."⁶⁴ It is this Romantic perspective that subsequently informed his experience of gnosis in the dentist's chair: "With Kant, Fichte, Jacobi, Hegel, Schelling and Emerson in hand, and with Jesus above all, we go back well equipt to the ancients."⁶⁵ Also particularly significant in this respect is the influence of German Idealism on the development of his metaphysics. In addition, his thought is organized around a gnostic reading of the Reformed doctrine of grace, in that the visionary moment of revelation is given, not acquired: "It arrests us rather than is assumed by us"; it is, indeed, "the gift of God," and according to nought besides; especially may I say, not according to knowledge"—by which he meant rational knowledge.⁶⁶ What rational thought was able to perceive only abstractly, chemically induced altered states revealed directly. Although revelation cannot be guaranteed, of course, and although he admits that the "condition" necessary for revelation may be "attained otherwise," he tells us that he had been able to attain it only "by the use of anaesthetic agents."⁶⁷ Put succinctly, the core ideas of Romanticism and Idealism are experienced as truths in moments of mystical transcendence induced by anesthetics.

As to the nature of the experiences, they are, he insists, incommunicable—"an *uncondition*"—not because they lack cogency or substantive weight, but because they are beyond rational articulation.⁶⁸ They are ineffable. All reasoning, even theological reasoning, is insufficient for interrogating and communicating "the genius of being" (and here we recall the Romantic conception of "genius" noted above), which can only be known as it is experienced: "No poetry, no emotion known to the normal sanity of man can furnish a hint of its primeval prestige, and its all-but appalling solemnity."⁶⁹ As we have seen, this focus on the epistemic significance of subjective experience is not uncommon in the history of religions. It is not unusual for an absolute distinction

to be drawn between the moment of revelation, subjectively experienced, and theological reflection on that event.⁷⁰ Hence, for Blood, “the Anaesthetic Revelation . . . cannot be brought out of that condition into the normal sanity of sense—cannot be formally remembered, but remains informal, forgotten until we return to it.” To press home this point he quotes some lines from Tennyson:

*As here we find in trances, men
Forget the dream that happens then,
Until they fall in trance again.*⁷¹

Consequently, the anesthetic revelation, like all religious experience, tends to be ultimately authoritative for the individual. As James puts it—influenced, to some extent, by Blood’s account—mystics speak “not as the scribes, but as men who have ‘been there’ and seen with their own eyes . . . One cannot criticize the vision of a mystic—one can but pass it by, or else accept it as having some amount of evidential weight.”⁷² This is a conspicuous example of psychedelic gnosis. Indeed, much of Blood’s pamphlet is devoted to a discussion of the impotence of philosophical reasoning in understanding the “genius of being.”⁷³ In a letter to James he makes his position plain: “Philosophy is past. It was the long endeavor to logicize what we can only realize practically or in immediate experience.”⁷⁴ Following his critique of the philosophical method in seeking to understand that which is beyond the grasp of reason, in a short final section he turns his attention to the remedy, the “anaesthetic revelation”: “I would admonish philosophy of her own weakness in her own way, before I speak of that unconditional satisfaction.”⁷⁵ As James says, it begins with “dialectic reasoning of an extremely Fichtean and Hegelian type, but it ends with a trumpet-blast of oracular mysticism, straight from the insight wrought by anaesthetics—of all things in the world—and unlike anything one ever heard before.”⁷⁶

Finally, Blood’s critique of philosophical reasoning and his “trumpet-blast of oracular mysticism” lead him to articulate one of the central tenets of psychedelic spirituality: mystical democracy. Anticipating the arguments of Aldous Huxley and Timothy Leary almost a century later, he concludes that profound mystical experiences are not the preserve of some elite group of spiritual giants or the product of a life devoted to ascetic discipline, but rather are available to anyone with the ability to inhale gas. That this is so was demonstrated to Blood following the publication of *The Anaesthetic Revelation*. In his final, posthumously published work, *The Pluriverse*, he

records that numerous people, having read the pamphlet, wrote to him to relate their own experiences while anesthetized:

I learned that nearly every hospital and dental office has its reminiscences of patients who, after a brief anaesthesia, uttered confused fragments of some inarticulate import which always had to do with the mystery of life, of fate, continuance, necessity and cognate abstractions, and all demanding "What is it?" "What does it all mean, or amount to?" Such is what is known esoterically, or among comparatively few illuminati, as the anaesthetic revelation.⁷⁷

Anesthesia and the Society for Psychological Research

Blood posted copies of *The Anaesthetic Revelation* to a number of influential thinkers. Although the initial reception was not promising, gradually, despite the idiosyncrasy of his philosophy and his rather arcane prose, his ideas began to garner interest. Unsurprisingly, his work was most positively received by those who, like James, were associated with the Society for Psychological Research (SPR). Founded in London on February 20, 1882, by an elite group of scholars based at Cambridge, the initial core membership included Henry Sidgwick, Professor of Moral Philosophy at Cambridge University (the first President of the SPR); the classicist Frederic William Henry Myers; and the psychologist Edmund Gurney. Early members also included other eminent Victorians, most notably physicists William F. Barrett and John William Strutt (Lord Rayleigh; awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1904), chemist Sir William Crookes, philosopher and British prime minister (1902–1905) Arthur Balfour along with his brother, the classical scholar and philosopher Gerald Balfour, and Eleanor Sidgwick (the wife of Henry Sidgwick), a mathematician and, later, Principal of Newnham College, Cambridge University.⁷⁸ As Egil Asprem has commented, the general aim of the SPR was relatively simple: "to bring the torch of science to the dim region of the occult: the phenomena of Spiritualism, apparitions, haunted houses, and psychic abilities were to be the focus of their careful investigations."⁷⁹ It involved a studied refusal to be dogmatic about either the claims of science or those of the paranormal. With an admirable openness to the significance of anomalous experiences, members of the SPR believed that new advances in the sciences could be employed to explore areas of human life that had been ill served by both traditional theology and the reductive

methods of modern science. What they sought to develop was a *tertium quid*, which, following the liberal instincts of John Stuart Mill, provided a *via media* between orthodox science and orthodox religion. For Myers, arguably the most influential thinker in the early SPR, there was, as Emily Williams Kelly says, “a conscious and sustained attempt to move beyond the increasingly polarized, dichotomous positions of 19th century thought and to seek different, broader perspectives in which aspects of both (or all) sides may have a place.”⁸⁰ As Myers argued, “something is gained if, having started with the preconception that ‘all which is not A is B,’ we have come to the conclusion that our own subject-matter is neither A or B, but X.”⁸¹ Investigations into this “X” category of phenomena necessarily included reports of hallucinations and other altered states of consciousness. A hallucination was defined by Myers as “any supposed sensory perception which has no objective counterpart within the field of vision, hearing, &c Hallucinations may be *delusive* or *falsidical*, when there is nothing whatever to which they correspond; or *veridical*, when they correspond (as those of which we treat generally correspond) to real events happening elsewhere.”⁸² While “elsewhere” typically referred to an event in a geographical location remote from the experiencer (usually a traumatic event, such as the death of a person), it might also refer to a transcendent region—a heterotopic elsewhere. Myers, like other members of the SPR, was, for example, intrigued by the possibility of “cosmopathy,” by which he meant an openness “to the access of supernormal knowledge or emotion, apparently from the transcendental world, but whose precise source we have no means of defining.”⁸³ This informed his understanding of ecstatic states: “a trance” during which “the Self” enters “into a state in which the spiritual world is more or less open to its perception, and in which it so far ceases to occupy its organism.”⁸⁴ It is hardly surprising that the scientific potential of chemically induced hallucinations were of interest to members of the SPR.

Early explorations by the SPR into the nature of altered states made particular use of Myers’s theory of the “subliminal Self,” a level of the human psyche unconstrained by the parameters of space and time and a source of supernormal phenomena.⁸⁵ The “subliminal” (the word is taken from the Latin for “under the threshold”) refers to those regions of the psyche underlying everyday awareness: those “thoughts, feelings lying beneath the ordinary *threshold* (*limen*) of consciousness, as opposed to *supraliminal*, lying *above* the threshold.”⁸⁶ In other words, he posited a binary understanding of the human personality. This proved to be an enormously significant distinction, and one that tended to inform much of the theorizing regarding paranormal

phenomena published by the SPR at the turn of the twentieth century. Jeffrey Kripal's helpful description is worth quoting:

There is what he called the *supraliminal* or "above" (*supra*) "the threshold" (*limen*) sense of the self that one carries around most of the time as one's social and personal identity and mistakes as one's complete and total self. And there is the *subliminal* or "below" (*sub*) "the threshold" Self that normally manifests only in altered forms of consciousness, such as dreams or creative acts of genius, or under excessive or traumatic conditions that break down or temporarily suppress the operations of the supraliminal personality, as in trance, ecstasy and, finally, death.⁸⁷

However, it is important to understand that Myers rejected the notion of a divided personality. That is, he posited a single personality that comprises two regions, each being as significant as the other: "Instead of regarding our consciousness (as is commonly done) as a *threshold* in our being, above which ideas and sensations must rise if we wish to cognize them, we may prefer to regard it as a *segment* of our being, into which ideas and sensations may enter either from below or above."⁸⁸ As Kripal says, not only is this notion of duality "a helpful heuristic device that captures quite accurately the kinds of functional dualisms that do in fact seem to give structure to human experience throughout the history of religions," but "the supraliminal and subliminal dimensions of the human personality line up closely with what later mainstream Freudian psychology would call the ego and the unconscious."⁸⁹

The subliminal regions of the psyche, argued Myers, communicate with the conscious self (the ego) not directly but rather indirectly through signs, such as the images and impressions that manifest in altered states of consciousness. Moreover, as far as hallucinations were concerned, it's interesting to note that while these were commonly understood to be indicators of a cognitive deficiency, Myers believed them to be an enhancement of an individual's mental function: "The real kernel of the phenomenon is not the inhibition, but the dynamogeny; not the abstraction of attention or the imagination from other topics, but the increased power which imagination gains."⁹⁰ In other words, the "anaesthetic condition" comprises two fundamentally related processes: an induced withdrawal from everyday life, and an enhanced ability at the subliminal levels of consciousness. "I have many times noted," says Myers, "that people while anæsthetised, who do not feel pain in the ordinary sense, and who, on coming to themselves . . . have struggled, groaned, spoken, or

given some other evidence that *some stratum of their consciousness was awake during the anesthesia*.” This, he concludes, “appears to show that the subliminal consciousness does take note of what is going on, while the workaday self is oblivious to all external stimuli when under the influence of an anæsthetic; and that the memory of this subliminal self may be brought to the surface by some appropriate stimulus.” It seems clear that under certain conditions, such as induced altered states, “the subliminal is more active than the supraliminal stratum of our conscious personality.”⁹¹ Psychoactive substances are able to inhibit the normal processes of the supraliminal personality, thereby facilitating the operations of the subliminal self.

Bearing such reasoning in mind, it is not difficult to understand why members of the SPR believed anesthetics to be “scientifically” important technologies of transcendence, in that, rooted in the discipline of chemistry, they seemed able to provide controlled access to the subliminal self, thereby enabling observation, testing, and repeatable results—all of which are central to the scientific method. The science of drugs was, they recognized, still in its infancy, but the future potential for psychical research seemed most promising. Hence, accounts of experiences were solicited from readers of SPR publications. “I do not recommend my readers to take drugs for the purpose of inducing hallucinations,” said Myers. “But, since the action of drugs in generating hallucinatory sounds or images is, at present, ill-understood, it might be interesting if persons to whom such drugs are administered for other reasons would attempt crystal-vision⁹² and report results.”⁹³ Indeed, because the discussion around anesthesia, hallucinations, and the subliminal self was prominent in the SPR at this time, letters were already being received reporting anomalous experiences of a “subliminal uprush” while under anesthesia. There was confirmation, for example, of an “apparent duality of consciousness under anaesthetics.”⁹⁴ Even if, in the final analysis, there was no consensus regarding the epistemic significance of drug-induced experiences of transcendence, the usefulness of anesthesia as a research tool was rarely doubted in the early years of the SPR. “It will be asked,” noted Myers, “can we make this a really experimental study? Must we not content ourselves with simply watching these fleeting hallucinatory images as they rise and pass away? Is it possible to induce hallucinations? And, if possible, is it safe?”⁹⁵ His answer was clear. With reference to the research into hypnosis done by Hippolyte-Marie Bernheim, Professor of Medicine at the University of Nancy, he insisted that it has been “conclusively proved that hallucinations can be induced in very many subjects, healthy both in body and mind, without any kind of consequent ill effect,” and he was happy to apply the same

conclusion to drug-induced altered states.⁹⁶ For example, he makes specific reference to the reports of experiments with cannabis by the Scottish pharmacologist Lauder Brunton: "The hallucinations caused by this drug are well known, although their agreeable quality has been much exaggerated. An unusual degree of motor automatism—uncontrollable speech, gesture, and the like—accompanies the visual hallucinations. Automatic writing"—a technique that he believed communicated information directly from the subliminal self—should, he says, "be tried with these patients."⁹⁷

Another early member of the SPR was the prominent Spiritualist George Wyld, a Scottish physician, homeopath, and president of the British Theosophical Society. Reacting to the Spiritualist focus on communication with disembodied spirits, he became a key figure in the shift toward an occult focus the spiritual nature of humanity.⁹⁸ The spirits of the dead, he believed, offer us little more than can be learned from the spirits of the living: "Briefly stated my theory is this. Man is a spirit; therefore, if the phenomena we call Spiritual are produced by spirits, there is no reason why the operating spirits should not be those of the living beings present . . . I simply say and believe that all phenomena we have yet obtained *might* be produced by the spirits of the living."⁹⁹ The problem is that most of us are unaware of our full potential as spiritual beings: "man is only half known to himself."¹⁰⁰ This is largely because "the earth-plane and the spirit-plane" are "separated by the wall or river of oblivion."¹⁰¹ If there was made available a way to travel between the two, we could finally investigate the true nature of humanity. This, he seemed to believe, was exactly what anesthetics offered. Focusing on chloroform (although elsewhere he discusses the benefits of inhaling nitrous oxide),¹⁰² he argued that it can be thought of as "a door leading to the other life."¹⁰³ The "action of anaesthetics," he insisted, "is to entrance the man," and in so doing allow a fuller engagement with the soul.¹⁰⁴ For example, he comments that, "on one occasion, after taking chloroform for the relief of intense pain, I distinctly found myself outside my body."¹⁰⁵ In other words, anesthesia provides proof of the separate existence of the soul.¹⁰⁶

The sceptic will deny that the all but universal belief of human beings in the existence of the soul has any weight. He will further deny the authority of spiritual revelations. He will discredit . . . the assertions of Hindu or Christian ecstasies; but if he experiments with medical anaesthetics on his own person, and finds out, as I and others have done, that the soul may be projected outside the body, and externally

exist as the true ego, he may then be induced to believe in the existence of the soul.¹⁰⁷

Furthermore, “those who have demonstrated the existence of their spiritual nature know that in so doing they demonstrate the existence of the Father of all Spirit—God.”¹⁰⁸

By 1885, however, while still convinced that anesthetics have led “many pious Souls” to have “glimpses of Paradise,” Wyld was beginning to express reservations.¹⁰⁹ For example, in personal correspondence, he expressed concerns about the wider use of drugs within Spiritualism: “The ideas and powers obtained through drugs are more Magical than from God, and they are apt to lead to degradation of the Spirit. Fasting and prayer and a perfectly pure life are the only legitimate roads to Theosophy, and it is not advisable that man from curiosity should indulge in drugs.”¹¹⁰

While Myers and Wyld might have been cautiously impressed by the potential of drugs, other eminent Victorian scientists were less inclined to believe that they had much to offer. One such scientist was William Ramsay. While some seem to believe that he was convinced by the content of his anesthetic experiences, this in fact was not the case.¹¹¹ He made an important distinction between his convictions while under the influence of anesthetics and his conclusions when sober. Indeed, he even referred to anesthetic experiences as “mental delusions.”¹¹² In a paper entitled “Experiments with Anaesthetics,” delivered on June 2, 1893, at the Fifty-Ninth General Meeting of the SPR, he made his position clear. The report of that meeting in the *Journal of the Society of Psychical Research*¹¹³ records that he “described the mental state produced when he was partially under the influence of anaesthetics. There were no dreams, that is, no connected story as is usual in dreams; but an overwhelming mental impression that he alone was a self-centred existence on which passing events made little or no impression.”¹¹⁴ Confirming the experiences recorded by Davy, he noted that while anesthetized he “became fully convinced of the truth of Bishop Berkeley’s theory that all external objects are merely impressions on the mind, and have in themselves no real existence. This state of mind,” the report continues, “recurred under the influence of very varied anæsthetics, and was essentially the same, however long a period was allowed to elapse between the repetition of the experiment.”¹¹⁵ Moreover, he also noted that a “feeling of expectation was always aroused that it would on each occasion be possible to penetrate a little further into the secret of the universe, that is, to fathom a little more deeply the secret nature of the mind.”¹¹⁶ (He is here, of course, thinking of Myers’s work on the subliminal

self.) Elsewhere, Ramsay says that while he was under the influence of ether, “an overwhelming impression forced itself upon me that the state in which I then was, was *reality*; that now I had reached the true solution of the secret of the universe, in understanding my own mind; that all outside objects were merely passing reflections on the eternal mirror of my mind—something trivial and transitory.” Indeed, he notes, “the main and impressive fact *for me* was that *I* was self-existent, and that time and space were illusions . . . Each time I am under the influence of an anaesthetic I am able to penetrate a little further into the unfathomable mystery.”¹¹⁷ Following Ramsay’s paper, members of the SPR suggested to him that his experiences were similar to those induced by other drugs, such as “hashish,” and that “further experiments would perhaps prove the correctness of a recent hypothesis that the psychical action of anaesthetics . . . was due to the suppression of the subject’s objective consciousness and the dominance of what Mr Myers calls the subliminal consciousness.”¹¹⁸

It would be wrong to assume that Ramsay had a Damascene conversion to Idealism as a result of his anesthetic revelation. Fascinated as he was by the promise of anesthetics, he was too much a man of empirical science to interpret his experiences as anything more than “a curious delusion.”¹¹⁹ “I do not think that I am a follower of Bishop Berkeley in my ordinary everyday existence; my tendency of mind is scientific skepticism,” he wrote. However, “under the influence of an anesthetic, all doubts vanish; *I know* the truth of Berkeley’s theory of existence.”¹²⁰ The problem is that “such impressions, exceedingly difficult to express in words, pass off gradually. After five minutes they begin to fade in intensity; the conviction of their truth is less deep-seated; that there exists an ordinary workaday world in which I and innumerable others play our parts, is again realized, and in ten minutes or a quarter of an hour the state of mind is perfectly normal.”¹²¹ As James and many others have done, he wrestled with the cogency of gnosis. In the sober light of day, ideas that convinced him during the experience are defeated by “common sense.”¹²²

However, as we have seen, this was by no means a consensus within the SPR. As Blood records, a decade after Ramsay’s paper, a symposium was convened on June 24, 1904, at 20 Hanover Square, London, by those whose experience of anesthetics was far closer to his own: “The gathering comprised representatives of quite distinguished literary and social eminence, and the current discussion of the topic had the advantage of not only frank and ingenious expression, but of scientific and historical criticism.” While the experiences related were all a little different in their details, he argues that they can be summed up as follows (quoting Ernest Dunbar, one of the lecturers at the symposium): “After the first effects of ether had passed off, there comes

a time of profound intellectual stimulation, during which the mind reasons with astonishing rapidity, choosing, in some individuals, transcendental lines, appearing to solve, *once and for all*, the mystery of the universe.”¹²³

Likewise, James, who was president of the SPR in 1894–1895 and who had “the highest respect for the patient labors of . . . Myers,” was also less inclined to interpret the anesthetic revelation as delusional.¹²⁴ While he was just as committed to the methods of empirical science as Ramsay was, he considered drugs to offer some potential for research into mystical experience. Moreover, he also understood the subliminal Self to be not only a “well-accredited psychological entity” but also an intermediary between the conscious self and “the absolute,” however that might be understood:

What Mr. Myers said in 1892 in his essay on the Subliminal Consciousness¹²⁵ is as true as when it was first written: “Each of us is, in reality, an abiding psychical entity far more extensive than he knows—an individuality which can never express itself completely through any corporeal manifestation. The Self manifests through the organism; but there is always some part of the Self unmanifested; and always, as it seems, some power of organic expression in abeyance or reserve.”¹²⁶

While much of this subliminal background within which our conscious life is embedded, says James, is relatively insignificant to our everyday lives, there are “invasions from this region,” as in the case of anesthetic mystical experiences, that are enormously important to us and have a revolutionary impact on our lives. The “uprushes of the subliminal faculty,” as Myers referred to them, should not be dismissed as peripheral to the conscious life, as Ramsay had done.¹²⁷ James suggests (in a way that typifies the approach of the SPR) that

whatever it may be on its *farther* side, the “more” with which in religious experience we feel ourselves connected is on its *hither* side the subconscious continuation of our conscious life. Starting thus with a recognized psychological fact as our basis, we seem to preserve a contact with “science” which the ordinary theologian lacks. At the same time the theologian’s contention that the religious man is moved by an external power is vindicated, for it is one of the peculiarities of invasions from the subconscious region to take on objective appearances, and to suggest to the Subject an external control. In the religious life the control is felt as “higher”; but since on our hypothesis it is primarily

the higher faculties of our own hidden mind which are controlling, the sense of union with the power beyond us is a sense of something, not merely apparently, but literally true.¹²⁸

Whereas “science” had provided James with “a doorway” into understanding the nature of religious experience as a psychological phenomenon, his anesthetic revelation stopped him from shutting the door completely against the supernaturalistic claims of religion: “It is only a doorway, and difficulties present themselves as soon as we step through it, and ask how far our transmarginal consciousness carries us if we follow it on its remoter side.”¹²⁹ In the final analysis, therefore, he allowed for the veracity of mystical experiences of “the wider self”: “The further limits of our being plunge, it seems to me, into an altogether other dimension of existence from the sensible and merely ‘understandable’ world. Name it the mystical region, or the supernatural region, whichever you choose.”¹³⁰

This, of course, is directly linked to James’s pragmatist philosophy. Put simply, ideas are tools, the worth of which lies in their utility. In analyzing a belief, one might simply ask what material difference it would make if it was not true.¹³¹ On this basis he argued that the “unseen region . . . is not merely ideal, for it produces effects in this world.”¹³² Mystical experiences such as those produced by anesthesia manifest empirically observable psychological phenomena beyond those of the immediate effects of the drug. Psychedelic experiences have concrete consequences. When we induce an experience of other forms of consciousness, “work is actually done upon our finite personality, for we are turned into new men, and consequences in the way of conduct follow in the natural world upon our regenerative change.”¹³³ Quite simply, because the “unseen reality” with which an anesthetized person engages “produces effects” within this everyday reality, it “must be termed a reality itself.” Consequently, he says, “I feel as if we had no philosophic excuse for calling the unseen or mystical world unreal.”¹³⁴ This, again, has been the contention of many within psychedelic history.

Finally, it is worth noting that because James, unlike Ramsay, could not dismiss his nitrous oxide experience, he was led to rethink his critique of Hegel. For example, in a note added to a republished article on British and American “Hegelism” following his experiences under anesthesia and his reading of Blood, he argued that he was now able to understand, “better than before, both the strength and weakness of Hegel’s philosophy.”¹³⁵ Given that he had provided the reader of the initial article with eleven reasons why he was “*not* an Hegelian,”¹³⁶ it is a little surprising to then read that “the first result”

of his anesthetic experience “was to make peal through me with unutterable power the conviction that Hegelism was true after all, and that the deepest convictions of my intellect hitherto were wrong.”¹³⁷ He continues with one of the most evocative descriptions of psychedelic gnosis committed to text:

Whatever idea or representation occurred to the mind was seized by the same logical forceps, and served to illustrate the same truth; and that truth was that every opposition, among whatsoever things, vanishes in a higher unity in which it is based; that all contradictions, so-called, are but differences; that all differences are of degree; that all degrees are of a common kind; that unbroken continuity is of the essence of being; and that we are literally in the midst of *an infinite*, to perceive the existence of which is the utmost we can attain . . . It is impossible to convey an idea of the torrential character of the identification of opposites as it streams through the mind in this experience. I have sheet after sheet of phrases dictated or written during the intoxication, which to the sober reader seem meaningless drivel, but which at the moment of transcribing were fused in the fire of infinite rationality. God and devil, good and evil, life and death, I and thou, sober and drunk, matter and form, black and white, quantity and quality, shiver of ecstasy and shudder of horror, vomiting and swallowing, inspiration and expiration, fate and reason, great and small, extent and intent, joke and earnest, tragic and comic, and fifty other contrasts figure in these pages in the same monotonous way. The mind saw how each term *belonged* to its contrast through a knife-edge moment of transition which *it* effected, and which, perennial and eternal, was the *nunc stans* of life. The thought of mutual implication of the parts in the bare form of a judgment of opposition, as “nothing—but,” “no more—than,” “only—if,” etc., produced a perfect delirium of theoretic rapture. And at last, when definite ideas to work on came slowly, the mind went through the mere *form* of recognizing sameness in identity by contrasting the same word with itself, differently emphasized, or shorn of its initial letter.¹³⁸

However, like Ramsay, he noted that “as sobriety returns, the feeling of insight fades, and one is left staring vacantly at a few disjointed words and phrases, as one stares at the cadaverous-looking snow-peak from which the sunset glow has just fled, or at the black cinder left by an extinguished brand.”¹³⁹ Powerful though his experience was, he was not finally convinced by Hegelianism,

just as Ramsay's return to sobriety dissolved his conviction that Berkeley was right. But unlike Ramsay, James did not consider the experience itself to be insignificant. In accordance with his philosophy of pragmatism, he was forced to take seriously the impact of that experience, if not the details of its Hegelian content: "One conclusion was forced upon my mind at that time, and my impression of its truth has ever since remained unshaken. It is that our normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different."¹⁴⁰ Therefore, he says, like Myers, "I strongly urge others to repeat the experiment, which with pure gas is short and harmless enough." He continues:

The effects of course will vary with the individual, just as they vary in the same individual from time to time; but it is probable that in the former case, as in the latter, a generic resemblance will obtain. With me as with every other person I have heard, the keynote of the experience is the tremendously exciting sense of an intense metaphysical illumination. Truth lies open to the view in depth beneath depth of almost blinding evidence. The mind sees all the logical relations of being with an apparent subtlety and instantaneity to which its normal consciousness offers no parallel.¹⁴¹

Concluding Comments

At the turn of the nineteenth century there was an unprecedented focus on the significance of "the self." As Andrew Cunningham and Nicholas Jarden have commented, "the major critical movements of the period which affect the arts and sciences are all enterprises in self-understanding."¹⁴² Questions about the nature of the divine, the nature of humanity, the nature of creativity, the nature of "genius," and so on were all essentially questions about self-understanding, about the extent and scope of human knowledge, and about the power and reach of an individual's cognitive faculties. Furthermore, as might be expected during this period, the interrogation of the self tended to be informed by the Christian myth that attributes humanity's current condition to a primeval Fall from an ideal state: "Once in a Golden Age, in the Garden before the Fall, man was at one with himself and nature. Now he is divided in himself, his once harmoniously united faculties at war with each other and at odds with nature. He is 'the sour grape in nature's sweet clusters.'

How is the lost unity of self and nature to be restored?"¹⁴³ Of course, the traditional response to this question was eschatological: because there was no hope in this life of recovering that original innocent state, we would have to wait for some postmortem utopia. As the Romantic dramatist Heinrich von Kleist declared, "Paradise is bolted and barred, and the cherub is behind us."¹⁴⁴ Indeed, within Romanticism, there was a common tendency to adapt some understanding of history as consisting of three ages: a prelapsarian past in which humans lived in harmonious communion with God and creation (Eden—the One); the present disharmony, determined by a separation from God and creation (the Fall—the many); and a future reconciliation and return to the prelapsarian state of health and harmony (Heaven—the One).

Also popular during the nineteenth century was the notion that although we now "dwell in the age of fragmentation, we all possess some kernel of the original 'One' within ourselves," which tended to be understood in terms of divine immanence.¹⁴⁵ As Andrew Swensen notes, not only can we experience the presence of the divine deep within ourselves, but we can also "sense the presence of the divine within all other things, and also sense the cosmos within ourselves."¹⁴⁶

These ideas help us toward an understanding how anesthesia was interpreted during this period. First, the world of fragmentation can be transcended and oneness can be experienced—the unity discussed within Romantic Idealism.

Second, the sense of euphoria, the relief from pain, and the perception of unity with nature induced by anesthetics all seemed to suggest that they were technologies that enabled the self to unbolt the gates to paradise, to unlock within human experience an understanding of reality that transcended the effects of the Fall. In short, anesthetics induced an experience of the lost and longed for ideal state.

Third, just as the effects of the Fall apply to all, so relief from its effects and the revelation of the ideal state are fundamentally democratic, in that they can be experienced by all. More specifically, such egalitarian technologies seemed able to open up spaces within which any individual could experience gnosis—a higher truth beyond that afforded by convoluted philosophical reasoning, scientific experimentation, and orthodox religion. Again, this egalitarianism is a central feature of psychedelic mysticism.

Fourth, following directly from the above, anesthetics were understood by some to contribute to a "third way" between orthodox science and orthodox religion pursued by the Society for Psychical Research. They appeared to enable access to deeper, "subliminal" levels of truth. This was significant, for

there was a general acceptance of Coleridge's thesis that "all truth is a species of Revelation."¹⁴⁷ As Guy de Maupassant described his own experience of ether in his autobiographical story "Sur l'eau" (1888): "It was a prodigious keenness of reasoning, a new manner of seeing, of judging, of estimating things and life, with the absolute consciousness, the certitude that this manner was the true one It seemed to me that I had tasted of the Tree of Knowledge, that all the mysteries had become unveiled."¹⁴⁸ The anesthetic revelation could be likened to that moment when Adam eats fruit from "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil," in that while he may have lost his innocence, he experienced a level of understanding previously limited to God. This, of course, is an essentially gnostic reading of the myth.¹⁴⁹ As Bernard Reardon notes in his discussion of Hegel's interpretation of the Fall, "as soon as a more or less literal reading of the myth has been abandoned, the sin of Adam is bound to be construed as in some manner an elevation, or at any rate a broadening and enrichment, of his nature."¹⁵⁰ This is precisely how the anesthetic revelation was understood. It was a direct route to a profound understanding of the nature of reality.

Fifth, the event of anesthetic revelation was understood to be self-authenticating and ultimately authoritative. Blood insisted that anesthetics enable a person to graduate "beyond instruction in 'spiritual things.'"¹⁵¹ Consequently, the experience itself is epistemically necessary. That is to say, because it constitutes a form of consciousness fundamentally "discontinuous with ordinary consciousness," it has to be known experientially.¹⁵² Blood is reluctant to use the term "knowledge," for what is revealed cannot be taught from a pulpit or communicated in philosophical texts. Again, while he does not use the term, it is better understood as gnosis. Individuals have to taste the fruit of the "tree of knowledge" for themselves.

Sixth, the perception of unity experienced during the anesthetic revelation was so enveloping and profound that it seemed to demand a monistic interpretation of reality. As John Middleton Murry declared in 1929, "I insist emphatically that to me the element of pure experience in both mystical and anaesthetic experiences is indistinguishable, in so far as both constitute an 'immediate awareness of an all-pervading Unity.'"¹⁵³ Even thinkers such as Ramsay and James, who were particularly resistant to post-Kantian Idealism, found themselves turning to its concepts in order to articulate their experiences. All contradictions and opposites were transcended in a cogent perception of cosmic oneness. This was certainly the case for Blood. Although he eventually abandoned monism—largely, I suspect, because of the influence of James, who was critical of this aspect of his thought¹⁵⁴—in *The Anaesthetic*

Revelation he seems convinced of its accuracy as an interpretation of the nature of reality: "Men and brethren, into this pervading genius we pass, forgetting and forgotten, and thenceforth each is all, in God. There is no higher, no deeper, no other, than the life in which we are founded. 'The One remains, the many change and pass'; and each and every of us is the One that remains."¹⁵⁵ Even in his posthumously published work, *Pluriverse: An Essay in the Philosophy of Pluralism*, which argues that reality is irreducible to a single principle ("the One"), he insists that the experience of anesthetic revelation is a direct challenge to pluralism ("the many"). It presents an "unequivocal *impasse* whose obstruction can neither be obviated nor defined."¹⁵⁶

Finally, the gnostic transcendence of embodied existence is a marked feature of the anesthetic revelation. This is particularly interesting when one considers that, up until the early nineteenth century, the care of the sick was informed by a commitment to the belief that pain and disease were a direct result of sin—a consequence of the Fall. Consequently, there was some unease about interfering with the inscrutable purposes of God by reducing pain—not least during childbirth.¹⁵⁷ However, the development of anesthetics significantly contributed to the erosion of these attitudes during the nineteenth century.¹⁵⁸ Not only did they alleviate pain, but they also induced an experience of the transcendence of embodied existence.¹⁵⁹ There was a sense in which, as John Addington Symonds put it, one was able to catch a "glimpse of the eternal process."¹⁶⁰ That is to say, the anesthetic revelation provided, as Syntax and Molly found, "a sweet foretaste / Of what we hope with souls more chaste / To breathe through a perpetual spring / When Death has dropt his venomd sting."¹⁶¹ In other words, a visit to the dentist could lead both to relief from the effects of the Fall and also to an experience of heavenly bliss.

Hashishdom

Wonder, amazement, admiration, but faintly portray my mental condition. Prepared by what I had already seen for something odd and Oriental, still the magnificence of what now met my gaze far surpassed anything I had ever dreamed of, and brought to mind the scenes of the Arabian Nights, forgotten since boyhood until now . . . I silently filled my second pipe, and was about to lapse again into a reverie that had become delightfully full of perfect rest and comfort, when my companion, leaning toward me, said: "I see that you are fast approaching Hashishdom. Is there not a sense of perfect rest and a strange, quiet happiness produced by it?"

—H. H. KANE¹

BY THE CLOSE of the nineteenth century, those wanting to induce states of transcendence had an increasingly broad range of psychoactive technologies with which to conduct their experiments. Whereas opium had been the Oriental drug of choice for the Romantic literati earlier in the century (and continued to be so for many), by the 1840s another comparatively mild psychoactive was beginning to be used, particularly in France and America.² Filled with Eastern promise, cannabis came to the attention of a number of thinkers interested in consciousness transformation, from Théophile Gautier and Charles Baudelaire to Aleister Crowley and Helena Blavatsky. By the early twentieth century, philosophers such as Ernst Bloch³ and particularly Walter Benjamin were beginning to experiment with hashish in order to induce, as the latter put it, "trances" that might elicit "profane illumination."⁴ And although cannabis use was relatively rare and its pharmacology was not well understood, it initially enjoyed some popularity among physicians and psychiatrists.⁵

The reception of hashish within literary, philosophical, and esoteric circles was not always positive, in that, like all psychoactive substances, it was (in the quantities many consumed during this period) capable of transporting the mind from celestial rapture to hellish terror. Also, for many its reputation was tainted by popular Orientalist constructions of the East as drug-addled, profane, and barbarous, which was not helped by lurid and terrifying descriptions in published accounts of hashish visions. Hence, as people were introduced to the word “hashish,” simultaneously they were being taught to associate it with madness, immorality, and criminality.⁶ Nevertheless, whether condemned as a profane scourge or elevated as a sacred herb, during the late nineteenth century the seeds of cannabis were planted in the fertile soil of an expanding Western counterculture.

Cannabis and Clinical Research in the Nineteenth Century

It would take us too far out of our way to provide an overview of the history, chemistry, preparation, and effects of cannabis, all of which have been the subject of much excellent popular and scholarly analysis, particularly over the last couple of decades.⁷ However, it might be helpful to begin with a few introductory notes on cannabis before looking at relevant areas of its use within psychiatry in the nineteenth century.⁸

Botanically, cannabis is classified as a member of the family Cannabaceae and the genus *Cannabis*. It is an annual, dioecious, flowering herb, of which there are three species: *Cannabis sativa*, which was initially classified by the Swedish botanist Carolus Linnaeus in 1753; *Cannabis indica*, the most psychoactive of the species, classified by the French biologist Jean Baptiste Lamarck in 1785; and *Cannabis ruderalis*, classified in 1924 by the Russian botanist Dmitri Erastovich Janischewsky.⁹ Nowadays there is a range of hybrid strains, including the notoriously pungent varieties of “skunk,” typically cultivated in order to intensify psychoactive potency. Although the plant contains more than 460 known compounds, the only cannabinoid—of more than sixty cannabinoids identified in the plant—that is both present in large amounts and psychoactive is delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC). This was first isolated in 1964 by Raphael Mechoulam and Yechiel Gaoni at the Weizmann Institute of Science in Rehovot, Israel. Their discovery was no mean feat, for the cannabinoids (a term coined by Mechoulam), which are unique to the plant, are lipophilic compounds. That is to say, as contemporary

users who enjoy cooking with cannabis will be aware, cannabinoids are soluble in fat but not in water. This meant that relatively sophisticated laboratory equipment was required in order for researchers to separate and examine the compounds.

Generally speaking, within cannabis culture, the preparations used in India serve as a gauge of potency. These are *bhang*, *ganja*, and *charas*.¹⁰ *Bhang*, the least potent and cheapest, is produced from the dried leaves, seeds, and stems. On the Indian subcontinent, it is traditionally used in food and drink—often during religious festivals such as Holi. *Ganja*, which is prepared from the flowering tops of cultivated female plants, is far stronger than *bhang*. A large percentage of the cannabis smoked in Western societies—variously known as “marijuana,” “weed,” “grass,” “pot,” “herb,” or “green”—is *ganja*. Finally, *charas* looks quite different from either *bhang* or *ganja* in that it is a solid, resinous substance made from the cannabinoid-rich trichomes (glandular hairs) along with fragments of flowers (which contain the most trichomes) and leaves. The resin reservoirs of the trichomes are separated from the plant using various methods and then compressed into blocks. Widely known as “hashish” or “hash,” *charas* is often stronger than *ganja*—although this is by no means always the case, certainly in the West.¹¹ As one popular and informed user’s guide comments regarding “the relative merits of grass versus hash,” “if one were to judge it purely by strength of the smoke, then hash is the clear winner. This is because, in its purest state, hash contains significantly more THC . . . than grass.”¹² Largely for this reason, *charas* is sacralized by some religious groups and used within ritual contexts. For example, some sects within Shaivism in India, such as the Naga sadhus, smoke *charas* during worship.¹³

Cannabis is one of the oldest cultivated plants, particularly valued for its hemp fiber and oils. As Lester Grinspoon and James Bakalar comment, not only was it “used in China by 4000 BCE and in Turkestan by 3000 BCE,” but it has also “long been used as a medicine in India, China, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, South Africa, and South America.”¹⁴ In the West, it was identified as a medicine by Galen in the second century and has since appeared in Western scientific texts, such as Robert Burton’s *The Anatomy of Melancholy* in 1621, *The New English Dispensatory* in 1764, and the *Edinburgh New Dispensary* in 1794. However, it wasn’t until the nineteenth century that its star began to rise within Western psychopharmacology. While the French Arabic scholar Sylvestre de Sacy had mentioned the possibility of its medicinal use in 1809, it would be another three decades before physicians would begin to experiment with its psychopharmacological properties.¹⁵

Of particular note in this respect was the psychiatrist Jacques-Joseph Moreau de Tours, who is generally thought to have provided the first recorded clinical experiments on the psychopharmacology of cannabis extracts.¹⁶ It is of some significance that he was a student of Jean Etienne Dominique Esquirol, who in 1838 published one of the earliest scientific studies of insanity, *Des maladies mentales*, in which he defined hallucinations as “external sensations which the patient believes he experiences, even though no external agent has acted materially on his senses.”¹⁷ This conclusion was subsequently used by Louis-Françisque Lélut and Alexandre Brierre de Boismont to account “scientifically” for mystical experiences of the supernatural, including the *récits fantastiques* of Thomas De Quincey and others. Likewise, it informed Moreau’s understanding of the significance of induced altered states. As Tony James comments, “The main advantage of hashish in Moreau’s view is not just that it procures illusions, visions, and other unusual states. It is that it produces these states while leaving consciousness intact, and thus enables the states to be observed, as they unfold, from the inside.”¹⁸

Esquirol’s research had led him to the conclusion that certain mental illnesses were essentially pathologies of overattention, and so he developed strategies to distract his patients, such as knitting and gardening. However, he made more effective methods of distraction available to his wealthier patients. Shortly after his arrival at the hospital in Charenton in 1825, he began recommending therapeutic tourism. According to his patients’ financial circumstances, he sent them on trips around Europe, Asia, and North Africa, accompanied by his assistants. Moreau, who had begun working under Esquirol at the clinic on July 6, 1826, was initially chosen to accompany one of these patients to Italy and Switzerland. However, as Bo Holmstedt has noted, it wasn’t long before travel “became a necessity for Moreau. He had nothing to keep him in France; he was young and had no desire to settle down; he longed to see foreign countries.”¹⁹ So Esquirol entrusted him with the care of a new patient, whom he would accompany for a period of three years to a number of more exotic destinations, including Egypt, Turkey, Nubia, Palestine, and Syria. During this time abroad, Moreau observed that hashish was widely used as an intoxicant, especially in Islamic societies, effectively replacing the alcohol consumption that was so prevalent in Europe, yet without many of the damaging psychological and social effects. Following Esquirol’s advice concerning therapeutic practice—namely, that one must live and empathize with one’s patients in order to understand their disorders—Moreau immersed himself in a form of anthropological participant observation, adopting the dress and customs of the inhabitants of the countries

in which he lived. He also began self-experimenting with hashish, insisting that “personal experience is the criterion of truth here.”²⁰ While, as Katrin Solhdju has discussed, many of Moreau’s colleagues were suspicious of his self-experimentation, largely because it “smacked of Romanticism and was not in keeping with strict scientific claims for objectivity,” he was not dissuaded.²¹ From this point on, induced altered states became an important part of his research. “Because of the singular property of hashish to keep intact ‘consciousness and the innermost feeling’ of the user,” Holmstedt notes, “he could analyze all his impressions and still be aware of the disorganization of his mental faculties. In order to complete this internal self-observation, Moreau also commissioned the persons around him to note carefully his words, acts, gestures, and facial expressions.”²²

Shortly after returning to France in 1840, Moreau began work in the Bicêtre asylum, and a few months later he secured a position at the Hôpital de la Salpêtrière, where he continued his experiments with hashish. In his groundbreaking book, *Du hachisch et de l'aliénation mentale: études psychologiques*, published in 1845,²³ as well as in other reports of the findings of his own research, he reviewed accounts of experiences of transcendence induced by a range of other drugs, including those of Humphry Davy and De Quincey.²⁴ In support of his overall thesis that madness and hashish intoxication are fundamentally analogous,²⁵ he identified eight “psychological phenomena” associated with both.²⁶ These are, in order of increased mental disorganization, (1) inexplicable feelings of happiness, (2) increased excitement combined with a heightening of the senses, (3) distortion of the dimensions of time and space, which typically manifests as a magnification of both, (4) a keener sense of hearing combined with a greater susceptibility to music and the phenomenon that ordinary noise can be enjoyed as though it as a pleasurable composition, (5) persistent ideas that dominate the mind and verge on paranoia, (6) disturbances of emotion, typically in the form of an increase in preexisting feelings, (7) irresistible impulses, and (8) illusions and hallucinations, the latter being unrelated to anything in the external world. Concerning the first and most conspicuous of these, he makes the point that the states of mind produced are actual and, as such, have significant implications for an individual’s construction of reality:

It really is *happiness* that hashish gives, and by that I mean total mental joys, not at all sensual as one might be tempted to believe. This is indeed very curious, and one can draw strange conclusions—this one among others, that all joy, all contentment, even though its cause is

strictly mental, deeply spiritual, and highly idealistic, could well be in reality a purely physical sensation, developed physiologically, exactly like those caused by hashish.²⁷

Not only is this, as Hélène Peters says, “the first hint ever at the existence of brain reward mechanisms centered in the limbic area,”²⁸ but he also, rather presciently, makes a connection between brain chemistry and mystical experience. His comment that “Plato could not have dreamed of purer and more spiritual passions than those kindled by hashish” says less about those passions and more about how they are produced in the brain.²⁹ Temporary states of transcendence, like temporary states of madness, can be induced by chemicals, just as they can be induced by other external sources. It is not unusual to observe the phenomenon of inexplicable happiness “occurring frequently at the beginning of madness. I am speaking of those feelings of happiness, of intimate joy . . . which inspire so much hope, so much confidence in the future, and which, alas, are only premonitory symptoms of the most violent delirium.”³⁰ It is important to understand that Moreau was not arguing that cannabis *causes* madness; rather, he was claiming that it is able to produce phenomena *analogous* to those observed during madness and so can be a useful tool in psychiatric research.

This led him to the conviction that hallucinations were evidence of an interior world, as opposed to the external, everyday world. In other words, his work with hashish seemed to suggest two types of existence: an exterior world, experienced during normal waking consciousness, and an ideal interior world, experienced in dream states under the influence of psychoactive substances. Such ideas stimulated great interest, not least among the Parisian literati. As we will see in Chapter 5, they also intrigued French Spiritualists, particularly Louis-Alphonse Cahagnet, in that they cohered closely with the tenets of mesmerism, which posited the existence of a “second self” during trance states.

Moreau’s research, therefore, can be considered an important contribution to the reception of cannabis in the West. His work, along with that of Louis Rémy Aubert-Roche, who discussed the use of hashish as a treatment for the plague and typhoid in his 1840 study *De la peste, ou, typhus d’Orient*, stands at the beginning of what was to become the heyday of cannabis research.³¹ That is to say, while it was recognized as medically significant and discussed as a potent psychoactive prior to the nineteenth century, it wasn’t until around 1839 that its pharmacological significance was properly recognized in the West. Between 1840 and 1900 more than a hundred articles were published

in scientific journals describing its medicinal properties and encouraging further experimentation. However, while Moreau was an important figure in early cannabis research, “during his lifetime he and his work were never recognized as they should have been. Thus he did not even become a member of the Academy of Medicine.”³² So in seeking to understand the reasons for the spike of interest in cannabis research during the late nineteenth century, we need to look elsewhere.

Arguably the most culturally significant figure in early cannabis research was the Irish physician William Brooke O’Shaughnessy. As Michael Aldrich notes, “although cannabis was mentioned occasionally by early botanists and explorers describing their travels, little was actually known about cannabis therapy in Europe and America until O’Shaughnessy read a paper to a group of students and scholars of the Medical and Physical Society of Calcutta in 1839.”³³ As well as accounts of his experiments with the drug, his paper also included an overview of the history of cannabis use by Ayurvedic practitioners in India and Persian physicians. When his paper was eventually published in the *Provincial Medical Journal* in 1843 it stimulated great interest in pharmaceutical circles. Also significant was the fact that in 1842 he encouraged Peter Squire, “the well-known pharmacist of Oxford Street,”³⁴ London, to develop a hashish tincture—Squire’s Extract.³⁵ This was followed by numerous other preparations, perhaps most famously Dr. John Collis Brown’s Chlorodyne, the principal ingredients of which were cannabis tincture, laudanum, and chloroform, a potent mixture that no doubt secured its unrivaled popularity as an effective remover of almost any symptom one could think of. While cannabis never rivaled opium as a medicinal treatment in the nineteenth century, it was a fairly widely used ingredient in pharmaceutical preparations. For example, the eminent physician Sir John Russell Reynolds in an interesting 1890 article, “On the Therapeutic Uses and Toxic Effects of Cannabis Indica,” recommended the drug as an effective remedy for a broad range of conditions, including sleeplessness, neuralgia, and dysmenorrhea.³⁶ It is often suggested that in his role as Queen Victoria’s physician he prescribed the monarch cannabis tincture to ease her discomfort during menstrual periods.³⁷

At a more popular level, myths about its effects were widely disseminated in order to promote certain cannabis-based products. Advertisements began to appear in a number of popular publications for “hasheesh candy,” an appealing mix of hash and maple sugar. Not only was this forerunner of the hash brownie advertised in the widely read catalogues produced by Sears, Roebuck and Company, as well as in newspapers such as the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, but

it was also sold in department stores, where it was extolled as the “true secret of youth and beauty.”³⁸ It was regularly advertised as “a remedy that ought to be in every house on account of its harmlessness and potency.” It was claimed to heal common ailments such as colds and headaches, and under its influence “the writer, the speaker, the student, and the businessman . . . seem to gather a new inspiration and new energy, a readiness of perception unknown before.” Consequently, “no clergyman, actor, singer, lawyer or in fact anyone should be without it.”³⁹

It did, however, suffer from poor quality control and so lacked the stability of other preparations. Not only was it not the secret of youth and beauty, but also it often failed to relieve all the symptoms listed in the advertisements. Certainly it was far less effective than much smaller doses of opium could be. Furthermore, as noted above, in the quantities taken during the nineteenth century, it often produced unwanted psychoactive effects that disturbed the more sober-minded members of society. By the turn of the twentieth century, then, it struggled to rival newer drugs such as aspirin, chloral hydrate, and barbiturates, all of which were chemically more stable than cannabis, less psychoactive, and therefore able to produce more predictable results. Moreover, the invention and subsequent popularity of the hypodermic syringe contributed significantly to the decline of medicinal cannabis use, in that, unlike opiates such as morphine, it couldn’t be injected because it wasn’t soluble in water.

The Old Man of the Mountain and the Assassins

Particularly since the 1960s, hashish has been associated with a counterculture more interested in making love than war. This, however, was not how the drug was originally understood in the West. While it was certainly believed to be a technology of transcendence, able to lift users to paradisiacal states, it was also linked in the Western imagination to those who “are thirsty for human blood, kill the innocent for a price, and care nothing either for life or salvation.”⁴⁰ Hashish, paradise, and murderous bloodletting became the core themes in popular accounts of the “Assassins,” “the Hash-Head Hashishins, the fanatical Muslim sect who practiced power politics by wielding the knife in the fine art of political murder.”⁴¹ However, the relationship between the Assassins and hashish is complex one, rooted both in “the general hostility of the Muslims toward the Isma‘ilis” and also in “the Europeans’ own fanciful impressions of the Orient.”⁴² The stories are largely informed by Marco Polo’s account and the research and speculation of the nineteenth-century French scholar Antoine Isaac Sylvestre de Sacy.

The Assassins were *fida'is* (self-sacrificing devotees) who were loyal to Ḥasan Ṣabbāḥ, a convert to the Isma'ilis and the founder of the so-called Nezāri Isma'ili state. Under his leadership, the Nezāris mounted a decentralized revolutionary effort against the militarily superior Turko-Persian Saljuq empire. Ḥasan's principal tactic was carefully orchestrated assassinations, which had the effect of creating a culture of fear. While this strategy was not a new one in military history, it became particularly identified with Ḥasan and the Nezāri Isma'ilis. In 1090, as a result of a well-executed plan of infiltration, he finally secured for his headquarters the fortress of Alamut, located in the central Alborz Mountains of the Rudbār region. As Farhad Daftary comments, "This signaled the commencement of the Persian Isma'ilis' open revolt against the Saljuqs and also effectively marked the foundation of what was to become the Nezāri Isma'ili state of Persia."⁴³ Ḥasan quickly set about making the fortress impregnable, as well as developing irrigation systems in the Alamut valley to establish a society self-sufficient in food production. "Ḥasan also established an important library at Alamut, whose collections of manuscripts and scientific instruments had grown to impressive proportions by the time the Mongols destroyed the fortress in 1256."⁴⁴ These significant achievements all contributed to stories of well-educated, highly skilled, ruthless Assassins living amongst majestic gardens modeled on Qur'anic descriptions of paradise.

As to the reception of these stories in the West, many of which became embedded in Orientalist exaggeration and myth, Bernard Lewis makes the point that the word "assassin" first appeared in "the chronicles of the Crusades, as the name of a strange group of Muslim sectaries in the Levant, led by a mysterious figure known as the Old Man of the Mountain, and abhorrent, by their beliefs and practices, to good Christians and Muslims alike."⁴⁵ One of the earliest such descriptions of Ḥasan's community can be found in the report of an envoy sent to Egypt and Syria in 1175 by Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, in which he noted that "on the confines of Damascus, Antioch, and Aleppo there is a certain race of Saracens in the mountains, who in their own vernacular are called *Heyssessini*, and in Roman *seignors de Montana*. This breed of men live without law; they eat swine's flesh against the law of the Saracens, and make use of all women without distinction, including their mothers and sisters."⁴⁶ Ḥasan, we are told, selected some of the sons of his subjects, removed them from their families, and educated them to a high standard, including teaching them several languages, thus enabling their insinuation into enemy societies undetected. Central to this training was an unquestioning commitment "to obey the lord of their land in all his words and commands; and that if they

do so, he, who has the power over all living gods, will give them the joys of Paradise.”⁴⁷ Hence, it was imagined that, when summoned into Ḥasan’s presence, they prostrated themselves before him and fervently declared unconditional obedience. “Thereupon the Prince gives each one of them a golden dagger and sends them out to kill whichever prince he has marked down.”⁴⁸

While some stories about the Assassins had circulated amongst the Crusaders for a number of years, in 1192 attitudes hardened against the group when two of their number assassinated Conrad of Montferrat, a north Italian nobleman who had established himself as the ruler of Jerusalem. This first Crusader victim led to a proliferation of reports. Arnold of Lübeck is particularly significant in this respect. In the earliest Western source that refers to an unexplained potion administered by Ḥasan, he noted the following: “This Old Man has by his witchcraft so bemused the men of his country that they neither worship nor believe in any God but himself. Likewise, he entices them in a strange manner with such hopes and with promises of such pleasures with eternal enjoyment, that they prefer rather to die than to live.” This is achieved by intoxicating them with “such a potion that they are plunged into ecstasy and oblivion,” during which they experience “certain fantastic dreams, full of pleasures and delights.”⁴⁹ This psychoactive potion became identified with hashish in subsequent versions of the legend, which were adopted by Marco Polo and other Western sources. Their accounts—mentioned, for example, by Dante and Giovanni Boccaccio—subsequently informed the reception of hashish during the nineteenth century.

While interest in the Assassins continued in the West, stimulated by the work of writers such as Denis Labey de Batilly in 1603, Henricus Bangertus in 1659, and Étienne Maurice Falconet in 1751, it was Napoleon Bonaparte’s expedition to Egypt in 1798 that proved particularly significant.⁵⁰ Inspiring a groundswell of Occidental interest in the Orient, the expedition began a cultural process that finally fixed the Assassins’ relationship with hashish.⁵¹ Of particular note in this respect was the work of the Arabic scholar Silvestre de Sacy—“the first modern and institutional European Orientalist”⁵²—who on May 19, 1809, read a paper to the Institut de France on the Assassins.⁵³ In addition to a number of sources used by earlier scholars, he was, as Lewis says, “able to draw on a rich collection of Arabic manuscripts in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, including several of the major Arabic chronicles of the Crusades hitherto unknown to Western scholarship,” so “his analysis of the sources wholly superseded the efforts of earlier European writers.”⁵⁴ Silvestre de Sacy is particularly significant in that it was he who argued that “the word *assassin* is a corruption of the word *Hachishin*, and was given to the

Ismaelians because they made use of an intoxicating liquor called hashish.”⁵⁵ This was widely accepted. For example, in a short discussion of the Assassins, the English Victorian Orientalist Edward William Lane—who translated the *One Thousand and One Nights*, lived in Cairo, wore indigenous dress, and spent time sequestered in hashish dens—simply states regarding the etymology of the appellation, “De Sacy has, I think, rightly pronounced [it] to be a corruption of ‘*Hhash’shásheém*.’”⁵⁶

It should be noted, however, that while de Sacy convinced many of an etymological link between the term *ḥashīshīyyīn* and the Western term “assassin,” which, in turn, confirmed stories that the “potion” administered to the Assassins was *ḥashīsh*, the argument is problematic. First, the term *ḥashīshīyyīn* was a derogatory term originally used metaphorically of the Nezāri Isma‘īlis. The earliest recorded such use of it appears in a polemical text produced around 1123.⁵⁷ As Daftary comments, “In the entire mediaeval discussion of hashish by Muslim writers . . . users were plainly regarded as social outcasts and criminals, and the *ḥashīshīyya* were branded as dangerous to Islam and society, and condemned as such by majority opinion at least from the latter part of the eleventh century.” Most scholars would agree that “it was in the abusive senses of ‘low-class rabble’ and ‘irreligious social outcasts’ that the term *ḥashīshīyya* seems to have been used” during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, rather than because they actually “secretly used hashish in a regular manner.”⁵⁸ Second, the use of the drug as a psychoactive was well known at the time and therefore it was unlikely to have been considered a mysterious potion by those who took it. Third, unlike opium, psilocybin, or LSD, hashish is unlikely to have induced stable visions of paradise with the levels of clarity and cogency required by the early stories.⁵⁹ Finally, the quantities required for a cogent hallucinogenic experience would have been unhelpful to a militia required to execute their victims covertly with a high level of sophistication, agility, and precision.

For Western observers, however, such stories of drug-induced devotion, supported by Orientalist stereotypes of exotic assassins running amuck, made sense of the murderous extravagance of the group and their blind obedience to Ḥasan, which otherwise seemed inexplicable.⁶⁰ For example, Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall, in his influential *Geschichte der Assassinen aus morgenländischen Quellen* (1818), simply repeats Marco Polo’s account of hashish-induced visions of paradise and murder.⁶¹ The profane confluence of drugs and the occult machinations of the intoxicated Assassins had become fixed in the Western imaginary. In a supposedly objective article published in *Scientific American* in 1858, all the contemporary Orientalist prejudices are

laid bare and supported by the legend of the Assassins: "The drowsy appearance and indolent character of Eastern nations is not only due to the climate of the countries" but also to the widespread "use of powerful narcotic drugs." Whereas "the Chinese have their opium which they chew and smoke to great excess . . . the Ottomans . . . prefer the intoxication produced by hasheesh . . . the first smokers and eaters of [which] were called hasheeshins, from which our word 'assassin' is derived." Their custom of hashish eating, we are told, "was first practised in the days of the Crusaders by a powerful enemy of theirs, 'The Old Man of the Mountain,' as he was called, and who obtained the most implicit obedience from many followers by supplying them with this drug." Unsurprisingly, therefore, users of this powerful and profane toxin are driven to madness: "Persons who are in the habit of using this drug usually terminate their existence as lunatics, and since the French have had Algeria their insane hospitals have been filled with the victims of hasheesh."⁶²

If the stories of the Assassins suggested a link between hashish, violence, and madness, they also indicated the drug's effectiveness as an enchanting technology of transcendence. This latter emphasis is particularly evident in Alexandre Dumas's *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Building on both Marco Polo's account and also his own enjoyment of the drug, Dumas developed a version of the story in which the delights of hashish intoxication are embellished. "Did you ever hear . . . of the Old Man of the Mountain . . . Hassenben-Sabah, who planted beautiful gardens, within which there were isolated pavilions. Into these pavilions he admitted the elect, and there . . . gave them to eat a certain herb, which transported them to Paradise, in the midst of ever-blooming shrubs, ever-ripe fruit, and ever-lovely virgins. What these happy persons took for reality was but a dream."⁶³ This is the key for Dumas. Hashish had the psychoactive power to usher the Assassins into an enchanted dream world. On this basis, Dumas thought, the drug should be commended.

There is a struggle in nature against this divine substance—in nature which is not made for joy and clings to pain. Nature subdued must yield in the combat, the dream must succeed to reality, and then the dream reigns supreme, then the dream becomes life, and life becomes the dream. But what changes occur! It is only by comparing the pains of actual being with the joys of the assumed existence, that you would desire to live no longer, but to dream thus forever. When you return to this mundane sphere from your visionary world, you would seem to leave a Neapolitan spring for a Lapland winter—to quit paradise for earth—heaven for hell! Taste the hashish, guest of mine—taste

the hashish “*Ma foi*,” said Franz, “it would be the easiest thing in the world; for I feel eagle’s wings springing out at my shoulders, and with those wings I could make a tour of the world in four and twenty hours.” “Ah, yes, the hashish is beginning its work. Well, unfurl your wings, and fly into superhuman regions.”⁶⁴

Increasingly Dumas’s compatriots shared his views. “This is the time of the Assassins,” declared Arthur Rimbaud.⁶⁵ Baudelaire took the title of one of his books from the legendary “artificial paradise” created by Ḥasan. And the name of Ḥasan’s sect was adopted by a group of young French intellectuals who met under the auspices of Moreau. Le Club des Hachichins met monthly between 1845 and 1849 at the Hôtel Pimodan on the Île Saint-Louis. It might have gone unnoticed had it not been for the fact that one of their number, Théophile Gautier, published a semi-fictional essay, “Le Club des Hachichins,” in *Revue des Deux Mondes* on February 1, 1846, which explicitly recounts the story of the relationship between the Assassins, hashish, and visions of paradise.⁶⁶ Those who could be found visiting artificial paradises at the Hôtel Pimodan included Louis Rémy Aubert-Roche, Victor Hugo, Eugène Delacroix, Honoré Daumier, Alphonse Karr, Gérard de Nerval, and Honoré de Balzac. As Gautier recalled, he may have “had the appearance of a nephew going to dine with his elderly aunt” as he made his way to the hotel, but in fact he was actually “a believer on the point of tasting the joys of Mahomet’s heaven in the company of a dozen French ‘Arabs.’”⁶⁷

It was this sense of transcendence and the Orientalist construction of induced paradise, for which “reality merely served as a jumping off ground for the splendors of the hallucination,” that became central to the French *ḥashīshīyya*.⁶⁸ “I was in the happy stage of hashish that Orientals call *kief*,” declared Gautier. “I could no longer feel my body; the bonds of matter and spirit had been untied: I moved by sheer will power in a medium which offered no resistance at all.”⁶⁹ This, he reasoned, must be what we experience in the afterlife: “I understood the pleasures tasted by spirits and angels according to their degree of perfection, as they traverse the ether and the heavens, and what might be the pastime of Eternity in paradise. No trace of materiality mingled with this ecstasy, no earthly desire impaired its purity.”⁷⁰

This version of the Assassin legend has since found its way into twentieth-century high culture. For example, Robert de Ropp, in his influential book *Drugs and the Mind* (1958), makes the point that hashish

was always associated with romantic stories colorful and gorgeous as the interminable yarns of Scheherazade [*Arabian Nights*]. The very

word *hashish* carries exotic overtones. This substance was fed to his followers by Hasan-i-Sabah, “The Old Man of the Mountain,” who built his stronghold on the craggy peak of Alamut. For the sake of a glimpse of paradise which the drug afforded, his fanatical henchmen would gladly ride across the desert to Basra or Baghdad, there stealthily to murder certain individuals of whom Hasan had disapproved.⁷¹

He then relates the joys of hashish as described by Marco Polo. Likewise in the 1980s, Robert Anton Wilson makes much of the legend, embedding it within an idiosyncratic history of sex, drugs, and the occult, and portraying Hasan as a Crowleyan figure who “introduced marijuana to the Western world, from India,” and “taught that nothing is true and everything is permissible.”⁷² For William Burroughs, Hasan stands as “the only spiritual leader who has anything significant to say in the Space Age.”⁷³ And in his poem “The Hashishins,” Robert Calvert of the band Hawkwind imagines a group of subversive hippies in contemporary Britain: “In every village within each town / And city you will find them . . . Hair flying, walking fast to score / Heads filled with dreams.”⁷⁴

Others in the twentieth century, however, have turned to earlier interpretations of the Assassin legend to promote anti-cannabis propaganda. For example, in the 1930s, several influential films were made that drew on readings of the legend that identified the drug as a source of profanation: *Reefer Madness* (1936) declared that “Women cry for it, men die for it,” and *Assassin of Youth* (1937) referred to the “wild-mad thrills” it induced. Such claims were supported by a series of articles published in periodicals such as *Scientific American* which argued that “marihuana produces a wide variety of symptoms in the user,” including “a desire to fight and kill.”⁷⁵ For example, in July 1937, Harry J. Anslinger (the first commissioner of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics) published a lurid article in the *American Magazine* entitled “Marijuana: Assassin of Youth,” in which he claimed that young people “on the weed” were responsible for a number of serious crimes, including murder. He claimed that “an entire family was murdered by a youthful addict in Florida. When the officers arrived at the home they found the youth staggering about in a human slaughterhouse. With an axe he had killed his father, his mother, his two brothers, and a sister. He seemed to be in a daze.”⁷⁶ As Anslinger had already stated on April 27, 1937, in testimony to Congress supporting the Marijuana Act:

This drug is as old as civilization itself. Homer wrote about it, as a drug that made men forget their homes, and that turned them into swine.⁷⁷

In Persia, a thousand years before Christ, there was a religious and military order founded which was called the Assassins, and they derived their name from the drug called hashish, which is now known in this country as marihuana. They were noted for their acts of cruelty, and the word "assassin" very aptly describes the drug.⁷⁸

Much of this was ill-informed nonsense, but it does indicate the significant impact the legend had on the reception of drugs in the West.

Also significant in this respect was the influence of *One Thousand and One Nights*, which was translated from Arabic into French by Antoine Galland and appeared in twelve volumes between 1704 and 1717.⁷⁹ Widely known in English as *Arabian Nights*, it shaped Western conceptions of the Orient as an exotic, enchanted heterotopia. By the 1880s, it had, as Sadie Plant notes, "inspired all of the nineteenth century's writers on drugs."⁸⁰ Not only was it one of De Quincey's favorite childhood books,⁸¹ but his Parisian admirers were "in love with the Eastern flavor of hashish and the stories with which it seemed to come equipped."⁸² Indeed, it was largely because Ḥasan Ṣabbāḥ was viewed through the lens of *Arabian Nights* that he became, as Marcus Boon puts it, a "medieval dandy" and a revolutionary icon for "the dope-smoking radicals of the 1960s, decked out in caftans while plotting to overthrow the state."⁸³ A good example of this is the Hawkwind song "Hassan I Sahba" (from the album *Quark, Strangeness and Charm*, 1977), in which he becomes a signifier for the confluence of hashish, *Arabian Nights*, and the legend of the Assassins: "Guide us O thou genie of the smoke / Lead us to a thousand and one nights / In the perfumed garden of delights."

Artificial Paradises

Among the most important drug writing to emerge out of the séances at Le Club des Hachichins was Baudelaire's "Du vin et du hachish" (1851) and *Les paradis artificiels* (1860).⁸⁴ Even so, there is little evidence to suggest that he was a regular consumer of cannabis. "That he once or twice tried hashish, as a psychological experience, is possible and even probable," says Gautier, "but he did not make continuous use of it." Indeed, what Gautier refers to as "this happiness, bought at the chemist's and carried in the pocket," was, he says, "repugnant" to Baudelaire. "He compared the ecstasy that it produced to that of a maniac, for whom painted cloth and coarse decorations replaced real furniture and the garden enriched with living flowers."⁸⁵ That said, a couple of things need to be borne in mind. First, because Gautier was keen to

protect Baudelaire's reputation from those who would willfully misunderstand him, he played down the significance of drugs in his life and work. Second, Baudelaire also sought to distance himself from the perception of an intoxicated life. Hence, though he spent many hours under the influence of one substance or another, it is difficult to know how much cannabis he actually consumed.

What is clear is that he did not share Gautier's appreciation of hashish. While he writes in the love-hate style of an addict caught somewhere between the ethereal Romanticism of De Quincey and the brutal realism of Burroughs,⁸⁶ he insists that hashish is both "useless and dangerous." It is so effective in eroding morality, undermining creativity, and causing "intellectual death" that "if there existed a government whose interest it were to corrupt its citizens, it would have to encourage the use of hashish."⁸⁷ It harbors a "stupefying spirit" that quickly takes possession of the user's mind, inducing a profoundly antisocial attitude, which "renders the individual useless to his fellow man."⁸⁸ He believes that it erodes the willpower so comprehensively that regular use should be carefully avoided: "a profound languor, which is not without charm, invades your spirit. You are incapable of work and of energetic action."⁸⁹ Moreover, it leads a person "to admire himself and precipitates him day by day toward the very brink of the luminous abyss in which he admires his Narcissan face."⁹⁰ The paradises it promises "are not really as beautiful as they appear beneath their temporary disguises and magical tinsel trappings. Such thoughts belong to the earth rather than to heaven and owe a great part of their beauty to nervous irritation, to the eagerness with which the mind embraces them."⁹¹ This suggests that it is not quite true to claim, as Catherine Osborn does, that Baudelaire was "an understanding loving brother" to the hippies of the 1960s.⁹²

There is no doubt, however, that he was familiar with the artificial paradises induced by hashish, as he evocatively describes a number of core characteristics: the perception of time is so altered that an "eternity" can be experienced within just a few minutes, and within that experience of timelessness the angst of mortal life dissolves.⁹³ There is a sense in which an ample dose of hashish is able to lift the self above the tyrannical constraints of the historical process. Time ceases to be relevant or even to make much sense: "One lives several lives in the space of an hour."⁹⁴ While intoxicated one even has a suspicion that "soon the very idea of time will disappear,"⁹⁵ so

when on the morrow you observe the light of day in your room, your first sensation is astonishment. Time had completely disappeared. It

had been night just before and now it is day. "Have I slept or not? Did my state of intoxication last all night and, the concept of time having been suppressed, did the entire night signify for me less than the space of a second? Or have I perhaps lain enveloped in the veils of a vision-filled slumber?" There is no possibility of knowing.⁹⁶

Because one transcends "material things,"⁹⁷ there is also an erosion of the sense of space—another core characteristic of the experience. One can be anywhere and everywhere at once as the self bleeds into the fabric of the cosmos. Consequently, there is an erosion of the perception of the distinct identity of the self over against other objects in the world: "from time to time," says Baudelaire, the "personality vanishes." That is to say, "the sense of objectivity that creates certain pantheistical poets and great actors becomes so powerful that you are confounded with external objects. Now you are a tree moaning in the wind and murmuring vegetable melodies to nature. Now you hover in the azure of an immensely extended sky."⁹⁸ Again, "you are seated, smoking a pipe; you think you are sitting inside the pipe, but the pipe, rather, is smoking you; you exhale yourself in spirals of blue clouds."⁹⁹ The boundaries separating the self from that which is external to the self collapse. There is, as William James said of the "anesthetic revelation," something about it that is not only "Fichtean and Hegelian" but also fundamentally mystical.¹⁰⁰ As Baudelaire put it, "Every contradiction is now an identity. Man is a god."¹⁰¹ That is to say, "a final, crowning thought springs from the dreamer's brain: '*I have become God!* . . . Which French philosopher is it who said, in mockery of modern German doctrines, 'I am a god who has not dined well'? That irony would fail to make an impression on a man under the sway of hashish; he would calmly reply: 'I may not have dined well, yet I am a god!'"¹⁰²

Related to this perception of unity are Baudelaire's comments on the relationship between music and hashish intoxication—a relationship that is now well documented.¹⁰³ In particular, he notes that music "will associate itself with the objects around you," enchanting them and drawing the intoxicated observer into a unity with them. At one with the music, indistinguishable from it, the listener is no longer an isolated self, but rather merges with and becomes part of the sonic environment. This leads to a sense of unity with one's physical environment: "You would take your place and play your part in the most wretched of paintings, the coarsest wallpaper covering the walls of an inn."¹⁰⁴

Hashish intoxication can be an evocative experience, within which one discovers one's muse. Hence, it can, says Baudelaire, "give you infinite

poems.”¹⁰⁵ But, as noted in Chapter 1, he was suspicious of it as an easy shortcut that erodes creativity, bypasses serious reflection, and undermines morality: “In the very infallibility of the means lies its immorality, just as the supposed infallibility of magic lies in the diabolical stigma with which it is attached.”¹⁰⁶ There is something morally and creatively constructive about the time, effort, and privations endured by the ascetic, the mystic, and the artist; there is something important to be gained from the dark night of the soul that is denied to the person who seeks to arrive at the same destination by a psychedelic shortcut.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that large doses of hashish can engender the gnostic conviction that “every philosophical problem has been solved. All the knotty questions with which theologians have battled and which are the despair of thinking humanity have become pellucid, limpid.”¹⁰⁷ While there is little that troubles the emotional and intellectual pool in which the intoxicated self floats, this is not because anything has actually been solved, but only because, being intoxicated, the self is content with an illusory solution.

Finally, central to the experience of this artificial paradise is a stupefying immersion in a sense of pleasure. Although users may initially experience several transitory negative effects, it isn’t long before they realize that “every sorrow has disappeared It is what the Orientals call *kief*—it is the absolute of happiness It is a calm and frozen beatitude.”¹⁰⁸ “You have ceased to struggle, you are transported, you are no longer your own master and little do you care.”¹⁰⁹ This is the central issue for Baudelaire: while drugs are undoubtedly pleasurable and in many respects inspirational, in the final analysis they create artificial paradises in which all problems are solved.

It was, therefore, unsurprising to Baudelaire that drug-induced states are frequently interpreted as mystical experiences of gnosis: “Alas! the vices of man, however frightful they seem, contain the proof (if only in their infinite applications!) of his taste for the infinite; and yet it is a taste that quite frequently goes astray.”¹¹⁰ The problem is that this appetite for transcendence, which activates the interest in psychoactive substances, is not satisfied by the experiences they induce.¹¹¹ As he says with reference to two types of dreams that humans typically experience, “The first is filled with his ordinary life, his preoccupations, desires, and vices, which combine in a more or less bizarre manner with objects encountered during the day to randomly fix upon the vast canvas of his memory. This is the natural dream; it is the man himself.” The second type is an “absurd and unpredictable dream, which has no bearing on, or connection to, the character, life, and passions of the dreamer!” This he refers to as the “hieroglyphic dream,” which is often thought to represent “the

supernatural side of life.” Indeed, “it is precisely because of its absurdity that the ancients thought it of divine origin. As this dream cannot be explained by any known cause, they attributed it to a cause external to man.”¹¹² Hashish users who seek gnosis will always be disappointed, for “in hashish intoxication, we find nothing of the kind. Here we never leave the natural dream. Throughout its duration, the intoxication will be nothing but a fantastic dream The idler has contrived to artificially introduce an element of the supernatural into his life and thoughts: but he is, after all, and in spite of the heightened intensity of his sensations, only the same man augmented, the same number elevated to a much higher power.”¹¹³ Hashish intoxication distorts perception but does little more than that. It is certainly not a gnostic technology capable of providing an egress into a “second reality.”

Not everyone at the close of the nineteenth century agreed with this view, of course. Gustave Flaubert was particularly critical of Baudelaire: “One senses something like a leaven of Catholicism here and there. I would have preferred you not to condemn hashish, opium, overindulgence. How do you know what may ultimately come of all that.”¹¹⁴ In his *La tentation de Saint Antoine* (1874) he discusses a night in the life of the fourth-century Christian anchorite mystic Saint Anthony.¹¹⁵ Weakened by the rigors of asceticism and haunted by sinful thoughts and remorse, Anthony slips into hallucinatory altered states in which he experiences sensual excess and philosophical doubt. Rooted in, as Michel Foucault put it, “the ancient imagination of the Orient,”¹¹⁶ the account locates Anthony on the border of madness and mysticism. In many ways it is an examination and even a celebration of the potential of the mind during altered states of consciousness. Whether the visionary states are induced by the privations of asceticism or by drugs is beside the point, in that both alter brain chemistry and produce hallucinations that can have profound personal, social, and religious implications. As Plant comments, while “*Madame Bovary* is the book most closely associated with Flaubert’s drug-induced experiences,” his discussion of Anthony is a better example of the psychedelic experience: “His journeys take him back into the heart of the matter itself, when, at the very end of the book.”¹¹⁷ Anthony yearns, in a passage deeply resonant of Romantic Idealism, to “have wings, a carapace, a rind, to breathe out smoke, wave my trunk, twist my body, divide myself up, to be inside everything, to drift away with odour, develop as plants do, flow like water, vibrate like sound, gleam like light, to curl myself up into very shape, to penetrate each atom, to get down to the depth of matter—to be matter.”¹¹⁸ These are important experiences that Flaubert feels Baudelaire dismisses too lightly, for how does he know what may come of all that?

The American Hashish-Eater

In 1854 an anonymous article entitled “The Vision of Hasheesh” was published in *Putnam’s Monthly Magazine*. In fact, the author was Bayard Taylor, the illustrious poet, travel writer, and United States envoy to Prussia.¹¹⁹ It was a sensational and engaging account of his experiences of transcendence: “The spirit . . . of Hasheesh had entire possession of me. I was cast upon the flood of his illusions, and drifted helplessly whithersoever he might choose to bear me.”¹²⁰ Here too, the relationship between cannabis and the Orient was key: “I suddenly found myself at the foot of the great Pyramid of Cheops . . . I wished to ascend it and the wish alone placed me above its apex, lifted thousands of feet above the wheat-fields and palm-groves of Egypt.” He continues, “I was moving over the Desert, not upon the rocking dromedary, but seated in a barque made of mother-of-pearl, and studded with jewels of surpassing lustre. The sand was made of grains of gold, and my keel slid through them without jar or sound.”¹²¹ Traveling farther east in his vision, he too reveals the influence of *Arabian Nights*: “Mahomet’s Paradise, with its palaces of ruby and emerald, its airs of musk and cassia, and its rivers colder than snow and sweeter than honey, would have been a poor and mean terminus for my arcade of rainbows. Yet in the character of this paradise, in the gorgeous fancies of the *Arabian Nights*, in the glow and luxury of all Oriental poetry, I now recognize more or less of the agency of hasheesh.”¹²²

Taylor’s article is particularly significant as the catalyst for one of the most influential hashish texts of the nineteenth century, Fitz Hugh Ludlow’s *The Hasheesh Eater: Being Passages from the Life of a Pythagorean* (1857).¹²³ Ludlow recalls that he had been “moved . . . powerfully to curiosity and admiration” by a “most graphic” discussion of hashish “from the pen of Bayard Taylor.”¹²⁴ While some, such as Boon, have argued that *The Hasheesh Eater* “inaugurated writing about drugs in America,” this is erroneous.¹²⁵ Fifteen years prior to Ludlow’s book, in 1842, William Blair had already published a De Quinceyesque piece in *The Knickerbocker*: “An Opium Eater in America.”¹²⁶

Not only was 1854 significant as the year in which “The Vision of Hasheesh” was published, but it was also the year in which Ludlow, still a teenager, began experimenting with the drug. He had been introduced to “a preparation of the East Indian hemp, a powerful agent in cases of lock-jaw,” by a local apothecary in his hometown, Poughkeepsie, New York.¹²⁷ However, after several years of committed and increasing cannabis use, including his time as a student at Union College, he became convinced that he had succumbed to addiction. Having chanced upon Taylor’s article in a local bookshop,

he believed that he had found a kindred spirit who might be able to help him: "As none other could counsel me, he might counsel. For the first time in all the tremendous stretch of my spell-bound eternity heard I the voice of sympathy or saw I an exemplar of escape."¹²⁸ He immediately wrote to the editor of *Putnam's Monthly Magazine*, who put him in touch with Taylor. In his response, Taylor suggested that, as a form of catharsis, Ludlow should reflect upon and record the details of his experiences. However, this self-therapy not only failed to terminate his cannabis habit but, following Taylor's example, led him to write an anonymous article for *Putnam's Monthly Magazine*: "The Apocalypse of Hashish."¹²⁹ Impressed, Taylor encouraged his young mentee to continue writing. By early 1857 he had a 365-page manuscript, which was quickly accepted for publication by Harper and Brothers in New York on July 1 of that year. Having received a number of prominent reviews, including one in the fashionable *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, the book sold well and three further editions followed. It finally went out of print during the Civil War and was not published again until 1903, when it was reprinted by S. G. Rains & Co. Including illustrations by Aubrey Beardsley (who was himself familiar with the drug),¹³⁰ it quickly acquired a certain countercultural gravitas, which attracted the attention of, among others, Crowley and Algernon Blackwood. Later in the century, H. P. Lovecraft would also express his indebtedness to *The Hasheesh Eater*, as would the Beat Generation and key figures of 1960s high culture and beyond.¹³¹ As Donald Dulchinos discusses, the Beats reprinted the book "in a broadside in 1960 alongside works of Kerouac, Ginsberg and Jean-Paul Sartre, and passed on the knowledge to the hippie generation, through the publication of the book by . . . City Lights Books." Moreover, "excerpts and analyses of *The Hasheesh Eater* appeared in half a dozen books on the Sixties' drug scene, as well as in the *Berkeley Barb*."¹³²

Like Baudelaire, Ludlow was deeply influenced by De Quincey, and like De Quincey, his favorite childhood book was *Arabian Nights*. It is difficult to overestimate the significance of both De Quincey's *Confessions* and *Arabian Nights* for Ludlow. De Quincey was, he says, "the most wondrous, most inspired Dreamer."¹³³ And Ludlow is admirably candid regarding the importance of *Confessions* for the development of *The Hasheesh Eater*: "Frankly do I say that I admire De Quincey to such a degree that, were not imitation base and he inimitable, I know no master of style in whose footsteps I should more earnestly seek to tread."¹³⁴ Base or not, *The Hasheesh Eater* can, without much effort, be read as a somewhat inferior and rather sensational imitation of De Quincey's *Confessions*. While he notes that "the state of insight which he attained through opium, I reached by the way of hasheesh,"¹³⁵ and that his

account is one of “unexaggerated fact, its occurrences being recorded precisely as they impressed themselves upon me,”¹³⁶ one can be forgiven for assuming that De Quincey’s influence was far more potent than that of the hashish. While Ludlow obviously consumed prodigious amounts of hashish, the remarkable and vivid experiences he records—including his addiction—seem closer to those of an opium-eater than a “hasheesh-eater.”¹³⁷ Moreover, from the first page, which opens with a quotation from Coleridge’s “Kubla Khan,” to its appendix, which commends the “lively hasheesh vision” described in *The Count of Monte Cristo*, Ludlow’s book is infused with Romantic Orientalism. That said, his estimation of the Orient tended to be far closer to that of the French hashish-eater than to that of the English opium-eater. Although a devotee of De Quincey, he displayed little of De Quincey’s suspicion of the Orient: “We try to imitate Eastern narrative, but in vain.”¹³⁸ In addition to making numerous references to Oriental culture, he sometimes chose to use Islamic rather than Christian theological terms, including “genie” (*jinn*, supernatural beings; “I was seized by the hand of the hasheesh genie”) and “Eblis” (*Iblīs*, the Arabic term for “devil” and the name of the leader of the *jinn* who refused to prostrate himself before Adam; “the hell of Eblis and its inextinguishable pangs”).¹³⁹ His understanding of the Orient was informed by his reading of *Arabian Nights*: “The singular energy and scope of imagination which characterize all Oriental tales, and especially that great typical representative of the species, the *Arabian Nights*, were my ceaseless marvel from earliest childhood.” He continues:

The book of Arabian and Turkish story has very few thoughtful readers among the nations of the West, who can rest contented with admiring its bold flights into unknown regions of imagery, and close the mystic pages that have enchanted them without an inquiry as to the influences which have turned the human mind into such rare channels of thought. Sooner or later comes the question of the producing causes, and it is in the power of few—very few of us—to answer that question right.¹⁴⁰

The reason “very few” were capable of revealing the mystery of *Arabian Nights* was that at the time very few had experienced the esoteric delights of cannabis: “I believe, and now with all due modesty assert, I unlocked the secret, not by hypothesis, not by processes of reasoning, but by journeying through those self-same fields of weird experience which are dinted by the sandals of the glorious old dreamers of the East.” In other words, “the secret lies in the use

of hasheesh.”¹⁴¹ He suggested that, as with all psychedelic mysticism, the path to wisdom was to be found in a direct experience induced by the appropriate technology of transcendence, and that hashish had, as Plant puts it, “a privileged connection, a sympathetic link to all the cultures in which the drug had ever been used.”¹⁴² Concerning this latter point, Ludlow noticed that several of his friends who had taken hashish had also experienced visions of Oriental scenes. While this might simply be a case of users associating the drug with stories with which they were already familiar, which in turn induced experiences informed by those particular discourses, Ludlow disputed this explanation. Rather, he insisted that during hashish intoxication, the mind becomes so detached from everyday life that it is difficult even to process such ideas. Hence, the only explanation must be that the mind is subjected to the force of an alien influence, which has over millennia shaped the Oriental mind and been formative in the construction of some of the key characteristics of its culture.¹⁴³ Consequently, users can experience that culture simply by consuming the same drug. This is nonsense, of course, but it is central to Ludlow’s understanding of the importance of hashish—and evident in much subsequent psychedelic thought.

It is not one of the least singular facts of hashish that its fantasia almost invariably takes an Oriental form. This cannot be explained upon the hypothesis that the experimenter remembers it as the indulgence in use among people of the East, for at the acme of the delirium there is no consciousness remaining in the mind of its being an unnatural state. The very idea of the drug is utterly forgotten, and present reality shuts out all inquiry into grounds for belief. The only supposition which at all accounts for the fact to my own mind is that the *hasheesh is the antecedent instead of the result of the peculiar characteristics of Oriental mind and manners*.¹⁴⁴

Oriental art, literature, music, and “the sum total of Eastern manners,” are, he says, “all the embodiment and symbol of the Eastern mind,” and that mind “is very much the product of those stimulants which are in use throughout that portion of the world, and among these hasheesh holds the regency, as swaying the broadest domain of mind, and most authoritatively ruling all faculties within it.” As a consequence, “wherever this drug comes into contact with a sensitive organization,¹⁴⁵ the same fruit of supernatural beauty or horror will characterize the visions produced.” He concluded that “it is hasheesh which makes both the Syrian and the Saxon Oriental.”¹⁴⁶ Ludlow is nothing if not

consistent. The English too, he insists, can trace their own peculiar culture back to cigarettes and alcohol: “beer, mildly toned by the moderate use of tobacco” accounts for the “reticence, solidity, reflectiveness” of the English.¹⁴⁷

To summarize, drugs induce states of mind, which are formative of cultural characteristics. Hashish can therefore be understood as a technology that enables the transcendence of the user’s own culture, establishing a “sympathetic link” with the Oriental mind that produced *Arabian Nights*. An intoxicated person is able, says Ludlow, to stand on “the same mounts of vision where they stood, listening to the same gurgling melody that broke from their enchanted fountains.” He continues, “Plunging into their rayless caverns of sorcery, and imprisoned with their genie in the unutterable silence of the fathomless sea, have I dearly bought the right to come to men with the chart of my wanderings in my hands, and unfold to them the foundations of the fabric of Oriental story.”¹⁴⁸

As indicated above, it is hardly surprising that *Arabian Nights* was so central to reflection on the “hashish state” during the nineteenth century, in that it was such a significant component of Orientalist occulture. Its importance for writers such as Ludlow, Taylor, and Dumas had less to do with the fact that hashish use is mentioned in the work and more to do with the exotic, enchanted world it presented to them. Not only is hashish not dwelt upon in *Arabian Nights*, but when it is mentioned, as Robert Irwin comments, it is often within “simple, crudely constructed tales, aimed at an audience which had a taste for bawdy or even lavatorial humour,”¹⁴⁹ which would have been of little interest to Ludlow and Taylor, if not Dumas. For example, in “The Tale of the Hashish Eater,” a beggar, having being given a large lump to eat, believes himself to be reclining in a palace while being washed by servants in preparation for a promised liaison with a beautiful young woman. When his head begins to clear, the vision fades, and he finds himself surrounded by a group of people “laughing at him with all their hearts at his naked zabb, which stood up in the air as far as humanly possible.”¹⁵⁰ Such stories detract from the esoteric significance with which nineteenth-century writers such as Ludlow sought to invest hashish. Hence, rather than turning to the portrayal of hashish intoxication in *Arabian Nights*, those pursuing artificial paradises focused on earlier drug writing, such as that of De Quincey and the Romantics. Of course, that hashish was perceived as an Oriental drug was important, in that it was confluent with the Orientalist occulture of the nineteenth century¹⁵¹—which, again, had been significantly informed by the popularity of *Arabian Nights*. As Irwin notes, “The publication of the *Nights* inaugurated a mania for oriental stories, whether translated or made up.”¹⁵² This not only had “a decisive

role in forming the general image of the Islamic Middle East in Europe"¹⁵³ but, arguably, also transformed "the course of European cultural development from the eighteenth century on."¹⁵⁴ Nineteenth-century Westerners who had been enchanted by stories of the Orient believed that they had found in hashish a psychoactive substance capable of transporting them to its exotic heterotopias.

Informing all this was an enthusiasm for Romantic ideas, the essence of which, Bernard Reardon comments, "lies in the inexpugnable feeling that the finite is not self-explanatory and self-justifying, but that behind it and within it—shining, as it were, through it—there is always an infinite 'beyond,' and that he who has once glimpsed the infinity that permeates as well as transcends all finitude can never again rest content with the paltry this-and-that, the rationalized simplicities, of everyday life."¹⁵⁵ As with opium and nitrous oxide, hashish intoxication responded well to this feeling. Terrible though some of the visions could be—Ludlow often describes the experience as "a daring venture into the realms of insanity and death"¹⁵⁶—the altered states it induced confirmed that behind and within the material world there is indeed an infinite beyond that, once glimpsed, leaves the user with a greater appreciation of the depth and breadth of reality. So even when denouncing hashish as "the witch-plant of hell" or "the weed of madness" or "the drug of sorcery," he is keen to stress "its revelation of interior mysteries."¹⁵⁷

Ludlow's own Romantic tendencies can, in part, be traced back to the influence of Laurens Perseus Hickok, the Professor of Mental and Moral Philosophy at Union College, which Ludlow attended. An ordained minister, Hickok had also been a professor of theology at both Western Reserve College (1836) and Auburn Theological Seminary (1844).¹⁵⁸ According to Ludlow, he was "almost the only real metaphysician of America, perhaps the greatest now living anywhere, and worthy to be classed with the strongest and deepest thinkers of any age or land."¹⁵⁹ Hickok's magnum opus, *Rational Psychology; or, The Subjective Idea and the Objective Law of All Intelligence* (1849),¹⁶⁰ is regarded by some as one of the most important studies in psychology produced during the nineteenth century¹⁶¹—although it should be noted that his thought is highly idiosyncratic and, regardless of the plaudits it received at the time, by the close of the nineteenth century was rarely mentioned in key works of psychology.¹⁶² Nevertheless, Hickok can be considered an important early American interpreter of German Idealism. A large and complex work, *Rational Psychology* is essentially an attempt to provide a way for the study of the mind to progress beyond a description of the facts of conscious experience (he is critical of both John Locke and David Hume).

Influenced by Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, he wants to excavate the universal a priori principles that determine what we experience empirically: "In this science [rational psychology], we pass from the facts of experience wholly out beyond it, and seek for the *rationale* of experience itself in the necessary and universal principles which must be conditional for all facts of a possible experience. We seek to determine how it is possible for an experience to be, from those *à priori* conditions which render all the functions of an intellectual agency themselves intelligible."¹⁶³

In passing from "the facts of experience wholly out beyond it," he embraces Kant's distinction between noumena and phenomena¹⁶⁴—the noumenon is *the thing in itself* unknowable through the senses; the phenomenon is *the thing as it appears* to an observer as an object of the senses. This is not to say that the noumenal world of transcendental objects is entirely obscured from reason, so that we can know nothing about it. Hickok agrees with Kant that "practical reason"—for example, the capacity to function as a moral agent—makes little sense unless one postulates the reality of a noumenal world in which God exists, a Platonic world of the highest knowledge, truths, and values, of which the objects in the phenomenal world are merely representations. The problem with Kantian epistemology, as far as Hickok was concerned, was that "ontology, in reference to the Soul, Nature, and God, must be left to opinion and faith, and can never become science."¹⁶⁵ In other words, Kant was unable to account for our knowledge of the noumenal world, which then led his Idealist successors to "Absolute Idealism, and ultimately to Ideal Pantheism."¹⁶⁶ Hickok sought to correct this in his rational psychology.

Ludlow follows Hickok in that his thought betrays the influences of both Kant and German Idealism. And like Hickok, he believed that one could access knowledge of the noumenal world. Indeed, he was happy to commend the Idealists for being "climbers over . . . that ring-fence of knowledge brought in through mere physical passages, with which a tyrannous oligarchy of reasoners would circumscribe all our wanderings in search of facts and laws."¹⁶⁷ Kant, he argued, "awakened . . . by the very perplexity which set boundaries to the mind of Hume, stands forth as the resurrectionist of the long-buried idea, and is followed, with more or less non-essential departure from his main track, by Fichte, Hegel, and Schelling; for, although the first of the trio may be styled a pure Idealist, he follows Kant pre-eminently in the assertion of far higher grounds of knowledge than the sense."¹⁶⁸ This was key for Hickok and it is key for Ludlow: there are "far higher grounds of knowledge than the sense." Building on Hickok's interpretation of Kant and Idealism—which he sometimes referred to as "Transcendentalism"¹⁶⁹—he posited the existence

of a "Notional"¹⁷⁰ (i.e., noumenal) world that is unavailable to sense experience but can be accessed by practical reason and intuited while hallucinating: "Great reason have I to be thankful . . . that I was suckled at the breast of Transcendentalism," for, he says, "the first moment when it flashed upon me . . . that we were not confined for our knowledge to the mere ungrouped and unsettled appearances of the Sense, was like a revelation; it expanded and dignified the soul with a sudden access of glories such as no earthly kingship could give. At that moment spirit appeared to me for the first time something more than a hopeless bond-slave of matter."¹⁷¹

Central to his thesis, therefore, is the experience of psychedelic gnosis. Hallucinations are intimations of a level of reality distinct from that available to the senses—a transcendent, noumenal reality. Therefore, a person in the "hasheesh state"¹⁷² can be understood to inhabit a different "world" than a person in the "natural" or "unexalted state."¹⁷³ As a technology of transcendence, hashish induces an experience during which the phenomenal world "is utterly violated." Hence, he says, "in the hasheesh-eater a virtual change of worlds has taken place, through the preternatural scope and activity of all his faculties. Truth has not become expanded, but his vision has grown telescopic; that which others see only as a dim nebula, or do not see at all"—the noumenal—"he looks into with a penetrating scrutiny." "Where the luminous mist or the perfect void had been, he finds wondrous constellations of spiritual being, determines their bearings, and reads the law of their sublime harmony."¹⁷⁴

Such preternatural insights into the noumenal world, into the world of necessary a priori truths, are ineffable. They cannot be communicated with any accuracy to one who has only experienced the phenomenal world and knowledge acquired through sense experience (what Kant referred to as a posteriori knowledge). "To his neighbor in the natural state he turns to give expression to his visions, but finds that to him the symbols which convey the apocalypse [revelation] to his own mind are meaningless, because, in our ordinary life, the thoughts which they convey have no existence; their two planes are utterly different."¹⁷⁵ Hashish visionaries have "spoken forth the symbols presented to their minds; yet from these symbols men around them, in the unexalted state, drew an entirely different significance from the true one, or, perceiving none at all, laughed at what was said as an absurdity."¹⁷⁶

Having drawn attention to the philosophical ideas informing Ludlow's notion of "separate worlds"¹⁷⁷—the "Ideal" and the "Non-Ideal," the "Visionary" and the "Practical"¹⁷⁸—we should also note that he was the son of a Presbyterian clergyman, the student of a Reformed philosophical theologian,

and in many respects a deeply Christian thinker himself. As his friend the painter Frank Carpenter recorded in an article for the *New York Evening Mail* following his death, "I never knew him under any circumstances, to shrink from bearing his testimony to the central truth of Christianity."¹⁷⁹ He was, as Dulchinos puts it, "thoroughly grounded in 'the old time religion.'"¹⁸⁰ Christian theology—albeit an idiosyncratic, esoterically nuanced version of it—was central to his interpretation of "the hasheesh state."¹⁸¹ For example, he relates his own experiences to those mentioned in 2 Corinthians 12:3–4: "And I knew such a man (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth). How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." This passage fascinated him: "I often thought of St. Paul's God-given trance." However, he says, "never was I more convinced of anything in my life than that our translation, 'which it is not lawful for a man to utter,' is wholly inadequate. It should be, 'which it is impossible to utter to man'; for this alone harmonizes with that state of intuition in which the words are 'speechless words,' and the truths beheld have no symbol on earth which will embody them."¹⁸² Again, his understanding of the ineffability of the "hasheesh state" is informed not only by the Kantian distinction between a priori knowledge and a posteriori knowledge but also by a theological, broadly gnostic distinction between revealed knowledge and natural knowledge. Those limited to the latter find the former absurd. Although 1 Corinthians 1:18–20 is not mentioned, it is difficult to resist the thought that it was at least at the back of his mind during the writing of *The Hasheesh Eater*: "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.' Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" Likewise, according to Ludlow, hashish destroys the wisdom of the wise and confounds the philosopher with insights unavailable and unintelligible to those whose understanding is restricted to empirical knowledge and human logic. "Blind philosophers! Nature refuses to cramp herself within your impossible law; she rejects your generalization; she throws off the shackles of your theory!"¹⁸³

The hashish experience revealed "the message of the cross" to Ludlow in a particularly profound and intimate way. Throughout both *The Hasheesh Eater* and "The Apocalypse of Hasheesh" he records vivid and terrifying hallucinations during which he witnessed the torments of hell and multitudes who have "stamped upon their foreheads . . . the dreadful sign of all hope

of better things forever lost.”¹⁸⁴ Believing these to be accurate visions of the afterlife, he became consumed with a deep unease as to the security of his own salvation. There is, he insists, “such a thing as damnation, for I have seen it. Shall I be saved?” The only way he could be sure of his redemption was to see his name inscribed in the “Book of Life” (Revelation 3:5, 20:15, 21:27): “Oh thou Angel of Destiny, in whose book all the names of the saved are written, I call on thee to open unto me the leaves!” As his hashish vision unfolds, “the dread registrar” descends and stands before him:

Silently he stretched out to me the great volume of record, and with devouring eyes I scanned the pages, turning them over in wild haste that did not preclude the most rigid scrutiny. Leaf after leaf flew back; from top to bottom I consumed them in my gaze of agony. Here and there I recognized a familiar name, but even my joy at such revelations took nothing from the cruelty of the suspense in which I looked to find my own. With a face cold as marble I came to the last page, and had not found it yet. Drops of torture beaded my brow as with eye and finger I ran down the final column. One, two, three—I came to the bottom—the last. I was not there!¹⁸⁵

Emerging traumatized from the hallucination, he records that he had become aware of a crucifix on a wall in front of him on which “Christ, the Merciful was nailed.” He clearly interpreted this as divine intervention: “I sprang from my seat; I rushed toward him; I embraced his knees; I looked intensely into his face in voiceless entreaty. That sad face sweetly smiled upon me, and I saw that my unspoken prayer was granted. Through my soul, as through a porous film, swept a wind of balm, and left it clean.”¹⁸⁶

Such expressions of Christian devotion, rooted in visions of hell and the experience of abandonment by God (*resignation ad infernum*), are of course not unprecedented within the history of mysticism. References are made to the Harrowing of Hell (*descensus Christi ad inferos*; 1 Peter 3:19–20) and particularly to Christ’s own experience of abandonment during the crucifixion: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46, citing Psalm 21:2). As Bernard McGinn says, “The delights of rapture and contemplative vision by no means exhaust the variety of ways in which mystics have described their consciousness of God Some mystics taught that a willingness to be consigned to hell, if that be God’s will, was a necessary aspect of the mystical path.”¹⁸⁷ For example, with *The Hasheesh Eater* in mind, it is interesting to read Teresa of Ávila’s account of her own vision of hell. Her

traumatic experiences of the sufferings of the damned were, she argues, “one of the greatest mercies that the Lord has bestowed on me. It has benefitted me very much, both by freeing me from fear of the tribulations and oppositions of this life, and by giving me the strength, whilst bearing them, to give thanks to the Lord who, as I now believe, has delivered me from these continual and terrible torments.”¹⁸⁸ Although Ludlow never explicitly discusses the work of any Christian mystics, he says that he “thirsted . . . for mystical discoveries”¹⁸⁹ and he frequently refers to his experiences as “visions.” Indeed, *The Hasheesh Eater* can be understood as a work of Christian mysticism.

Another of Ludlow’s experiences during the “hasheesh state” that needs to be interpreted carefully also has something of a precedent in the history of Christian mysticism—namely, the moment of immediacy and directness when the self becomes indistinct from the divine. As McGinn discusses, there are a number of mystics “who claim that God and soul become identically one.” At that point, they “explicitly insist on the absence of all mediation.”¹⁹⁰ This type of union, which is particularly associated with the German mystic Meister Eckhart, is experienced on a number of occasions by Ludlow in relation to Christ. That said, almost certainly because he is conscious of how his statements will be received within Presbyterian circles, his accounts betray a certain ambivalence. On the one hand, he links them to the pride of Eblis/Satan¹⁹¹—a central theme in Christian demonology¹⁹²—which, he says, “is so often characteristic of the fantasia.”¹⁹³ For example, he describes how “he grew colossal in a delirium of pride. I felt myself at the centre of all the world’s immortal glory.”¹⁹⁴ On the other hand, while we have seen that he understood himself to be ontologically distinct from Christ, nevertheless he recalls a vision in which he merges with the crucified Christ:

It was now with Christ the crucified that I identified myself. In dim horror I perceived the nails piercing my hands and my feet, but it was not this that seemed the burden of my suffering. Upon my head, in a tremendous, ever-thickening cloud, came slowly down the guilt of all the ages past and all the world to come. By a dreadful quickening, I beheld every atrocity and nameless crime coming up from all time on lines that centred in myself. The thorns clung to my brow, and bloody drops stood like dew upon my hair, yet these were not the instruments of my agony. I was withered like a leaf in the breath of a righteous vengeance. The curtain of a lurid blackness hung between me and heaven; mercy was dumb, and I bore the anger of Omnipotence alone. Out of the fiery distance demon chants of triumphant blasphemy came

surging on my ear, and whispers of ferocious wickedness ruffled the leaden air about my cross.¹⁹⁵

Elsewhere he records a similar experience, but with an eschatological focus on the millennial rule of Christ and the establishment of a new heaven and new earth (cf. Isaiah 65:17–25; Revelation 21:1–4):

My powers became superhuman; my knowledge covered the universe; my scope of sight was infinite. I was invested with a grand mission to humanity, and slowly it dawned upon me that I was the Christ, come in the power and the radiance of his millennial descent, and bearing to the world the restoration of perfect peace. I spoke, and it was done: with a single sentence I regenerated the Creation. A smile of exultation beamed from the awakened earth. I could hear her low music of rejoicing as she perceived that the fullness of the times with which, for centuries, she had travailed in woe, had at length been brought forth. All men once more lived in love to God and their neighbor, and, secure in an eternal compact, began marching on harmoniously to the sublime end of spiritual greatness. The nature of all beasts grew mild; the satyr walked down from his mountain fastness, and led his young fearlessly into the presence of his old foe, the leopard; the kite and the dove impied their wings upon the same branch; out of the depths of the jungle the tiger stepped forth and gently drew near to fawn upon his king. The terrible lustre of his eyes was dissolved into the serene light of love, and as I caressed his spotted hide, he returned the kindness with a thankful purr.¹⁹⁶

Such visions are perhaps what one should expect of a Christian on drugs, in that, as discussed in Chapter 1, both the set (the pharmacology of a drug and the personality of the user) and the setting (the physical and social context in which a drug is taken) have a formative impact on the experience.¹⁹⁷ Regardless of the nature of these experiences, they had an important and lasting influence. Like Teresa and other mystics, he understood these visions to be spiritual lessons, revelations of truth, which instilled in him, he says, “the conviction that, encumbered with a mortal body, I was suffering that which the untrammelled immortal soul could alone endure. The spirit seemed to be learning its franchise and, whether in joy or pain, shook the bars of the flesh mightily, as if determined to escape from its cage.”¹⁹⁸ In other words, when

disembodied, his soul was permitted to experience both the majesty and suffering of Christ.

Finally, in his discussion of 2 Corinthians 12:3–4, in which, as noted above, he compares his experience of transcendence with that of Paul, he makes the following point: “Though far from believing that my own ecstasy, or that of any hasheesh-eater, has claim to such inspiration as an apostle’s, the states are still analogous in this respect, that they both share the nature of disembodiment, and the soul, in both, beholds realities of greater or less significance, such as may never be apprehended again out of the light of eternity.”¹⁹⁹ That is to say, he interprets his experiences in terms of a gnostic dualist anthropology: “The conception of our human duality was presented to me in a manner more striking than before.”²⁰⁰ As noted above, he makes specific use of the Greek term *ἔκστασις* (ecstasy) to describe the intoxicated state, for hashish is able to liberate the soul from its embodied incarceration.

In the course of my delirium, the soul, I plainly discovered, had indeed departed from the body. I was that soul utterly divorced from corporeal nature, disjoined, clarified, purified. From the air in which I hovered, I looked down upon my former receptacle. Animal life, with all its processes, still continued to go on; the chest heaved with the regular rise and fall of breathing, the temples throbbed, and the cheek flushed. I scrutinized the body with wonderment; it seemed no more to concern me than that of another being.²⁰¹

This experience confirmed to him the Platonic notion that the body is little more than a container for the soul. The discarnate soul is still “possessed of all the human capacities, intellect, susceptibility, and will . . . complete in every respect; yet, like a grand motor, it had abandoned the machine which it once energized, and in perfect independence stood apart.”²⁰²

Once liberated by hashish, the soul ceases to be subject to the laws of the material world:²⁰³ “I was restrained by no objects of a denser class. To myself I was visible and tangible, yet I knew that no material eyes could see me. Through the walls of the room I was able to pass and repass, and through the ceiling to behold the stars unobscured.”²⁰⁴ Not only was he freed from material constraints, but he was freed from spatial constraints as well: “Hasheesh I called ‘the drug of travel,’ and I had only to direct my thoughts strongly toward a particular part of the world . . . to make my whole fantasia in the strongest possible degree topographical.” Should anyone, he says, “suggest to

me, however faintly, mountain, wilderness, or market-place, and straightaway I was in it."²⁰⁵ Finally, hashish also liberated him from temporal constraints:

I remember that . . . I had looked at my watch to measure the cycles through which I had passed. The impulse seized me to look again. The minute hand stood half way between fifteen and sixteen minutes past eleven. The watch must have stopped; I held it to my ear; no, it was still going. I had travelled through all that immeasurable chain of dreams in thirty seconds. "My God!" I cried, "I am in eternity." In the presence of that first sublime revelation of the soul's own time, and her capacity for an infinite life, I stood trembling with breathless awe. Till I die that moment of unveiling will stand in clear relief from all the rest of my existence. I hold it still in unimpaired remembrance as one of the unutterable sanctities of my being. The years of all my earthly life to come can never be as long as those thirty seconds.²⁰⁶

Released from the moorings of space and time, he "swam up against the current of all time; I walked through Luxor and Palmyra as they were of old; on Babylon the bittern had not built her nest, and I gazed on the unbroken columns of the Parthenon."²⁰⁷

While it could be argued that this is no more than one should expect of a person who had recently consumed large quantities of hashish, Ludlow was keen to establish that the experience has a greater significance than that: "This was neither hallucination nor dream. The sight of my reason was preternaturally intense, and I remembered that this was one of the states which frequently occur to men immediately before their death has become apparent to lookers-on."²⁰⁸ Indeed, central to his argument throughout *The Hasheesh Eater* is that the drug "is no thing to be played with as a bauble," for it induces an experience normally limited to the postmortem soul.²⁰⁹ Hashish does what death will eventually do: it separates body and soul. As such, perilous though the experience is, it provides a gnostic apology for "human duality" and, therefore, incorporeal immortality—at death the body is evacuated and dies, while all that is essential to the identity and nature of the self (the soul) survives.²¹⁰ There are even times during "the hasheesh state . . . at the moment of the most rapturous exultation," when "the soul hears the outcry of the physical nature pouring up to the height of its vision out of the walls of flesh The cords which bind the two mysterious portions of our duality together have been stretched to their

ultimate tensivity, and the body, for the sake of its own existence, calls the soul back into the husk which it cannot carry with it.”²¹¹ He recalls an experience during which “a voice of command called on me to return into my body, saying in the midst of my exultation over what I thought was my final disenfranchisement from the corporeal, ‘The time is not yet.’ I returned, and again felt the animal nature joined to me by its mysterious threads of conduction. Once more soul and body were one.”²¹² Again, there have been times of transcendent rapture that have, he says, been interrupted by a feeling of restraint, as if “the cords” connecting body to soul “were real sinews” inhibiting his progress to the celestial sphere.

Concluding Comments

Any adequate understanding of the reception of hashish in the West requires a grasp of the Romantic Orientalist milieu within which the drug was thought about and consumed—the set and setting of the nineteenth-century consumer of cannabis. It is not difficult to trace interpretations of hashish as a technology of transcendence back to Orientalist constructions of the East. One only has to consider that the very term “hashish” arrived in the West freighted with exotic baggage from the East, which, when unpacked, was shown to be conspicuously influenced by *Arabian Nights* and the legend of the Assassins. The languid, exotic dream states produced by Ḥasan’s elixir could now be experienced in Europe. This link between hashish and the Orient is, for example, evocatively portrayed in Gaetano Previati’s 1887 painting *L’hashish* (*Le fumatrici di hashish*), which depicts a group of women reclining on Oriental furnishings enjoying the hazy bliss of hashish intoxication.²¹³ In *The Count of Monte Cristo*, Dumas embeds a discussion of the celestial joys of hashish intoxication within a narrative that conflates the legend of the Assassins and references to *Arabian Nights*. Masquerading as Sinbad the Sailor, the protagonist, Edmond Dantès, constructs an Oriental setting, within which he relates stories of Hassen-ben-Sabah and persuades his guest, Baron Franz d’Epinay, to experience the wonders of “the purest and most unadulterated hashish of Alexandria.”²¹⁴ “Ah,” says Sinbad to Franz, “those Orientals, they are the only men who know how to live.”²¹⁵ The hashish experience in late nineteenth-century France was imagined as “a magic carpet ride.”²¹⁶ This is not to say that every nineteenth-century pothead had a sophisticated grasp of these ideas, but only that there was an early occultural link between hashish and Orientalist constructions of the exotic East. Consequently, by the late

nineteenth century, the states of transcendence produced in the pursuit of these “most remarkable phenomena,” whether incense-scented dreams or genie-haunted nightmares, tended to have an Oriental and paranormal, if not explicitly mystical, hue.

Confluent with this turning toward the East, there was also a frequently articulated Romantic Idealist bias. As Baudelaire and Ludlow discuss, one of the principal experiences of hashish intoxication is the transcendence of space and time. The user can be anywhere and everywhere at once. This is, in turn, often confluent with an erosion of the distinct identity of the self. “From time to time,” says Baudelaire, the “personality vanishes” as the self merges with its environment: “Now you are a tree moaning in the wind and murmuring vegetable melodies to nature. Now you hover in the azure of an immensely extended sky.”²¹⁷ “Every contradiction is now an identity. Man is a god.”²¹⁸ These are important points when considering hashish as a technology capable of inducing mystical states, in that they directly relate to what Aldous Huxley referred to as “the urge to transcend self-conscious selfhood.”²¹⁹

The experience of nineteenth-century users was often also shaped by their Christian set and setting. We have seen that Ludlow developed a form of psychedelic gnosticism that was influenced by popular Christian theological anthropology and rooted in Neoplatonism. He experienced, for example, his incorporeal soul shaking “the bars of the flesh mightily, as if determined to escape from its cage.”²²⁰ Hashish, he believed, had the ability to release the soul from its material incarceration into the immaterial world from whence it came—what he refers to as “eternity.” While the identity of the self remains intact, once released from its embodied state, it is no longer constrained by the laws of the physical universe. Under the influence of hashish, he was able to experience “the ages going by into eternity.” Although a bias toward Idealism is evident, it is tempered with classical theism: “A godlike sublimity swallowed up my soul. I was overwhelmed in a fathomless barathrum of time, but I leaned on God, and was immortal through all changes.”²²¹ For Ludlow this proved to be a powerful confirmation of the integrity and immortality of the soul. As he imagined would be his experience at death, he was able to stand outside his body, view the room in which he was seated, and pass through its walls unhindered into the incorporeal, eternal realm. As we will see in Chapter 5, these ideas quickly found their way into Spiritualism.

Also important for nineteenth-century Spiritualism was the conception of “two worlds,” which in Ludlow’s work was informed by the Kantian

distinction between the phenomenal and the noumenal. Although this needs to be understood carefully, it is an interesting idea that was developed in a number of directions. For example, we need to think of these not as ontologically distinct worlds but rather as “worlds of consciousness”—that is, rooted in a general perception that hashish induces a state in which, as Ernst Bloch puts it, “the external world is rather blocked off.” Such a state allows new, remixed versions of reality to manifest because empirical reality is not completely occluded, “as it is in sleep . . . but only to the extent that it is not compatible with the images that appear.” The external, everyday world, argued Bloch, can “appear to be on a plane with Parnassus.”²²² Benjamin, with whom Bloch took hashish, even records constantly passing between these worlds during an experience in Marseilles. He recalls an “alternation between dreaming and waking states, a constant and finally exhausting oscillation between totally different worlds of consciousness.”²²³

Finally, it is worth noting that while the experience of two worlds is central to much psychedelic thought, as noted in Chapter 1, it also has a subversive political significance. For example, while for Bloch this other world of consciousness was typically one of “enchanted levity,”²²⁴ which “to the talented hashish dreamer . . . becomes a request concert of wishes,”²²⁵ for Benjamin hashish intoxication was pregnant with revolutionary potential. The altered state could be used as a philosophical tool for social transformation, in that it enables the user to view the world in a nonhabitual way. As discussed in Chapter 1 with reference to Foucault, hashish can be understood in terms of a countercultural technology of the self, which is able to contribute to the subversion of technologies of domination. This is important. Rather than simply understanding intoxication in terms of a derangement of the senses or spiritual transcendence, Benjamin understood it as an “overcoming of the rational individual,”²²⁶ which, in turn, enables novel interpretations of the everyday:

In a state of intoxication, the thread of ratiocination is loosened, unraveled, not dissolved; with the emptying out of personality, there is a diffusion of perspective. Thinking is sensualized. A mimetic power holds sway in the realm of perception, the realm of image space, in all its plasticity. The intoxicated man takes the part of things around him, becoming, like the physiognomic flâneur or the child at play, a virtuoso of empathy . . . and at the same time, with utter detachment, drawing objects and events into his thickening web.²²⁷

Ordinary moments are transformed into catalysts of illumination. Even the most mundane object or event can be seen in a completely new light, the effect of which is to prompt the subject to think differently, to question. This, however, is not religious enlightenment, but rather, informed by a “materialistic, anthropological inspiration” and driven by “the energies of intoxication,” it is “profane illumination.”

Occultism in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

Hashish . . . will, in time, most unmistakably, produce clairvoyance, and all the sooner if a handkerchief be bound around the forehead and eyes . . . Persons may take a very little of it once or twice to render them susceptible to magnetic or spiritual influence; for while under it nearly anyone can be mesmerized, or made a medium.

—PASCHAL BEVERLY RANDOLPH¹

WHILE DRUG USE is often passed over in studies of the paranormal and the occult during the nineteenth century, it was in fact a prominent feature.² Although some occultists, such as Éliphas Lévi, warned against the use of drugs, believing them to cause confusion and perhaps inhibit a person's psychic potential, others were happy to embrace them as esoteric technologies.³

As we saw in Chapter 4 and as Eugen Weber has noted in his analysis of the period, just as "midcentury medical men interested in delirium and hallucinations had experimented with . . . cannabis and other hallucinatory drugs,"⁴ so "their writing had piqued the interest of artists and intellectuals on the lookout for new sensations. The 1870s had seen an increase in the use of drugs as they became more available."⁵ Morphine in particular became fashionable in some circles: "novelists wrote about it; society ladies got together to exchange injections; jewelers did a thriving trade in silver-gilt or gold-plated syringes."⁶ Popular though morphine was, there were plenty of other drugs to choose from and numerous ways of taking them. Strawberries soaked in ether were a delicacy at some society functions. Those whose taste for the anesthetic led to addiction quickly abandoned the fruit in favor of up to half a liter a day, sometimes with brandy. Cocaine became very popular during the 1890s, by which time thinkers such as Sigmund Freud had become enchanted

by the power of the drug. Freud first referred to cocaine in 1884 in a letter to his fiancée, Martha Bernays. Although he was only studying its history and effects at that time, it is clear that he was intent on self-experimentation. He soon acquired some, tried it, enjoyed it, and wrote a well-received study,⁷ which still “stands as a beacon to the understanding of cocaine and its natural history within a social and scientific context.”⁸ His interest did not remain within the confines of academic research, however. According to Howard Markel, “Cocaine thrilled him in a manner that everyday life could not. He wrote romantic, often erotic letters to his fiancée, dreamed grandiose dreams of his future career, walked about the streets of Paris, visited museums and theaters, and attended sumptuous soirees—all under the influence.”⁹

While Freud used the drug primarily to relax and facilitate social intercourse, others were far more enthusiastic about its potential as a technology of transcendence. Many “hoped for an introduction to those uncertain realms and indefinable states of mind that also made for the success of spiritualism, hypnotism, and occultism.” The refined, Weber continues, “dissatisfied with gross naturalism, pursued the stutterings of their souls to ever more ethereal and complex territory: mysticism, neo-Catholicism, a dilettantish quest for the effete and the bizarre that fed on missals, chasubles, ostensoria, lilies, Liberty silks, stained glass, anemia, virgins, waistline dresses, masses plain or black, and novels of J.-K. Huysmans.”¹⁰ We will return to some of these themes later in the chapter, when we focus more closely on the *fin de siècle*. Now, though, we begin with a largely neglected but important late nineteenth-century occultist, Louis-Alphonse Cahagnet.

Mesmerism, Hashish, and Somnambulism

Generally speaking, while Anglo-American Spiritualism tended to be dominant in the West, the direction of influence regarding the use of hashish flowed the other way. For example, an article on hashish published in 1848 in Britain, in *Chamber's Edinburgh Journal*, which leans heavily on the accounts of Jacques-Joseph Moreau de Tours and Théophile Gautier, was republished and quoted at length in the United States almost a decade prior to Ludlow's work.¹¹ Without wanting to identify it as a particular influence, in that it is simply indicative of the ideas circulating at the time, we can see that it makes a number of points subsequently developed in occult discourses. For example, as we have seen Ludlow argue, the article claimed that hashish is able to “to relax the ties which bind the body to the soul” and, with reference to the experiences of Gautier, it describes how, “a few minutes after swallowing

some of the preparation, a sudden overwhelming sensation took possession of him. It appeared to him that his body was dissolved and that he had become transparent. He clearly saw in his chest the hashish which he had swallowed, under the form of an emerald, from which a thousand little sparks issued.”¹²

Besides Moreau and the members of Le Club des Hachichins, there were a number of occultists in France experimenting with narcotics as technologies of transcendence, such as the magnetizer Victor Michal, who, as Jocelyn Godwin comments, was familiar with hashish as well as “a certain ‘theory of Séidism’ as taught by the Old Man of the Mountain, i.e., the chief of the Assassins.”¹³ However, the most significant such thinker was undoubtedly Cahagnet, a mesmerist and follower of Emanuel Swedenborg who describes himself as a simple *ouvrier*, much of whose working life was spent as a cabinet-maker and furniture restorer. While his work within Spiritualism can be considered innovative and influential, it should be noted that, as Frank Podmore commented in 1902, “in the Paris of his day Cahagnet seems to have stood almost alone. He belonged to no school; he persuaded few of his contemporaries to share his views of the somnambulist revelations which he recorded; and, but for the advent of Modern Spiritualism from America, he would, it may be hazarded, have found few readers.”¹⁴ Indeed, much of the content of these revelations was, as he put it, “of the usual post-Swedenborgian kind,” in that it relates “the constitution of the spirit spheres, the occupations of the deceased, the bliss of the after-life, and visions of angelic beings clothed in white, walking on beautiful lawns, in the light of a fairer day than ours.”¹⁵ While Podmore is cautious regarding the validity of the early revelations, he remarks that as Cahagnet’s work progressed, it became more rigorous and cogent: “In the whole literature of Spiritualism, I know of no records of the kind which reach a higher evidential standard, nor any in which the writer’s good faith and intelligence are alike so conspicuous.”¹⁶

One of the key early figures in the American reception of Cahagnet who was clearly persuaded of the veracity of his experiments was Paschal Beverly Randolph, who first met him during a visit to Paris in 1855. While, as John Patrick Deveney notes, Randolph’s encounter with him “must have been an eye-opener”¹⁷—certainly regarding the use of hashish—it is clear that he was already familiar with many of his ideas, as well as those of other French mesmerists, such as Baron Jules du Potet. He would almost certainly have been well acquainted with Cahagnet’s three-volume work *Arcanes de la vie future dévoilés* (1848, 1849, 1854) and *Sanctuaire du spiritualisme* (1850).¹⁸ Both the first volume of the former and the latter had been translated in America in 1851, although Randolph’s French was good enough for him to

have read the originals.¹⁹ As we will see, he sought to authenticate his use of hashish as a technology of transcendence with reference to the Orient—the turn toward the East being increasingly common in late nineteenth-century occultism.²⁰ But more important for the development of his ideas was the work of Cahagnet and the high culture of the burgeoning French *fin de siècle*. That is to say, not only was Cahagnet's work being increasingly widely disseminated during this period,²¹ but there is some comparative evidence to suggest that Randolph owes a particular debt to his cardinal work on hashish and mesmerism, *Sanctuaire du spiritualisme*.²² It is perhaps not insignificant that in 1859, under the title "Hashish Visions," an account of one of Cahagnet's hashish experiments taken from *Sanctuaire du spiritualisme* was published in the *Spiritual Telegraph and Fireside Preacher*, a popular occult publication with which Randolph had a close association.²³ If there was any doubt about Cahagnet's influence on Randolph, this is removed by the latter's published comments regarding his time in Paris. For example, he recorded that by using hashish, "Alphonse Cahagnet, myself, and others, have been enabled to pass through eternal doors, forever closed to the embodied man save by this celestial key, and passing through them, in holy calm to explore the ineffable and serene mysteries of the human soul, and attain unto conviction of immortality."²⁴

Before taking a closer look at Cahagnet's work, some clarification regarding Spiritualist mesmerism is required in order to understand his rationale for hashish use. It should not be a surprise to discover that although hashish use was not universally condemned within Spiritualism and Theosophy during this period, it was not well understood and, therefore, was treated with varying degrees of suspicion. Some, of course, were intrigued by the possibility that states of intoxication might be spiritually significant. For example, in *Supplement to the Theosophist*, in a report of a letter sent by Wilkie Collins to Henry Steel Olcott concerning the imagination and "flashes of divine knowledge from the divine consciousness," the point is made that "sometimes these inspirations come when the physical brain is stupefied by liquor or drugs, a *fact* but little known. Edgar A. Poe is a case in point."²⁵ Others, while acknowledging that "opium, hashish, Indian hemp, and such things are resorted to with the vague and ill-defined idea of transferring the consciousness to astral realms, which is the well-known, intoxicating effect such drugs have," were concerned that, "like all other abnormal processes, the ultimate result is destructive to the one who indulges himself in this manner."²⁶ Yet others, such as Adolph d'Assier, argued that those who use "the hashish of the Orientals" have "obtained no other effects than simple hallucinations."²⁷

Occultists who had been persuaded that drugs were indeed useful technologies of transcendence needed to make their case carefully and cogently. This tended to be done with reference to already established practices. For example, we will see that Randolph included effusive accounts of his own experience that typically dovetailed with the concerns of Spiritualists: "I gained more light . . . than from all the 'spiritual' experiences of my entire life—real, positive, genuine, unmistakable light—nor has my soul ever parted with one jot of that light to this day."²⁸ If more conservative Spiritualists had reservations, many also conceded that, even if potentially dangerous, hashish had some value within the occult world.

Of particular interest to Spiritualists was the fact that, as an article in the British occult journal *Light* indicated in 1893, "hashish-smokers frequently get into a state much resembling hypnotism."²⁹ This suggested a direct connection with the techniques of mesmerism/magnetism (the antecedent of hypnotism).³⁰ To unpack this last point a little: While the history of "animal magnetism" and hypnotism is relatively convoluted, essentially it is a theory based on a system of physical healing developed in the latter half of the eighteenth century by the German physician Franz Anton Mesmer (which is why it is also referred to as "mesmerism").³¹ He used the term "animal magnetism" because his theory was based on the premise that there exists "something that he called 'magnetic fluid' which permeates every living thing ('animal' here meaning anything that is animate, especially human beings)."³² Because he believed that illness was the result of blocks in the natural flow of magnetic fluid within an organism, he concluded that healing could be promoted by their removal. While initially he used iron magnets, which were beginning to come into general use, he eventually became convinced that the most effective "magnet" was the human body and that he could heal his patients by directing magnetic fluid in a concentrated form into the patient by means of "magnetic passes" (passing the hands over the body). Building on this work, Mesmer's student the Marquis de Puységur noted that some of his patients fell into states of trance as he worked with them. While in this hypnotic state of "magnetic sleep" subjects were apparently still conscious and could respond to questions and deliver information. They were also very suggestible. When they woke up, they recalled nothing that had taken place, but it was apparent from their communications during the trance state that they retained a continuous memory from one sleep state to the next. In other words, a separate memory seemed to operate during magnetic sleep that was not accessible once the subject was awakened. "Noting these two separate chains of memory that accompanied the two distinct states of consciousness, he came to

view magnetic sleep and the waking states as ‘two different existences.’ From this beginning, the notion that we all possess a mind seemingly separate from ordinary awareness operating covertly within the human psyche began to take root.”³³ He also made much of the similarity between magnetic sleep and the natural phenomenon of sleepwalking, “the only difference between the two states being that in magnetic sleep the subject is in a special connection or ‘rapport’ with the magnetizer, whereas in sleepwalking the sleeper is in rapport with no one.”³⁴ Moreover, Puységur also noticed a change in the personality of subjects during “magnetic somnambulism,” in that they seemed to exhibit an unusual vitality. In addition, notes Adam Crabtree, they would “sometimes exhibit certain metanormal abilities, such as the capacity to read the magnetizer’s thoughts and a certain degree of clairvoyance, taking the forms of diagnosing the subject’s own illness and those of others, along with the ability to prescribe effective remedies.”³⁵ Although Puységur resisted any mystical or occult interpretations of magnetism, they quickly became central to its reception in the West—which is largely why the term “hypnotism” was adopted in the late nineteenth century, in an attempt to return the practice to the world of medical science.

Cahagnet was firmly rooted within the tradition of occult mesmerism, in that he used its techniques to induce trance states in his *somnambules extatiques*. The most famous of these mediums was Adèle Maginot. Typically, a session would proceed as follows: he would induce magnetic sleep in the medium, which he understood in terms of a distinct spiritual state; he would then name the spirit he wanted to communicate with; the *somnambule* would contact the spirit and provide a description, which served as a form of identification; and Cahagnet would proceed to ask a series of questions of the entity, the answers to which were communicated through the medium. This information often concerned the nature of the spiritual world (including heaven and the afterlife), current events in distant locations, prognoses of medical conditions, and even predictions of death—Maginot is even said to have predicted Cahagnet’s own death at a time six years in the future, and William Gregory, “on good authority,” claimed that the death happened just as she had indicated.³⁶ While such claims were certainly sensational, Cahagnet’s approach was not unusual. Far more unusual was his claim to have used hashish to induce somnambulant ecstasy.³⁷

In his earlier work, Cahagnet only infrequently mentions “narcotics.” Of course, it would have been remarkable if he hadn’t mentioned them at all, for, as we have seen, they were being used increasingly within the French cultic milieu and drug-induced altered states had a growing presence within the

emerging occulture of the fin de siècle. He seemed initially suspicious of these developments, fearing that they might compromise the practice of magnetism. For example, in one recorded communication through Maginot, he is informed that “there are narcotics which produce hallucinations more or less agreeable, and display to us pictures, scenes, somewhat similar to ecstasy,” but that they also “convey trouble into the nervous system” and “disturb the soul in its vital functions.”³⁸ Indeed, while the intoxicated mind can “perceive the most burlesque scenes tacked on to rational ones . . . it knows not how to separate them, knows not where it is, knows not what they are; the reservoir of its imagination overflows, and hurries into the absurd.”³⁹ Consequently, Cahagnet insists that magnetism is “the only means of attaining the ends I have proposed to myself; any other state, effected by the ordinary means of narcotics, leaves the individual too much dependent on the resources of his belief, the influence of his desires, and naught but very suspicious results are obtained.”⁴⁰ Through Maginot, he asked the spirit of Swedenborg the following question: “Could you inform me of a means whereby I could enter into a state necessary to communicate directly with you, by the aid of certain narcotic combinations?” Swedenborg’s answer is clear: “The only practicable means is magnetism; any other state, provoked by narcotics, irritates the nerves, influences the ideas by disorganizing them, and can not, consequently, be so good as the magnetic state.”⁴¹ (It is also worth noting here that, betraying the influence of Cahagnet, Randolph expresses similar reservations: “In attempting to gain lucidity,” rather than using “narcotic agents . . . I strongly advise purely magnetical means.”)⁴²

Before his own hashish revelation, Cahagnet did commend narcotics for occult purposes, but (as is often printed on tubes of medicinal cream) “for external use only.” For example, he seems to have engaged in some early experiments with a range of rather bizarre preparations, such as narcotic pomade, the principal ingredients of which were “flowers of hemp, flowers of red poppy or the wild poppy, then five *grammes* of hashish in a *hecto* of lard.” This should be applied in “the evening, before going to bed.” For the maximum clairvoyant effect, a person should—partly following his magnetic technique—“rub it behind the ears, descend along the neck to the carotid arteries, then use it under the armpits, and in the region of the grand sympathetic, which passes under the left breast. Then rub in the same manner the loins, the soles of the feet, the thick part of the arms, and the chest.” Then sleep, “well penetrated with the subject which you desire to understand.”⁴³ He suggests that profit might be gained from the use of a “narcotic mirror,” which was a method of scrying using the reflective surface of “water distilled from Narcotic plants.”

He recommends “Belladonna, Henbane, Mandragora, and flowers of hemp, then a head of a bruised poppy, and three grammes of opium, macerated for forty-eight hours in a glass retort, of the capacity of two *litres* circumference, a full moiety of good red wine, after which put all to heat upon a sand-bath to distill.”⁴⁴ He concludes with some advice to his readers (not that many would have needed it): “Care should be taken that this water is not swallowed.”⁴⁵

Following his hashish revelation, his approach shifted significantly—by 1850, swallowing was strongly advised! In *Sanctuaire du spiritualisme* he discusses, with some enthusiasm, his experiments with hashish as a magnetic technology.⁴⁶ The book begins with forty-five “*propositions métaphysiques*,”⁴⁷ which provide the reader with a basic outline of his Spiritualist presuppositions: “Life is only one thought which *observes* another thought”; “That which exists *in general* is only a manifestation of Divine thought”; “The spiritual world is a *state* of thought”; “The material world is a *state* of thought”; “We cannot glance at the smallest object which surrounds us, either as emanating from God, or fashioned by the hands of men, without seeing it as a Divine thought.”⁴⁸ Moreover, based on the broadly Neoplatonic notion that “each germ is the whole of its species,” he concludes that “the human soul is the whole of these species, and God is the sum of these wholes.”⁴⁹ His articulation of what he calls “this Platonic proposition”⁵⁰—in which he shows the influence of both popular Romantic Idealism and also certain prominent currents of esoteric thought⁵¹—is indicative of a shift in Spiritualism away from a concern with external disembodied spirits and toward a more gnostic focus on the nature of humanity: all that can be known about the macrocosm can be discovered by exploring the microcosm within. Hence the importance of the somnambulist state, the significance of which his own experiences with hashish had confirmed to him: “I was a universe in miniature.”⁵² (This reflected the teaching of mesmerism regarding the omnipresent “magnetic fluid,” which connects the individual to the universe.)

As to his preference for hashish over other drugs, initially he had tried opium, as well as a broad range of natural herbs and chemicals, including extract of hemp, belladonna, melilot, Russian balm, and ether. From these, he says, “I obtained nothing.”⁵³ Nevertheless, he continued, for “with perseverance, as they say, one conquers everything.”⁵⁴ Finally, a friend of his recalled that he had seen a card carrying an advertisement for “*Haschish d’Orient*” at an apothecary on the rue de l’Ancienne-Comédie, and “I ran forthwith to procure myself some of this precious drug.”⁵⁵ Within a few hours everything had changed. What he experienced was, far from being a disorganization of the mind (as he had previously suspected), actually an insight into the

organization of reality: "It would be an error to imagine it only as an hallucination."⁵⁶ Indeed, with specific reference to "the most curious" work of Moreau,⁵⁷ he believed hashish to have provided him with a direct experience of mesmerism's teaching regarding two distinct orders of reality: an exterior world, experienced during normal waking consciousness, and an ideal interior world, experienced during somnambulant states. This common experience during transcendent states was also, we have seen, of great interest to the members of Le Club des Hachichins; in the world-weary culture of the *fin de siècle*, drug-induced imaginations could access exotic heterotopias. Of course, Cahagnet was not entirely happy with Moreau's psychiatric terminology, but this was a small matter that could be dealt with easily: "Let us hope that in a short time the words *madness*, *hallucination*, and *imagination* will be erased from our scientific language to be replaced by those of internal life, and external life."⁵⁸ And to those who might be tempted to consider that the visions produced "by artificial means" (i.e., hashish) are merely dream states (e.g., Baudelaire's "artificial paradises"), he states, quite categorically, "I regard it as a reality, not as a dream. Dreaming belongs solely to this world." Hashish enables us "to penetrate thither momentarily."⁵⁹

Moreover, he believed that his intoxication had confirmed to him that "*birth* and *death* are the entrance of man into two different states."⁶⁰ Take, for example, the following account recorded in *Sanctuaire du spiritualisme* and reprinted in the *Spiritual Telegraph and Fireside Preacher*: "I could perceive what it was to die, and in this manner: I saw myself die; my body was stretched out on the bed, and my soul escaped from all parts of it like a thick black smoke, but instead of being dissipated in the atmosphere, this smoke was condensed two feet above my body, and formed a body in every respect like that which I had quitted."⁶¹ He then passed "into a state of which I preserved no recollection. I think I did not speak, and know not how long a time I continued in it."⁶² Finally he returned to consciousness, but he was aware that he was still "disengaged from matter." His wife and Adèle Maginot were able to continue to communicate with him, which, he concluded, proved the independent existence of an incorporeal spiritual self within a "miserable material envelope."⁶³

I make use, indeed, of my material mouth to speak. That is true; without that you would not understand me; but it is not my body that speaks, is my Spirit; it ascends to my mouth and issues from it, as by a door or a window, under the form of a small flame, to communicate with you. At this moment, I seem as though I were at my window, and

that I am speaking to someone in the street; it is no longer my material envelope that thinks and acts, it is myself. In our psychological conversations, we call our bodies pitchers. Oh, they are in truth really pitchers, or rather not even pitchers, for pitchers still imply stone—they are miserable matter!⁶⁴

He concludes that the hashish-induced state is much the same as the ecstasy experienced by “Swedenborg, whom we so much venerate.” Swedenborg did not, he insists, experience “a different state from mine. I see what he has seen and comprehend what he has comprehended. Oh, I am as great as Swedenborg myself! I am his equal.”⁶⁵ Indeed, not only did he subsequently edit a digest of Swedenborg’s *Heaven and Hell*,⁶⁶ but it is significant that he used Antoine-Joseph Pernety’s translation, which represents him as a mystic and an admirer of Jakob Böhme.⁶⁷ This enabled him to portray Swedenborg as “an ecstatic” whose teaching was akin to his own.⁶⁸ Indeed, postmortem messages from the spirit of Swedenborg in support of Cahagnet’s teaching, not only dominate the first volume of his *Arcanes de la vie future dévoilés* but continue under the influence of hashish in *Sanctuaire du spiritualisme*—which is dedicated to him.

From his idiosyncratic Swedenborgian perspective, in *Sanctuaire du spiritualisme* Cahagnet articulates one of the core doctrines of psychedelic mysticism, namely, the ability of psychoactives to penetrate everyday perception, to subvert hegemonic ideas learned in the material world, and to reveal the spiritual dimension of reality. Indeed, as with Ludlow, one of the most common psychedelic experiences provides further confirmation for Cahagnet, as it would do for Randolph, of the independent existence of the soul, which, when released from the body, is not subject to the usual spatial and temporal constraints. “. . . this second, I will that it shall last ten thousand years,” he states under the influence of hashish. “Well, it has lasted ten thousand years; at this moment ten thousand years are only a second; I comprehend all that, and also that it can be so. Good God! I comprehend eternity.”⁶⁹ The state induced by hashish is, he says,

so different from the material state that it is wholly impossible, while subjected to its influence, to appreciate the time that slips away, and the space that exists between the succession and continuance of these images. I felt a conviction that I hovered over the centre and above this microscopic universe, which nevertheless presented to me the semblances of form and space, producing the same effect and impression

as materiel forms and spaces. Being swayed by the idea of observation and comparison between this state and the material state, I could not but pronounce in favour of the former. The material state appeared in all respects inferior.⁷⁰

It is important to understand that Cahagnet is not here imagining an induced out-of-body experience, in the sense in which that was typically understood.⁷¹ In other words, the experience was not, strictly speaking, one of leaving his body, but rather one of going within, of experiencing the self as microcosm: “Swedenborg is right in saying that we have in us a universe, since I can clasp the universe in one embrace.”⁷² Because “the spiritual world” can be understood as “a state of thought”⁷³—which, again, he understands in terms of a larger experience of reality—the transcendence of space and time is effectively achieved in a subjective experience of gnosis. “I found myself in the spots I desired to visit, without ceasing to observe that I perceived them in myself—that they were my domain. I had got the solution I had been in search of; I understood what man was—I was a universe in miniature; and I appreciated how it was a clairvoyant could be in Egypt or China without journeying thither.”⁷⁴ There was a cleansing of the doors of perception.

Finally, for Cahagnet, all this can be interpreted in terms of divine providence: “C’est par la volonté de Dieu que j’ai cette dernière extase.”⁷⁵ It has been, he says, “demonstrated to me that these hallucinations, so called by all those who have taken this beverage, and on whom similar effects have been produced, were intended to establish sacred truths.”⁷⁶ Randolph reached a similar conclusion. Although we will see that his comments regarding the use of hashish are not entirely consistent, and while he sometimes refers to it as a “pestilent thing” or a “terrible drug,”⁷⁷ his principal thesis is that it has “a positive sphere of use.”⁷⁸ “I . . . most sacredly believe that, properly used, it is an agent especially ordained by God himself to aid man in his search for light on the nature of the human soul.”⁷⁹ He insists that throughout history, numerous esoteric thinkers have received inspiration under the influence of hashish: “Thousands of people in all ages have used it to procure insight into the mysteries that surrounded them on all sides. There is no doubt that Confucius, Pythagoras, and his disciples, the Alchemists, Hermetists, Illuminati, and mystic brethren of all ages used it to exalt them while making their researches for the Philosopher’s Stone, Secret of Perpetual Youth, and the Elixir of Life.”⁸⁰ He even argued that “Mahomet derived all his knowledge and power from its use in the cave of Mecca.”⁸¹

*Dowameskh, the Orient,
and Neoplatonic Esotericism*

As with Cahagnet, Randolph's discussions of hashish were a significant but relatively small part of a much larger body of work. As well as being "an eloquent advocate of social reform," he was, as Hugh Urban comments, "arguably the founding father of modern sexual magic."⁸² Born in 1825 to a wealthy Virginian father and a Malagasy slave mother, he was a "free black" (i.e., not a slave) who referred to himself as "the man with two souls."⁸³ Raised in the squalid urban slums of New York, orphaned at the age of seven, brought up in the almshouse in which his mother had died, and largely self-educated, he had a distinctly unpropitious early life. Although until very recently he has rarely been mentioned in surveys of Spiritualism, it is clear that he rose to prominence as a popular and prolific thinker in the burgeoning American Spiritualist movement during the 1850s and 1860s.⁸⁴ Even in Britain, his works were advertised in popular publications⁸⁵ and he was received at conferences as the "famous" and "celebrated American medium."⁸⁶ At the height of his powers, wherever he went he seemed incapable of disappointing his audience. He demonstrated an acute awareness of contemporary interests and, arguably, what would entertain those who came to see him perform. For example, at one meeting of the Charing Cross Spirit Circle in London, he caused some excitement when he delivered a trance address "inspired by Sir Humphry Davy."⁸⁷

Influential though he was within nineteenth-century Spiritualism, his life was in many respects a tragic one. While he can be considered, as Lana Finley comments, "*the* foundational figure of African American esotericism,"⁸⁸ it is perhaps not surprising that the African American community rejected him on account of his explicit experimentation with sex, drugs, and the occult. Furthermore, toward the end of his life, his fortunes shifted swiftly and significantly. In May 1873, he "suffered a serious injury that left his left arm and side partially paralyzed. Apparently, while walking over a railroad trestle in Toledo—one has to suspect that he was intoxicated—he found himself between 'two converging locomotives, one behind and one before,' and fell twenty-five feet to the ground."⁸⁹ Although he was still able to continue his work within Spiritualism, he became increasingly dependent on alcohol. He also became increasingly jealous of his young wife, Kate Corson. Eventually, believing her to have been unfaithful, he shot himself.⁹⁰

Charles Baudelaire was once unfairly attacked for being "at once a mystic . . . an erotomaniac, [and] an eater of hashish."⁹¹ To describe Randolph in these terms would not be unfair. Indeed, he was quite different from Baudelaire

in a number of respects. There is, for example, little that is novel in Randolph's writing, much of which lacks systematic thought and suggests exaggeration, even fabrication. In particular, it is clear that he drew heavily on the works of Bayard Taylor, Ludlow, Dumas, Gautier, and, of course, Cahagnet, although these sources are often unacknowledged. Plus, his discussion of his own hashish use contains basic contradictions. For instance, in 1867 he makes the following point: "People often ask me if I use hashish, and I reply, I took it twice on purpose, and twice accidentally, many years ago. I have not used it since, not that I fear its power, but because I need it not."⁹² Two years later, in 1869, in an article for the *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, responding to a person envious of his achievements who, he claimed, "thought to build himself up by tearing me down . . . telling people I was a hashish eater," he insisted that "I never took an eighth of an ounce in my life."⁹³ Another year on, and we find him claiming that while he had only experimented with the drug twice, he deeply regretted the experiences: "May God forgive me for so doing. Nothing on earth could induce me to repeat [the experiments], or suffer others to do so, for I know no possible good, but much of unmitigated evil, can result therefore."⁹⁴ While these contradictions might be overlooked, his story begins to unravel when one discovers that ten years previously, in December 1860, he had already declared that "five times—perhaps six—in my life, and that within a period of twelve years, I have experimented with Hashish upon myself, in order to reach through the gloom toward the light." Moreover, he says, "I shall do it again, when I get ready," for "I gained more light in any two of these experiments than from all the 'spiritual' experiences of my entire life—real, positive, genuine, unmistakable light—nor has my soul ever parted with one jot of that light to this day. Under its influence, I became developed to what I am—intellectually reaching by it a certain point from which my soul has never ebbed again."⁹⁵ Two months earlier, in October 1860, he had already indicated that his use was far more frequent than a mere five or six times and that within Spiritualist circles he was viewed as an authority on the subject. For example, in an address on hashish to the Boston Spiritual Conference of 1860, he began by remarking that "this Conference has, during its recent sessions, repeatedly called for my views on the question [of the spiritual value of intoxication]."⁹⁶ Moreover, in an advertisement published in the *Banner of Light* on October 6, 1860, he reveals that he had brought a large quantity of hashish from Europe, which he had been selling to persons with an interest in induced transcendence:

In reply to numerous correspondents, let me say that nearly all the Hashish I brought with me from Europe (and none other is fit to use)

is exhausted. The balance I will sell at four dollars a bottle, with full directions how to secure the celestial, and avoid the ill fantasia. I have only twenty-five cases left out of three hundred and fifty, so that those who want the genuine Oriental article must send at once to Dr. D. P. Randolph, 17 Bromfield Street, Boston, Mass.⁹⁷

It is rather difficult, therefore, to take much of what he has to say at face value. Of course, it needs to be borne in mind that, as an African American in the nineteenth century, he was continually treading on thin ice and conscious of the need to manage his public image carefully. This is evident throughout his work. In discussing his use of hashish, he must have been very aware of the prevailing cultural currents, the audience he was addressing, the need to make a living from a community that was often suspicious of drug use, and any rumors that may have been circulating about him.

As indicated above, Randolph had spent time in Europe, his first and most important trips being in 1855 and 1857, and his final journey being at some point in 1873 or 1874. During his travels he became acquainted with, as Emma Hardinge Britten commented, “the *haut ton* of European Spiritualism.”⁹⁸ It’s also clear that he became familiar with the burgeoning intellectual and esoteric currents of fin de siècle Paris, where drugs and occultism had a comfortable relationship—certainly several members of Le Club des Hachichins expressed an interest in esotericism. And, in accordance with the Romantic penchant for the Orient, Randolph also spent time in Asia Minor and the Middle East, where he claims to have garnered occult knowledge, particularly from the Nusa’iri (Ansairah/Ansayree):⁹⁹ “I became affiliated with some derishes and fakirs,” through whom “I found the road to other knowledges.”¹⁰⁰ These “devout practitioners of a simple, but sublime and holy magic” guided his “soul into labyrinths of knowledge,” which they “themselves did not even suspect the existence of.”¹⁰¹ Such claims are not untypical within occultism, betraying again the significance of Orientalism in the nineteenth century. As I have argued elsewhere, occult travelers during this period simply assumed the superiority of the Western intellect in the discernment of esoteric knowledge. Their innate intellectual insight enabled them to sift out the core mystical ideas of Oriental religion.¹⁰² As Edward Said has commented, in Western discourses about the East “the Orient is less a place than a *topos*, a set of references, a congeries of characteristics, that seems to have its origin in a quotation, or a fragment of text, or a citation from someone’s work on the Orient, or some bit of previous imagining, or an amalgam of all of these.”¹⁰³ This was certainly true of Randolph, for whom the Orient was an idea, which became a

space to be plundered. Exotic theories, symbols, and practices, which could be presented as ancient and authentic, untainted by the institutions and theologies of the West, enchanted his Romantic mind. As Ludlow put it, "We are all of us taught to say, 'The children of the East live under a sunnier sky than their Western brethren; they are the repositories of centuries of tradition; their semi-civilized imagination is unbound by the fetters of logic and the schools.'" ¹⁰⁴

The principal critic of fin de siècle culture, Max Nordau, is scathing of occultism in this respect, and it has to be said he is not entirely wide of the mark: "The greater number of 'occultists,' as they call themselves, in their treatises on occult arts and magic sciences," claim to have, "without any pretext of 'modernity,' without any concession to honest investigation of nature . . . direct recourse to the most ancient traditions."¹⁰⁵ For example, Randolph was convinced not only that he could accurately interpret Oriental religion but also that, unhindered by the underdeveloped cultures within which it was embedded, he could attain a level of proficiency beyond that available to indigenous practitioners. His work in this respect was, he believed, necessary because the world was "approaching the termination of the Christian civilization . . . bidding farewell to many of its modes, moods, sentiments, thoughts, and procedures, and . . . entering upon a new epoch of human history," which would witness the emergence of humanity's currently latent occult powers.¹⁰⁶ Hope for the future, he argued, was to be found in the "semi-civilized" Orient, unbound by the fetters of Western logic, for here there was a repository of occult knowledge that would "revolutionize the globe."¹⁰⁷ Such knowledge was prized, and Randolph confidently declared that after only a short period of time he had learned immeasurably more than teachers in the East had been able to discover for themselves: "I became practically, what I was naturally—a mystic, and in time chief of the lofty brethren; taking clues left by the masters, and pursuing them farther than they had ever been before; actually discovering the Elixir of Life; the universal Solvent or celestial Alkahest; the water of beauty and perpetual youth, and the philosopher's stone."¹⁰⁸ As noted above, while Randolph claimed that his own teaching amounted to "a resume" of what he had "acquired in the Orient," and that it differed "*in toto* from all Occidental knowledge and practice of spiritism,"¹⁰⁹ it was, in fact, little more than a development of the latter. This is conspicuously the case concerning hashish, which was almost certainly the principal ingredient in the "celestial Alkahest"—what he elsewhere refers to as "Alla-chichi" and "Dowam meskh" or "Dowameskh."¹¹⁰

His influences are conspicuous. As well as references to *The Count of Monte Cristo* and *Arabian Nights*,¹¹¹ he tells us that, "lured by what Cahagnet

wrote about the use of narcotic agents and strengthened in the hope by what Théophile Gautier, Bayard Taylor, Fitz Hugh Ludlow and various other travellers wrote regarding the use of [hashish], early in the year 1855, I was led to make two experiments.”¹¹² Indeed, their Orientalism, including their references to the legend of the Assassins, had a formative influence on his interpretation of the hashish experience. For example, his comments on “the Hashish and Dowameskh extasia and fantasia,” which he links to “dreams and their meanings,”¹¹³ betray the influence of Le Club des Hachichins and particularly Dumas, whom he claimed to know as a friend—which is possible, bearing in mind Dumas’s penchant for Spiritualism and his presence in Paris during Randolph’s visit.¹¹⁴ He used the term “fantasia” for the hashish experience, a term he would have come across in Ludlow’s work and in popular articles on the subject;¹¹⁵ the same term was commonly used by Gautier, Moreau, and no doubt Dumas.¹¹⁶ More significant, he fetishizes the Parisians’ preferred way of consuming the drug. Described by Gautier as “a greenish conserve,”¹¹⁷ it is described by Baudelaire as follows:

In Arab countries, the rich extract of hashish is usually obtained by cooking the plant’s freshly culled crowns in butter with a little water. The preparation thus arising, after evaporation has rid it of moisture, resembles a greenish-yellow pomade and retains the unpleasant odor of hashish and rancid butter. In this form, it is taken in small pellets of two to four grams. Because of its repugnant odor, which intensifies over time, the Arabs mix the rich extract into a sweet jam. The most commonly employed of these preparations is *dawamesk*, a blend of rich extract, sugar, and diverse flavorings, such as vanilla, cinnamon, pistachio, almond, and nutmeg.¹¹⁸

Dowameskh was important for Randolph—as it was for Moreau, Gautier, and Dumas—because it was an authentic Oriental preparation. Indeed, writing during his brief period as a dealer, he stresses the importance of using the highest-grade Oriental hashish—which, of course, is what he claimed to have in stock. His comments, while idiosyncratic and misleading, are worth quoting:

A deal of misapprehension exists in this country as to what this substance really is. Most people think that it is the ordinary extract of *cannabis indica*. A greater mistake was never made. “Hashish” is a slang term, used in the Orient, just as we use the term “rum” in a generic

sense. We use “rum” when we mean alcoholic stimulants of whatever shape or form; and just so does the term “hashish” stand for a whole class of exhilarants, although in European lands and here, it is mainly given to the inspissated juice of India hemp, which juice, as well as the common “extracts,” are better calculated to make those who use them, under the delusive hope of making half-hour trips to heaven by the “Hashish Express,” repent their folly, than even our modern tangle foot whiskey, which we well know will kill at forty rods. All these mongrel extracts of hemp are on a par with that staple article extract of American commerce.¹¹⁹

However, he says, there are “higher preparations, which, while coming under the general term ‘hashish,’ or exhilarants, are as superior to all the ‘extracts’ as is pure grape juice to New England ‘R.G.’”¹²⁰ In particular, there are three Oriental varieties of which hemp is the basis: “First, *affiyooni*, the common ‘drunk,’ [sic]” by which he is very likely referring to *bhang*, which, as we have seen in Chapter 4, was used recreationally as a mild intoxicant. Second (probably drawing on “The Tale of the Hashish Eater” in *Arabian Nights* and Dumas’s *The Count of Monte Cristo*), he identifies *dabreeb*, which he claims is used “in Oriental lands” as “the grand sexual invigorator of the harems. It is one of the perpetuators of polygamy, inasmuch as it keeps up the vigor to a greater length of time; and, without it, one wife would suffice one husband . . . Its effect is to increase the vital energies, make a beggar feel himself a Lord.”¹²¹ The third preparation is “dowam meskh,” which has been used “for ages by the Orientals” as a technology of transcendence, for “beyond all question,” it is “one of the most remarkable things on earth.” Claiming to “speak from experience,” he assures his readers that it

leads the soul to glory ineffable and imparts a rapture and bliss not to be measured by mortal standards. It is the “royal road” to a kind of mediumship, whose magnificent revealments are as superior to those of the so-called “state,” as is the blazing sun to a common candle; and I have no doubt that the clairvoyance it induces is as far superior to the ordinary sort, as gold is better than block tin for jewelry. True, it will not produce this holy state in all, but will in a majority of cases. It not only affects the body, but the very soul itself, and produces an ecstasy, and mental and spiritual illumination, whose unutterable glory, superlative grandeur, and awful sublimity, transcend my powers of description.¹²²

In order to establish a link with the Orient—not that his readers would have had any trouble establishing it for themselves—he asserts that *Arabian Nights* is not simply a collection of imaginative stories but is rather the result of “so many doses of hashish, penned as the visions occurred.”¹²³ That is to say, there is something of esoteric import in the very stories themselves, because “whoever wrote the *Arabian Nights*, did so under Hashish, and thousands of people in all ages have used it to procure an insight into the mysteries that surrounded them on all sides.”¹²⁴ The overall point is that at some level the Oriental provenance of hashish authenticates its significance as an occult technology of transcendence. This is why he informs his readers that the knowledge imparted in his work originated in the teachings of “dervishes and fakirs.”¹²⁵

In order to further understand his interpretation of the hashish experience, more needs to be said about the basic contours of his esoteric thought. While his teaching is rather convoluted and develops over a number of years, by 1862 his core ideas had begun to take shape. In *Dealings with the Dead*¹²⁶ (which doesn’t discuss hashish) he sets out his broadly Gnostic cosmology, consisting of a “Central Sun,” the origin of the “All,” within which God is immanently present.¹²⁷ “Coruscating out eternally from this sun are three forms of fire or light. One of these becomes matter, another is the highest form of the all-pervading and sustaining fluid of the magnetists, and the last is the stream of soul monads—thoughts of God ‘Individual monads—all men and women—are scintillas or parts of this great thought of the Mighty Thinker, God; they are coruscations from the Over-Soul, while matter is constituted of ethereal from God’s Infinite Body.’”¹²⁸ This, of course, is not far from Cahagnet’s “Platonic proposition.” But while Randolph also argues that “man is a microcosm—a universe in miniature,”¹²⁹ his vision, depicting a celestial hierarchy, is grander and more Neoplatonic than that of Cahagnet. Not only is “man a world within himself,” but “he is an entire system of worlds”; “the Soul, I soon discovered, was a Vastitude in and of itself.”¹³⁰ This is a conspicuously gnostic thesis. He refers to this interior microcosm as the “Soul-world” (distinct from the mundane “Spirit-world”), within which the soul progresses back toward its source, God. That is to say, the origin of the “monad,” which becomes a soul, is in “the Over-soul himself.”¹³¹ He provides the reader with an autobiographical account of the development of the monad, beginning with its genesis in the “heart of God.” He describes a gradual unfolding over long periods of time and through various forms of matter and animal life (including racial and cultural hierarchies)¹³² into a self-conscious, immortal soul: “I awoke to a consciousness of self, and man, the immortal, stood

revealed!”¹³³ As a self-conscious soul in possession of gnosis, Randolph can now reflect on the process: “With me there were myriads of others, for in every molecule of spiritual and material substance, was imbedded one of my brethren, all longing to escape and return to the heart of God, whence we had been sent forth to perfect his great design.”¹³⁴

Interestingly, Randolph develops a tripartite anthropology that distinguishes the soul from both the spirit and the body: “The spirit of a human being is the product of the physical body; the human being is a triplicate, composed of soul, or the thinking principle, the body, and an intermediate link, called spirit; *possessing all the organs of and shaped like the body*, and which serves to connect this last with the soul, while on earth, and being its eternal casket after death.”¹³⁵ Elsewhere, he refers to the spirit as “a phantasmal projection” and a “out-attachment of the supreme self.”¹³⁶

This esoteric anthropology does not seem to be particularly important for his understanding of hashish intoxication, however, in that his gnostic interpretation of the experience tends to be more bipartite than tripartite. On the one hand, drug-induced states enabled one to explore inner space—the “vastness of the soul,” “the microcosm,” the “universe within.” On the other hand, such states were effectively able to detach the soul from “its material envelope.”¹³⁷ Such perceptions concur with a number of occult and theological anthropologies. As Benjamin Walker commented in his own broadly esoteric study of the subject, “The idea that there abides within the physical frame of man a non-material entity, more permanent than the physical body, is one of the most persistent beliefs of mankind. This non-physical double conforms in character, thought, and feeling to the man himself. Although it coexists with the body it can separate at certain times, as during sleep or trance, and is capable of an independent existence. There are several minor variations of this basic idea.”¹³⁸

Writing in 1860, slightly before the publication of *Dealings with the Dead*, Randolph suggests that hashish was able visibly to manifest his “soul” outside his body: “I rolled up a pill of Hashish and Taraxicum [Dandelion] about as large as a small pea, took it, and retired to rest . . . I slept in the upper part of the house, with door locked.”¹³⁹ At breakfast the next day, an occupant of the house

stated that, notwithstanding the room where he slept was, as usual, securely fastened, and a light burning, yet that I was seen in that room, not as a shadow or spirit, but as an apparently opaque [*sic*] form, which reflected the light from the lamp. The figure was unmistakably mine,

but its features were bland, and wore none of the lines of care, sorrow-plowed, which mark my unfortunate body. The figure had life, for it mutely expressed solicitude for my host, a man for whom I had great regard, who is well-known as a gentleman and thinker . . . Now, the body of that soul lay alive upstairs, proving, he says, that the body “is only second cousin to the soul—a relationship which it can toss off at will.”¹⁴⁰

It could be argued that the reason this account makes no reference to “the spirit”—which is odd in the light of his claim that it is “shaped like the body”—is that in 1860 he was still in the process of working out an esoteric anthropology. In another article published the same year, he recalls a similar psychedelic experience to that described by Cahagnet:

On 29th of March, 1858, just after my return from Europe—I think it was on Sunday—being desirous of entering the clairvoyant state, and no magnetizer at hand, I took a jar of Dowam meskh from my trunk, rolled up a pill, took it, and waited quite four hours without feeling the least effect. I then returned the jar to the trunk, and walked out, thinking I had had my labor for my pains. Presently I returned to my lodgings . . . I became seized with an irresistible impulse to open the window and the blinds. I did so, and . . . lay down upon the bed. And now a tremendous experience followed; and *on this* experience I predicate *my* immortal nature, and of course that of all other human beings; for to me it passes belief—it is KNOWLEDGE [i.e., gnosis] . . . I became conscious of being entirely free from the body, and with folded arms stood looking calmly at the body on the bed. I saw it distinctly! I watched the pulses through its heart; I saw it gently breathing.¹⁴¹

In the final analysis, he concludes that while “it is by no means an easy task to define where the objective begins and the subjective terminates, hashish will, in the hands of judicious persons, be the means of solving many a knotty problem connected with the soul, its nature, and destiny.”¹⁴²

Abstinence and Ambivalence

As noted at the beginning of the chapter, many within the occult milieu, particularly within Spiritualism and Theosophy, condemned drug use, some being enthusiastic supporters of temperance.¹⁴³ As Marlene Tromp points out,

"One of the most distressing indignities for Spiritualists and damning for non-Spiritualists was the abuse of alcohol and drugs in the movement."¹⁴⁴ This was often simply because it provided an escape from the enormous stress that many mediums (particularly women) were undoubtedly subjected to, not only by fellow Spiritualists desiring confirmation of their beliefs and contact with dead loved ones, but also by rival mediums competing for clients and, of course, by detractors seeking to prove their work to be fraudulent.¹⁴⁵ As Alex Owen comments, as well as providing "temporary escape from the problem of declining powers and popularity . . . it was also one way of dealing with the pressure of constant s ances and the unremitting demand for exciting phenomena. The pressures on mediums were enormous."¹⁴⁶ For example, it was well known that Kate Fox—whose experiences with her sister on March 31, 1848, are usually identified as the inauguration of the modern Spiritualist movement—succumbed to alcoholism.¹⁴⁷ "It was rumoured as early as 1867," notes Owen, that she "had begun to drink heavily, and after her husband's death in 1881, she deteriorated rapidly. In England her reputation was discredited, and in New York she was arrested for drunkenness and idleness and her children were taken away."¹⁴⁸

Inevitably, therefore, concern arose within the movement regarding the effects of alcohol and drugs. James Burns, for example, insisted that alcohol "perverts all the magnetic sphere, turning the wholesome emanations of the system into poison, and laying the drinker open to evil spirits, besides degrading his own spirit in its operation through the body."¹⁴⁹ Likewise, the English industrialist and Spiritualist Alfred Smedley admonished believers to "banish the drink from your midst" and "do what you can to prevent its victims from being sent prematurely, or at all, into 'the land of souls'; then will your hours of spirit-communion be secure against unwelcome visitation."¹⁵⁰ The link made by Burns and Smedley between intoxicants, "evil spirits," and "unwelcome visitation" is an interesting one, in that it would seem to draw on common discourses in religion around purity and pollution, focusing particularly on the identification of healthy food with healthy spiritual communion.¹⁵¹ In other words, just as the consumption of sacred substances, such as the Eucharist, leads to "holy communion," so the consumption of unclean substances taints the spirit and leads to profane communion. The rejection of alcohol and drugs, particularly within Spiritualism, needs to be understood in relation to an emerging discourse on purity, particularly the power of food to enhance, not only a healthy body, but also a healthy spirit. As Tromp notes of the medium Elizabeth d'Esp rance, she "insisted that her sitters avoid alcohol and tobacco for up to six months prior to a s ance because their ingestion might damage the spiritual energy and thus the phenomenon of the s ance."¹⁵²

This approach was conspicuously championed by the British magnetizer Chandos Leigh Hunt, who was an ardent advocate of both temperance and anti-vaccination. Not only did she claim, with some evidence, that “drunkenness was becoming the ruin of England,”¹⁵³ but she also argued that any form of drug use should be resisted. For example, in her discussion of “the development of magnetic power,” she argued that to become an adept, “food and drink must be taken merely as necessary supports to the body. Fish, flesh, fowl, alcohol, drugs, tobacco, mineral substances, and every such perversion of the natural appetite must be religiously abstained from, and your tastes therefore redirected to the proper channels. *Good* cannot be *good* if it is joined to one particle of evil.”¹⁵⁴ In one of her lectures, subsequently published in the weekly Spiritualist journal *The Medium and Daybreak*, she related the following message delivered during a séance by a departed spirit (who “when on earth, had been a powerful biologist and magnetic healer”): “All medicines are bad, and nothing but bad. I was killed in the most orthodox fashion by beef-tea, drugs, and other abominations. The disease that was in me was cancer, but I could have remained in my body much longer than I did if the doctors hadn’t interfered with me. No, my dear, drugs are bad, and if you want to do good in the world you won’t use them.”¹⁵⁵ Moreover, she says, “he then told me that whenever he returned to earth and entered a human organism, he experienced a return of the burning cancer pains. ‘Do you feel them now?’ I questioned, eagerly . . . ‘Yes,’ he replied, ‘I do feel it now, and I must go soon or it will become too intense.’” More worryingly, before he departed he introduced her to the spirit of a sailor “who was drowned when in a state of drunkenness. He was, when on earth, a fearful drinker, and is never even now to be found sober, for he controls the organisms of many, whom he forces to drink for the purpose of satisfying his own craving for alcohol.”¹⁵⁶ Her point was not only that the effects of drugs continue to exert an influence in the afterlife, but also that departed spirits are able to induce the same addictions in those through whom they communicate in order to satisfy cravings they cannot satisfy in the spirit world. Indeed, she claimed that with the help of a benevolent spirit she was subsequently able to lure the spirit of this “drunken sailor” into a medium with the promise of an alcoholic beverage. The medium was given a purifying preparation, which Hunt claimed was an antidote to “the poisonous effects of alcohol” and which was able to release “the victim from the tyranny of this national curse.”¹⁵⁷ Having drunk the antidote, he was cured.

At this point, it is perhaps worth recalling that for many occultists interested in drugs, altered states tended to be understood in terms of a

countercultural subversion of the habitual perception of everyday life. Just as the occult world challenged the “reasonable” and subverted hegemonic constructions of reality that shaped the social prejudices of late nineteenth-century minds, so drug-induced altered states did much the same. Consequently, even when drugs and the occult were not confluent, they shared a space on the rejected margins of late nineteenth-century Victorian society, in that both tended to be linked to irrationality, profanity, immorality, and insanity. This meant that those occultists wanting to maintain a certain level of respectability had to do what they could to distance themselves from everything else commonly associated with that space. Even the eccentric Victorian novelist, playwright, and politician Edward Bulwer Lytton was concerned that his interest in the paranormal might reflect badly on his reputation. As his biographer Leslie Mitchell comments, to add it “to his other eccentricities was to invite yet more adverse comment. His fascination with the subject was inexhaustible, but he was always on the defensive.”¹⁵⁸ This is not to say that the temperance espoused by Burns, Hunt, and other occultists should be viewed cynically. While the desire for respectability was a significant factor in Victorian society, many occultists were morally and religiously opposed to drugs as agents of profanation. It was the conviction of many that alcohol in particular, as the Spiritualist James Brevitt insisted, “brutalizes man’s moral faculties, destroys his health, influences his passions, perverts his will and moral sense,” and so it should be considered “economically, socially, politically, morally, and spiritually, a blunder and a curse to millions.”¹⁵⁹

Just as there were those in the occult world who profaned drugs as a curse and others who welcomed them as a blessing, many more were ambivalent. On the one hand, they could not deny the esoteric use of narcotics in the Orient, nor could they deny their conspicuous ability to induce states of transcendence. On the other hand, they felt the force of the arguments supporting abstinence. Indeed, many occultists who promoted the development of innate human abilities and spiritual techniques felt that while drugs might be useful technologies of transcendence, they should not be relied upon and might even serve to undermine those abilities. For example, while George Wyld was initially enthusiastic about the ability of anesthetics to induce states of transcendence, as we have seen, there is evidence to suggest that he became more ambivalent. While he agreed that drugs had enabled “many pious Souls” to experience “glimpses of Paradise,” he concluded that “the ideas and powers obtained through drugs are more Magical than from God, and they are apt to lead to degradation of the Spirit. Fasting and prayer and a perfectly pure life

are the only legitimate roads to Theosophy, and it is not advisable that man from curiosity should indulge in drugs."¹⁶⁰

Emma Hardinge Britten is another good example of this ambivalence. She considers "nitrous-oxide gas, ether, and other stimulating and anaesthetic vapors" to be "powerful means of inducing . . . the trance state"; she also notes that because "Hasheesh, Napellus, Opium, the juice of the Indian Soma, or Egyptian Lotus plant, besides many other narcotics of special virtues, constitute a large portion of the preparatory exercises by which Oriental Ecstasies produce their abnormal conditions," they might be considered for use within Western occultism. On the other hand, she rarely discusses drugs and, in the final analysis, is far more concerned to identify "the all-omnipotent and restless power" of the human will in occult practice; "the power of faith, is the power of will, the essence of Soul, and Soul's action in producing forms, and emulation the creative functions of Divine Will."¹⁶¹ She commends "temperance, chastity and purity."¹⁶² Throughout the history of occultism, "the more utterly ascetic" priests and prophets were able to be, "the more exalted their spiritual powers." She concludes, "Without a certain amount of fasting and asceticism, let none expect to succeed in magical practices."¹⁶³ In her widely read book *Ghost Land* she notes that while some had discovered that "somnambulism . . . could be induced sometimes by drugs, vapors, and aromal essences . . . the best and most efficacious method of exalting the spirit into the superior world and putting the body to sleep was . . . through animal magnetism." She therefore advises her readers that although "the use of certain drugs . . . might produce temporary excitement in the person upon whom they are exercised, nevertheless . . . the effect is temporary."¹⁶⁴

Another interesting example of this ambivalence is the idiosyncratic and doughty social activist, scientist, and Baptist missionary Adele Marion Fielde. Indeed, ambivalence, rooted in an irrepressible inquisitiveness, was central to her thought. Although she was born into a warm, liberal Baptist family and was always serious about her faith, as a young woman she chose, with her parents' blessing, to join the more liberal and tolerant Universalist tradition. In her late twenties, though, she became engaged to a Baptist missionary working in Siam and agreed to return to the Baptist fold. She traveled to Siam to get married, but on her arrival in 1865 was told that her husband-to-be had died several months previously. She decided to continue his work, but she was not well received within the conservative Baptist missionary community. Apart from her critical theological mind, she liked to dance and play cards with the diplomatic community. Eventually this led to her dismissal, although she was later reinstated and reassigned to China, where she began training

Chinese women to work as Bible teachers. She also established schools, wrote a curriculum, and engaged in humanitarian work. On her retirement from the mission field, she returned to America to pursue both a career in science (providing important research into the behavior of ants) and social activism (particularly in the area of women's suffrage), becoming one of the founders of New York's League for Political Education.

While she is now generally eulogized as an important Baptist missionary, and she did indeed subscribe to Baptist theology for most of her life, it is very clear that following an early "psychic experience"—an account of which she sent to the Society for Psychical Research in 1907¹⁶⁵—she was always ready to look beyond the doctrines of her tradition to the burgeoning occulture of fin de siècle America.¹⁶⁶ Later in life she became interested in Spiritualism and increasingly fascinated by questions raised by psychical research. Moreover, in 1868, while still working as a missionary in Siam, she began secretly experimenting with hashish.¹⁶⁷ In 1888, following her retirement from the missionary society, she produced an account of her experiences as part of what she understood to be a scientific investigation into "the problem of consciousness."¹⁶⁸ This is significant for a number of reasons, not least because a summary of the article was republished by Britten in her journal *Two Worlds* under the title "The Psychic Effects of Hashish"—although she masculinizes her as "Mr. A. M. Fielde . . . the well-known chemist."¹⁶⁹ Fielde suggests both that hashish can contribute to the scientific verification of psychic phenomena and also that there is a "close relationship between states of real insanity and transitory affections induced by psychic poisons."¹⁷⁰

The record of her initial experience of hashish intoxication, which seems to have increased her interest in the occult, repeats many of those discussed above, focusing particularly on the manifestation of a "second self": "about ten minutes after laying down the pipe, I suddenly became conscious of dual being. My usual self was awake, was aware of all my actual circumstances, was perceiving with clearness and recalling with precision the facts of my commonplace existence. I knew that I was lying on my back in a chamber of a native house, at ten o'clock at night, and was observing with open eyes the details in my familiar surroundings."¹⁷¹ Furthermore, she recalls that her "double was standing in an arched and pillared hall, whose walls, furniture, and drapery were all encrusted with tinted gems, that shone with soft and exceeding brilliancy . . . In the midst of this radiance and beauty I was infinitely joyous. Every atom in me quivered in unspeakable spiritual bliss, and," she notes, "I said, 'This is the house not made with hands, and I am now in heaven.'"¹⁷² In other words, she seems to have interpreted the experience

in terms of either astral travel or a foretaste of celestial rapture. Whatever the case, she understood it in terms of a profound mystical experience.

The liberation of her “second self” also seemed to evoke an experience of pantheism, which she describes in a way that suggests the influence of Transcendentalism. For example, she records her “double” morphing into “an automatic musical instrument, a complex arrangement of strings and keys, trembling in rapture while sending forth an enchanting melody.”¹⁷³ “My duplicate became a boundless sea, ravishingly cool, utterly free, rising in vast billows under an illimitable sky, and feeling in every drop of every wave the transport of my own pulsations. Then I became a continent, with wide meadows and verdant forests. A breeze swept over me and ruffled all my leaves. I felt my vital forces working in every blade of grass and every spreading tree, sending them gently upward. The thrill of growth was in them all, and growth was ecstasy.”¹⁷⁴ The influence of Spiritualism is evident in her recollection that during intoxication she understood clairvoyance and hypnotism. Moreover, the article betrays the confluence of Christian theology and Idealism evident in the work of “Professor Ludlow, the hasheesh-eater of Albany,”¹⁷⁵ with which she was clearly familiar and which informed her interpretation. The point is that while she is aware of the problems drugs caused¹⁷⁶ and does not commend their use, she does not deny that, under certain conditions, they induce experiences that cannot be ignored; indeed, they may very well prove to be spiritually and philosophically beneficial.

Theosophical Reflection

A few years after Fielde had begun experimenting with hashish, members of the Theosophical Society discovered the drug and reached similar conclusions. From a relatively early period in its history, the Theosophical Society advised against the use of drugs as detrimental to spiritual progress.¹⁷⁷ But while contemporary discussions typically cite early Theosophical literature to support this position,¹⁷⁸ there is good evidence to suggest a more inquisitive attitude. Indeed, some, such as the German Theosophist Wilhelm Hübbe-Schleiden, traveled to India to pursue *ganja*-induced “God-intoxicatedness.”¹⁷⁹ That said, he became increasingly disillusioned with the results. He was also concerned that his experiments were at odds with the growing focus on temperance within the society, a view that was particularly encouraged in India by both Annie Besant and Angarika Dharmapala.¹⁸⁰ Even in more conservative quarters, late into the twentieth century there is some evidence of an acknowledgment of the esoteric potential of psychoactive substances. Geoffrey Hodson is perhaps typical in this respect. On the one hand, he warned spiritual seekers during the

1960s and 1970s against using psychedelics: “Such is the great and devastating harm being done to individuals and nations by illicit drug use, that absolutely nothing should be said to encourage people to experiment with them.”¹⁸¹ On the other hand, he noted that “under certain circumstances, it is possible to expand or should I say ‘shift’ consciousness, and even the causal plane (higher mental) can sometimes be accessed in this way.” However, he advises that while some people may be able to profit from their psychedelic experiences,

generally, the information that comes through with the average person is quite wild and unstructured and therefore not of much use for a genuine spiritual aspirant Continued use, in fact sometimes even a single dose of a drug like LSD, can permanently damage the delicate mechanism of consciousness in the brain, especially relating to the brain’s switchboard of the thalamus and hypothalamus along with the pineal and pituitary glands, and by so doing prevent any real spiritual progress from proceeding in that lifetime.¹⁸²

More significant, for him, is that drugs can lead to “the destruction of the astral shield or web.”¹⁸³ This had concerned Charles Webster Leadbeater earlier in the century¹⁸⁴ and led Hodson “to severely warn people: if you want spiritual experience get it by the safe means of meditation. Unfortunately, for many young people they want instantaneous results and therefore continue to experiment with drugs—a very serious mistake!”¹⁸⁵

Leadbeater, like Besant, was an enthusiastic supporter of temperance.¹⁸⁶ Not only did he argue against alcohol and tobacco but he was suspicious of all drugs, whether recreational or medicinal: “If we administer drugs of any sort, at the best we can act only upon the physical nerve, and through it to some limited extent upon the fluids surrounding it; whereas mesmerism acts directly upon the fluids themselves, and so goes straight to the root of the evil.”¹⁸⁷ It is unsurprising, therefore, that he warns against attempting to “throw open the doors which nature has kept closed” by the “use of alcohol or narcotic drugs.” This is because they interfere with the “etheric web”—a layer around the human aura that separates the physical and the astral bodies. It is important that this web remains intact because it prevents the “thought forms” and entities of the astral plane from intruding, uninvited, into the field of waking consciousness. The problem, says Leadbeater, is that

certain drugs and drinks—notably alcohol and all the narcotics, including tobacco—contain matter which on breaking up volatilizes, and some of it passes from the physical plane to the astral

When this takes place in the body of man these constituents rush out through the chakras in the opposite direction to that for which they are intended, and in doing this repeatedly they seriously injure and finally destroy the delicate web.¹⁸⁸

With these comments in mind, it is interesting to turn to the work of Theosophy's principal thinker, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky. While it can be used selectively to support abstinence, there is also a clear appreciation of drugs as technologies of transcendence. Even though she insisted that "a Sadhu who uses *ganja* and *sooka* —intoxicant drugs—is but a sham ascetic. Instead of leading his followers to *Moksha*, he does but drag them along with himself into the ditch . . . A pretty business that, for a religious teacher!",¹⁸⁹ she also indicated that she was herself not a stranger to this "pretty business." To begin with, unlike Leadbeater, she "rolled and smoked cigarettes with marvelous rapidity."¹⁹⁰ She even claimed that the effects of smoking tobacco were spiritually beneficial: "My most precious thoughts come to me in my smoking hours. My mind is then tranquil, and I feel lifted from the earth, and I close my eyes and float on and on, anywhere or wherever I wish."¹⁹¹ More significant is that there is good evidence that she used cannabis—and may even have been referring to its effects in that last comment. For example, Hannah Wolff, after a meeting with her, recorded in a letter originally sent to the editor of the *Better Way* that it was not only "evident from the first that she smoked tobacco to great excess," but also clear that she "was addicted to the use of hashish." Indeed, Wolff described how "she, several times, endeavored to persuade me to try the effect upon myself." She also reported that Blavatsky related to her that "she had smoked opium, seen its visions and dreamed its dreams, but that the beatitudes enjoyed in the use of haschish were as heaven to its hell. She said she found nothing to compare with its effects in arousing and stimulating the imagination."¹⁹² This account is supported by the comments of Blavatsky's friend Albert Rawson. Not only does he confirm that "she had tried hasheesh in Cairo with success," as had Taylor and Randolph,¹⁹³ but he also confirms that "she again indulged in it in [New York] under the care of myself and Dr. Edward Sutton Smith, who had had a large experience with the drug among his patients."¹⁹⁴ According to Rawson, she once declared to him that "hasheesh multiplies one's life a thousand fold. My experiences are as real as if they were ordinary events of actual life. Ah! I have the explanation. It is a recollection of my former existences, my previous incarnations. It is a wonderful drug, and it clears up a profound mystery."¹⁹⁵

It is not surprising, therefore, that regardless of her Orientalist comments concerning the sham sadhus who use *ganja*, elsewhere in her work she is more

approving of the use of psychoactive substances. For example, in *Isis Unveiled*, she argues that some plants have “mystical properties in a most wonderful degree.” Unfortunately, “the secrets of the herbs of dreams and enchantments are . . . lost to European science.” They are, she says, “unknown to it, except in a few marked instances, such as opium and hashish.”¹⁹⁶ While in the modern Western world “the psychical effects of even these few upon the human system are regarded as evidences of a temporary mental disorder,” there are other interpretations of altered states available to the occultist: “The women of Thessaly and Epirus, the female hierophants of the rites of Sabazius, did not carry their secrets away with the downfall of their sanctuaries. They are still preserved, and those who are aware of the nature of *Soma*, know the properties of other plants as well.”¹⁹⁷ This last point regarding *soma* is, I suggest, an important one for Blavatsky, in that her interest in psychedelics was informed not just by the undeniable effects of hashish and opium but also by references to them in Vedic literature (see Chapter 8). This, above all else, authenticated the use of psychoactives within esotericism: “In the Rig Veda, Indra is the highest and greatest of the Gods, and his Soma-drinking is allegorical of his highly spiritual nature.”¹⁹⁸ Although she had a limited grasp of Vedic literature, it seems clear that the religious significance of *soma* as a psychoactive substance informed her understanding of narcotics: “in mystical phraseology,” *soma* is “the name of the sacred beverage drunk by the Brahmins and the Initiates during their mysteries and sacrificial rites.” She continues:

The “Soma” plant is the *asclepias acida*, which yields a juice from which that mystic beverage, the *Soma* drink, is made. Alone the descendants of the Rishis, the *Agnihotri* (the fire priests) of the great mysteries knew all its powers. But the real property of the true Soma was (and *is*) to make a new *man* of the Initiate, after he is *reborn*, namely once that he begins to live in his *astral* body.¹⁹⁹

She argues that as well as being a substance able to induce “mystic visions and trance revelations,”²⁰⁰ *soma* can be identified with “the Elixir of Life.”²⁰¹ This is possibly because she imagined that it produced altered states similar to those she had experienced on hashish. For example, she insisted that a person under the influence of “the occult force in the *Soma*”²⁰²

finds himself both linked to his external body, and yet away from it in his spiritual form. The latter, freed from the former, soars for the time being in the ethereal higher regions, becoming virtually “as one of the gods,” and yet preserving in his physical brain the memory of

what he sees and learns. Plainly speaking, *Soma* is the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge forbidden by the jealous Elohim to Adam and Eve or *Yahve*, “lest Man should become as one of us.”²⁰³

In other words, the altered states produced suggest its potency as an elixir of immortality and an impartor of gnosis. In “receiving of the sacred drink,” a person also receives, at that moment, “revelation . . . by no human agent.” This is why, in India, “the initiated received ‘Soma,’ sacred drink, which helped liberate his soul from the body,” and why “in the Eleusinian mysteries it was the sacred drink offered at Epoptheia.”²⁰⁴

This understanding of *soma* seems to be extended to other psychoactive substances. She argues that the plane of “astral consciousness . . . is the limit of the vision of the ordinary medium. To reach it, a non-mediumistic person must be asleep or in a trance, or under the influence of laughing gas [nitrous oxide], or of some drug.”²⁰⁵ That is to say, she implies that contemporary drugs can produce esoterically significant trance states. “Even in that early period and before the ‘Rochester’ wave of Spiritualism [i.e., the modern Spiritualist Movement inspired by the Fox sisters] had swept over any considerable portion of civilized society in Europe, it was shown that the same phenomenon could be produced by means of various narcotics and drugs.”²⁰⁶ Recognizing that some of her readers might be timid about sharing such experiences for fear of social censure, she refers them to the Parisian drug culture, where there are “bolder people” who fear “neither a charge of lunacy nor the unpleasant prospect of being regarded as wards in ‘Old Nick’s Chancery.’” In particular, she mentions “Théophile Gautier, the famous French author.”

Few are those acquainted with the French literature of that day, who have not read the charming story told by that author, in which he describes the dreams of an opium-eater. To analyse the impressions at first hand, he took a large dose of hashish. “My hearing,” he writes, “acquired marvellous capacities: I heard the music of the flowers; sounds—green, red and blue—poured into my ears in clearly perceptible waves of smell and colour. A tumbler upset, the creaking of an arm-chair, a word whispered in the lowest tones vibrated and resounded within me like so many claps of thunder. At the gentlest contact with objects—furniture or human body—I heard prolonged sounds, sighs like the melodious vibrations of an Aeolian harp.”²⁰⁷

If some occultists were unable to concur with such ideas and expressed reservations about drug use,²⁰⁸ there were several significant others informed by

transgressive ideas emanating from fin de siècle Paris for whom the notion of a technology of transcendence was too tempting to resist.

Discourses of Decadence

Situated between Victorian culture and modernism, with its center of gravity in the 1890s, roughly speaking, the fin de siècle spanned the years between 1870 and 1914. That said, the term came to refer not simply to a period of time but rather to a set of social and cultural values that became prominent leading up to and following the turn of the twentieth century. More specifically, it identifies a moment of crisis in Western modernity around which there was not only an increase in recreational drug use but also a number of significant currents in the development of occult thought and practice. Eugen Weber sums up the core theme: “Sooner or later, beginnings suggest ends, and ends suggest decline.”²⁰⁹ The fin de siècle suggested a “tragic generation,” as W. B. Yeats referred to it.²¹⁰ It suggested decadence and death; it suggested the decline of one world and the birth of another; it suggested abrogation and transgression. This led to the emergence of a discourse that had widespread implications. As Mark Micale has commented, “The sheer number of cultural fields that underwent creative transformation during the years 1870–1914 is remarkable, as are the horizontal cultural interconnections among developments in the arts, sciences, and philosophy.”²¹¹

Within the cultural melting pot of the fin de siècle, a number of prominent themes emerged, organized around the ideas of decline and rebirth. First, contemporaries reflecting on the innovative thinking during the period tended to discuss it in terms of aestheticism, exemplified in the doctrine that art exists for itself alone—“*l’art pour l’art*” (art for art’s sake). That is to say, unlike many in Victorian society, they did not believe that art needs to be morally improving; it should have no didactic or utilitarian function; it need serve no other purpose than simply being the creation of an artist and the object of an individual’s gaze. Philosophically rooted in Romanticism and Kant’s insistence on the autonomy of aesthetic standards, the principal ideas within the milieu of the fin de siècle challenged prevailing utilitarian social philosophies and sought to provide a way out of the darkness, ugliness, and philistinism of the industrial age. Although there was no “aesthetic movement” as such, a key feature of this discourse was its challenge to traditional values through a foregrounding of sensuality and the promotion of artistic, sexual, political, and religious experimentation.

Second, this fundamentally countercultural trajectory tended to be identified as one of “degeneration”—a reversal of evolutionary progress expressed

in cultural formations. That said, when the term *fin de siècle* was first coined in France, it wasn't entirely clear what was meant. "It could denote 'modern' or 'up to date.' But novelty went with uncertainty and a certain insecurity, and eventually a certain decline of standards. A shoemaker could be praised for being a traditional cobbler rather than *fin de siècle*. Soon the negative connotations of the term drove all others out."²¹² For some the term represented a cultural disease that was eating at the heart of society; for others it represented freedom from stifling moral constraint and a license to experiment; and for yet others it was simply a source of titillation. For example, a popular 1888 play called *Fin de Siècle* explored the sordid world of sex, corruption, and murder. "A new financial weekly, *Le Fin de Siècle*, promised spicy revelations of financial scandals . . . Moral anarchy, or what was so described, subverted ideas and standards hitherto taken for granted, at least in public. There were no more beliefs, vice was everywhere."²¹³ No wonder, says Weber, "that growing numbers, especially within the Catholic Church, believed that they saw the Devil's hand behind the accelerating decay."²¹⁴ This popular negative interpretation of the term was finally fixed in the public imagination by the publication of Nordau's influential and widely read critique of *fin de siècle* culture, *Degeneration* (1892).²¹⁵ Nordau developed a rather crude, provocative theory of social entropy as an explanation for the changes taking place. Picking up on the theme of degeneration developed by, among others, Bénédict Morel, he popularized the notion that civilizations eventually terminate in decadence and decline. One of his theses was that an overly refined society betrays the "disease" of an "effeminate style," which was an inevitable consequence of estrangement from instinctive masculinity.²¹⁶ Art, he argued, was the principal agent of decadence. Focusing his analysis on the work of authors such as Oscar Wilde,²¹⁷ he concluded that *fin de siècle* culture had become blighted and unhealthy: many of its most prominent creative voices were openly contemptuous of traditional customs and morality, and this had introduced a creeping rot into the fabric of society. He insisted that Baudelaire, as well as being "an eater of hashish and opium . . . felt himself attracted in the characteristic fashion by other degenerate minds, mad or depraved, and appreciated, for example, above all authors, the gifted by mentally-deranged Edgar Poe, and the opium-eater Thomas De Quincey."²¹⁸

Such derangement was particularly evident in the contemporary penchant for the occult, which was characteristic of a "state of mind, in which a man is straining to see, thinks he sees, but does not see—in which a man is forced to construct thoughts out of presentations which befool and mock

consciousness like will-o'-the-wisps or marsh vapours—in which man fancies that he perceives inexplicable relations between distinct phenomena and ambiguous formless shadows.”²¹⁹ Nordau was concerned that, having lost their moral moorings, people were exhibiting attitudes and behaviors that betrayed an increasing inclination to organize their lives around what they observed in art. Life was now imitating art. There was, in other words, an explicit manifestation of, and commitment to, ideas free-floating in occulture.

Third, drawing some of these lines of thought together, it is worth noting that this type of reactionary rhetoric merged easily with the celebration of “decadence” within aestheticism, which identified a set of related characteristics: intense refinement; dandyism; the valuing of artificiality over nature; a focus on *ennui* rather than on moral earnestness or the value of labor; a commitment to experimentation in spirituality, sexuality; and, of course, an enthusiasm for psychoactive substances. In a famous essay published in 1893, the British poet Arthur Symons summed up what he identified as “the decadent movement”:

After a fashion it is no doubt a decadence; it has all the qualities that mark the end of great periods, the qualities that we find in the Greek, the Latin, decadence: an intense self-consciousness, a restless curiosity in research, an over-subtilizing refinement upon refinement, a spiritual and moral perversity. If what we call the classic is indeed the supreme art—those qualities of perfect simplicity, perfect sanity, perfect, proportion, the supreme qualities—then this representative literature of today, interesting, beautiful, novel as it is, is really a new and beautiful and interesting disease.²²⁰

However, as is perennially the case, while some worried about *fin de siècle* culture and the future of an overly luxuriant, diseased society, there were others who were bewitched by the possibilities of what might emerge out of an abandonment to transgression. Following Durkheimian logic, just as there are always individuals and institutions committed to protecting “the sacred” in society, so there are others equally committed to celebrating transgression and the countercultural potential of the profane. As Symons observed, “Healthy we can not call it, and healthy it does not wish to be considered.”²²¹ Many delighted in the experimental corruption, introspection, and excess of *fin de siècle* culture. “Sin and vice, at least in certain circles, were no longer forbidden fruit, but the measure of a civilization whose refinement was mirrored in its corruption.”²²²

This was particularly evident in the fiction of Joris-Karl Huysmans, whose most notorious works, *À rebours* (*Against Nature*, 1884) and *Là-bas* (*Down There/The Damned*, 1891), both scandalized and fascinated their first readers in equal measure.²²³ The former, which is generally believed to be the “poisonous book” that so fascinated Dorian Gray in Wilde’s novel, focused almost exclusively on the interior life of its decadent, reclusive protagonist, Jean des Esseintes.²²⁴ Despising bourgeois nineteenth-century French society, Esseintes sought to construct his own ideal, sensual world. “The life of the senses,” says Wilde, “was described in terms of mystical philosophy. One hardly knew whether one was reading the spiritual ecstasies of some medieval saint or the morbid confessions of a modern sinner.”²²⁵ Huysmans epitomized the deliberate confusion of the sacred and the profane, which was so conspicuous in fin de siècle culture. The narrative of *À rebours* is driven along by the protagonist’s obsession with discovering new sensations. As Dennis Denisoff says, “Readers become less shocked with each new creation as their conventional assumptions become increasingly dislodged.” It doesn’t simply celebrate depravity but “threatens to dissolve readers’ long-held moral assumptions.”²²⁶ *Là-bas* is more explicit in this respect, in that it presents a lurid and profane challenge to the religion and morality of the nineteenth century by guiding the reader into the worlds of medieval and contemporary Satanism. As with *À rebours*, it reflects Huysmans’s own disillusionment with society and desire to withdraw to some profane heterotopia. In a letter to a friend, he explained that he wanted to discover “some compensation for the horror of daily life, the squalor of existence, the excremental filthiness of the loathsome age we live in.”²²⁷ In *Là-bas*, as Richard D.E. Burton discusses, Huysmans gives his readers “access to a curious and disturbing (anti)religious underworld, part real, part inverted, in which spiritualism, sexual perversion, and madness intersect, populated by men and women who, thirsting for some kind of absolute gratification but despairing of or hostile to orthodox Christianity, turn to Satanism as a way out of the ‘materialist prison house’ of late nineteenth-century France.”²²⁸ While the world of the occult, secret rituals, and devil worship is, in *Là-bas*, hardly utopian, it is the depiction of a heterotopia in which contemporary hegemonies are rejected. It represents both a Romantic-gnostic yearning to escape from late nineteenth-century French society and a critique of that society. The stability and security that many found in reason and religion was overturned within the culture of the fin de siècle. Drugs and the occult were central to this process.

*W.B. Yeats, Maud Gonne, Drugs,
and Fin de Siècle Occultism*

Romantic Idealist notions of dream states and theories of the imagination helped to shape the interpretation of drug-induced altered states within late nineteenth-century occultism. Indeed, as Michael Saylor has noted, “numerous *fin-de-siècle* writers . . . promoted the Romantics’ valorization of the imagination as a faculty that was equal to, rather than subordinate to reason.”²²⁹ Many occultists understood that, as Owen comments (quoting the occultist Edmund William Berridge’s 1892 *Some Thoughts on the Imagination*),

“Imagination is a reality,” and that “when the Imagination creates an image—and the Will directs and uses that image, marvelous magical effects might be obtained.” Magicians of the Golden Dawn were taught that “Imagination is the Creative Faculty of the human mind, the plastic energy—the Formative Power,” but that it must be harnessed to the magician’s will in an intense display if controlled creativity of powerful and desired magical effects are to be achieved.²³⁰

Likewise, the self-experimentation of scientific thinkers such as Davy and Moreau, the exotic experiences described by Ludlow and members of Le Club des Hachichins, the metaphysical speculation emerging out of Spiritualism and Theosophy, and the Orientalist lens through which drugs were typically viewed all contributed to the understanding of psychedelic states during the *fin de siècle*.

One of the first occult orders of the *fin de siècle* to experiment with drugs was the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor, a short-lived secretive order established to teach practical occultism. Known to have been operating in the mid-1880s, it was indebted to the ideas of Randolph—although the relationship with him is not explicitly spelled out in their extant materials²³¹—and drew some of its small membership from the Theosophical Society. Central to their work was clairvoyance and the ability to transcend the body in the form of an “astral double.” The practice of clairvoyance also included “the Sleep of Sialam,” which was, apparently, an “exalted conscious trance state in which the initiate communed with the Powers, Potencies, and Intelligences of the celestial hierarchies.”²³² It would be surprising if drugs had not been used, bearing in mind their availability and popularity within European mesmerism. Although the official materials of the H.B. of L. (as it was known) make

no mention of induced transcendence, not only is there evidence in the writings of key figures, such as Peter Davidson and Max Theon, but, in a letter to an American neophyte, Rev. William Alexander Ayton describes the circumstances of his own initiation as follows:

An Altar had to be extemporised, lamps burning, flowers on it, incense burning, and invocation of the elements, what purported to be the real Soma juice drunk at a certain stage. The Adepts were supposed to be present in Astral form. I hesitated very much to drink this drug sent to me by a perfect stranger, & I thought of omitting it. However, I opened the bottle & smelt of it. All my life I have been used to drugs, & I at once recognized this. I knew its effects were most powerful, but I decided to take it. Whether it was hallucination produced by this drug I know not, but I was conscious of another presence, tho' I cannot say I absolutely saw any form. I was fully 3 hours at it from midnight.²³³

While the H.B. of L. was not particularly prominent, its interest in psychoactive substances can also be found among members of a far more significant occult organization, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn—although, unlike the H.B. of L., it did not sanction the use of drugs in initiation rituals or, indeed, encourage drug use at all.²³⁴ Founded by three members of the *Societas Rosicruciana* in Anglia, Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers, William Wynn Westcott, and William Robert Woodman, drawing on the rituals and teaching within Freemasonry and Rosicrucianism, the Golden Dawn focused on disciplined ritual practice in the service of an “ancient wisdom.” It was established, as Robert Gilbert comments, “in response to a demand among occultists for a society in which the occult arts and sciences could be practiced rather than simply studied.”²³⁵ It did this by resurrecting a Rosicrucian magical tradition that united practical occultism with metaphysical speculation in a way that addressed late Victorian concerns regarding progress and future regeneration. While it was, says Owen, “a child of its moment,” it also did “more than any other Order to influence the development of modern magic in Britain, Europe, and the United States during the course of the twentieth century. It was without doubt the hidden jewel in the crown of the *fin de siècle* ‘mystical revival.’”²³⁶

Part of this influence lay in its ability to attract some of the most creative artists and thinkers of the *fin de siècle*. The “Hermetic science” taught by the Golden Dawn—which was, as Arthur Waite put it, “a method of transcending the phenomenal world, and attaining to a reality which is behind the

phenomena"²³⁷—could be, some believed, augmented by the use of psychoactive substances. In particular, Allan Bennett, Aleister Crowley, William Butler Yeats, and Maud Gonne all experimented with psychoactives as occult technologies, as did a number of their acquaintances, including the Victorian sexual psychologist Havelock Ellis and the British writers John Addington Symonds, Ernest Dowson, and particularly Arthur Symons.²³⁸

This, of course, is hardly remarkable in the milieu of the *fin de siècle*. Symons notes that he “took hashish fairly frequently in Fountain Court and in Paris” because “the sensations” it induced “were wonderful,”²³⁹ and this stimulated much speculation about the significance of intoxication. With reference to Dowson, he comments on “that slow intoxication, that elaborate experiment in visionary sensations.”²⁴⁰ Likewise, Ellis became fascinated with contemporary ethnographic reports of “the mescal rite”—the ritual consumption of peyote—which he considered to be “the chief religion of all the tribes of the Southern plains of the United States . . . Even Christian Indians regard Hikori, the cactus god, as co-equal with their own divinity, and make a sign of the cross in its presence.” He continues:

At all the great festivals, Hikori is made into a drink and consumed by a medicine man, or certain selected Indians, who sing as they partake of it, invoking Hikori to grant a “beautiful intoxication”; at the same time a rasping noise is made with sticks, and men and women dance a fantastic and picturesque dance—the women by themselves in white petticoats and tunics—before those who are under the influence of the god.²⁴¹

Although he didn’t share the Native American interpretation of altered states, his own experiments with the “mescal button”²⁴² convinced him of its ability to stimulate the imagination: “Mescal intoxication may be described as chiefly a saturnalia of the specific senses, and, above all, an orgy of vision. It reveals an optical fairyland, where all the senses now and again join the play, but the mind itself remains a self-possessed spectator.”²⁴³ Partly because of the use of rhythmic percussion in Native American rituals, he decided that, by self-experimentation, he would “test the influence of music.” He found that mescal was able to induce a form of synesthesia—that is, the sounds produced visual phenomena.²⁴⁴ Music “stimulated the visions and contributed greatly to my enjoyment of them. It seemed to harmonize with them, and, as it were, support and bear them up.” Remarking upon a phenomenon now recognized by psychedelic musicians,²⁴⁵ he noted that “a certain persistence

and monotony of character in the music was required in order to affect the visions, which then seemed to fall into harmony with it, and any sudden change in the character of the music would blur the visions, as though clouds passed between them and me."²⁴⁶ Also, as Davy had done, he invited artists and writers to subject themselves to his psychedelic experiments in order that they might provide another lens through which to scrutinize the nature of the visionary phenomena induced: "It occurred to me that it would be interesting to have the experiences of an artist under the influence of mescal, and I induced an artist friend to make a similar experiment."²⁴⁷ He also "made experiments on two poets, whose names are both well known." One was likely Yeats, whom Ellis found particularly fascinating because he was "interested in mystical matters, an excellent subject for visions, and very familiar with various vision-producing drugs and processes." Unfortunately, although "he obtained the visions," because his heart was "not very strong . . . he found the effects of mescal on his breathing somewhat unpleasant; he much prefers haschisch, though recognising that its effects are much more difficult to obtain."²⁴⁸

Whereas Ellis's interest in induced altered states was broadly psychopharmacological, Yeats's was firmly esoteric, rooted in an interest in the occult and folklore that was both long-standing and enormously important to him. Although for many years his occultism bemused scholars of his work who tended to treat it as an idiosyncratic and irrational digression, it is now generally acknowledged to be "vital to and inseparable from his aesthetic concerns."²⁴⁹ As he himself reflected, "Some were looking for spiritual happiness or some form of unknown power, but I had a practical object. I wished for a system of thought that would leave my imagination free to create as it chose and yet make all that it created, or could create, part of the one history, and that the soul's."²⁵⁰ He eventually found this system in the ceremonial magic of the Golden Dawn and acknowledged Mathers as an important influence on his development as a poet: "It was through him mainly that I began certain studies and experiences, that were to convince me that images well up before the mind's eye from a deeper source than conscious or subconscious memory."²⁵¹ However, he had begun along this path during his childhood in Sligo. Not only did the stories of Irish folklore he heard as a small boy serve as a resource for enchantment throughout his life, but, as Denis Donoghue comments, "his uncle, George Pollexfen, was an astrologer"—who also became a member of the Golden Dawn. "His friend, the artist and poet George Russell was a seer. Aunt Isabella Pollexfen gave Yeats a copy of A. P. Sinnett's *Esoteric Buddhism* (1884)."²⁵² Indeed, Sinnett's Theosophical work was particularly significant

in that it seemed to sharpen his focus. As Harper has argued, “His renditions of the kinds of stories that had long fascinated him” demonstrate the influence of Theosophy, the formal study of which can be dated to June 16, 1885, on which date he, with Russell and a number of friends, including Charles Johnson, founded the Dublin Hermetic Society. Two years later, during the Christmas season of 1887, having been greatly impressed by a meeting with Blavatsky, he joined the Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society. Over the next couple of years, however, his interests began to shift toward ceremonial occultism, and on March 7, 1890, at the invitation of Mathers, he became a member of the Golden Dawn, a move that had the effect of alienating him from the Theosophical Society.²⁵³ Later in life, following the demise of the Golden Dawn, he continued his interests as a member of the Order of the Stella Matutina and also as an associate member of the Society for Psychical Research (1913–1928).

Given that he was a Romantic occultist during the *fin de siècle*, it is unsurprising that he became interested in drug-induced transcendence. Because, as Harper has commented, “from start to finish” his work “suggests the pre-eminence of what can be envisioned over what can be rationally explained,” the psychoactive properties of certain drugs were, at some level, always going to appeal to him.²⁵⁴ This is evident in statements by Yeats such as the following: “Much as a hashish eater will discover in the folds of a curtain a figure beautifully drawn and full of delicate detail all built up out of shadows that show to other eyes, or later to his own, a different form or none, Swedenborg discovered in the Bible the personal symbolism of his vision.”²⁵⁵ Though relatively little is known of Yeats’s occultism, even less is known about his experiments with drugs, beyond a few isolated comments that weave esotericism and intoxication together.²⁵⁶

Having been introduced to hashish by Symons in 1890, he began experimenting within the occult milieu of *fin de siècle* Paris:²⁵⁷

I took the Indian hemp with certain followers of Saint-Martin on the ground floor of a house in the Latin Quarter. I had never taken it before, and was instructed by a boisterous young poet, whose English was no better than my French. He gave me a little pellet, if I am not forgetting, an hour before dinner, and another after we had dined together at some restaurant. As we were going through the streets to the meeting-place of the Martinists, I felt suddenly that a cloud I was looking at floated in an immense space, and for an instant my being rushed out, as it seemed, into that space with ecstasy.²⁵⁸

This led to a concern regarding the possibility of becoming detached from oneself while under the influence of drugs and losing agency. While he tells us that he became himself again following this experience, he notes that “the poet” who had provided him with hashish “was wholly above himself, and presently he pointed to one of the streetlamps now brightening in the fading twilight, and cried at the top of his voice, ‘Why do you look at me with your great eye?’”²⁵⁹ While this might be dismissed as the enthusiasm of youthful intoxication, for Yeats it was an indication of the dangers of drugs. He recalls an incident when “a Martinist ran towards me with a piece of paper on which he had drawn a circle with a dot in it, and pointing at it with his finger he cried out, ‘God, God!’ Some immeasurable mystery had been revealed, and his eyes shone.” Yeats was impressed by such intimations of revelation from beyond, but he was also concerned by the outbursts. “The boisterous poet, who was an old eater of the Indian hemp, had told me that it took one three months growing used to it, three months more enjoying it, and three months being cured of it.” His point was that “these men were in their second period,” which accounted for their enthusiasm, but, he insists, “I never forgot myself, never really rose above myself for more than a moment, and was even able to feel the absurdity of that gaiety.”²⁶⁰ It would be disastrous for his work, he reasoned, should his mind and spirit be impaired by drugs. “Alas that the hangman’s rope should be own brother to that Indian happiness that keeps alone, were it not for some stray cactus, mother of as many dreams, an immemorial impartiality and simpleness.”²⁶¹ As Mary Catherine Flannery has commented, “Drugs, like any other excess, are for Yeats the same as death; hashish and peyote are escapes not available to him. He will never enjoy ‘immemorial impartiality,’ as he was never fully part of the tragic generation.”²⁶² In other words, he tended to observe *fin de siècle* decadence at a distance. Although he did use drugs again, in “The Stirring of the Bones”²⁶³ we find him, as Flannery notes, “affirming consciousness and magic as the sources of inspiration,” rather than psychoactives. She continues, “Yeats knew what would not only save him from absorption [in the tragic culture of decadence] but also make him a great poet: the conscious use of rituals which would induce visions and help him to incarnate ideas from the *Anima Mundi*” (i.e., the neoplatonic “world soul”).²⁶⁴

Regardless of Yeats’s cautious approach to drugs, there is little doubt that he valued the few experiences of induced transcendence that he had shared with his muse and the object of his affection, Maud Gonne. Both were bewitched by the occult potential of dream states and intrigued by the prospect that these might be induced. Indeed, as Donoghue comments, the most

erotic moments in her letters to him “are those in which the theme is a shared vision, a dream of spiritual union. Maud was keen on such intimacies with Yeats, it was only physical conjunction with him she avoided.”²⁶⁵ The notion that drugs might foster such spiritual intimacy was appealing to both. They first took hashish together while in Paris in 1894.²⁶⁶ Then, in a letter to Yeats in 1897, Gonne notes that she had received a “dream drug” from him, which was almost certainly the mescaline he had acquired from Ellis.²⁶⁷ In 1898, they attempted spiritual union while geographically separated, first with “mescaline on 16 September,” and then with “hashish four days later.”²⁶⁸

Gonne indicates that she very occasionally took hashish alone and on one such occasion managed to induce an out-of-body experience. In a chapter in her autobiography entitled “Occult Experiments,” she notes, “Once, when I had got hold of some haschish, that strange Indian drug, I took the prescribed dose and nothing happened.” So, not unreasonably, she “took a much larger dose.” This time, following a period of sleep and slight paralysis in her legs, she “saw a tall shadow standing at the foot of [her] bed.” She continues: “It said, or more exactly, the thought drifted through my mind: ‘You can now go out of your body and go anywhere you like but you must always keep the thought of your body as thread by which to return. If you lose that you may not be able to return.’” Immediately, she tells us, “I wished to see my sister, Kathleen, and at once I was standing by her bed. She was asleep and her little son, Toby, was asleep beside her. I tried to make her know I was there by putting my hand upon her, but she slept on.” Gonne then began to notice that the house she had traveled to appeared unfamiliar. It was certainly not her sister’s home in Dublin. She explored further and discovered her brother-in-law sleeping in what should have been the children’s room. She then recalled the advice that she should not “lose the thought” of her own body if she wished to be reunited with it. “I thought of it. I had a vague, fleeting impression of sea and clouds and wind and was back in my room in Paris and saw my body asleep on the bed; then, with the sensation of falling from a height, I was really lying in my bed, conscious of my heart pounding queerly.” The next day she wrote to her sister. “My letter, sent to her Dublin house in Ely Place, had been forwarded to her at Howth.” Her sister replied, confirming her experience, for “Toby had been ill; she had taken him to convalesce at Howth in the little house in which we had lived as children He slept in her bed. Her husband slept in the room opposite. It was all exactly as I had seen.” This hashish-induced experience thus led her to the conviction—as it had done for Cahagnet and Randolph—“of the possibility of being able to leave the body and see people and things at a distance and to travel as quick as thought.”

If the practice “could be developed,” she noted, then “how interesting and how useful!”²⁶⁹ But, as was common within much Victorian occultism, she insisted that while drugs were powerful aids to transcendence, they could only ever be a step along the way to the development of one’s innate psychic abilities, as they were invariably detrimental to those abilities. While experimentation with such powerful technologies promised to be “interesting” and “useful,” in the final analysis, she says, “I wanted to do it by the power of will and not with haschish.”²⁷⁰ (We will see that many came to a similar conclusion at the end of the 1960s.)

The Highs and Lows of a Drug Fiend

Another prominent member of the Golden Dawn who adopted a rather more enthusiastic and less cautious approach to drugs was Aleister Crowley, the epitome of the fin de siècle occultist.²⁷¹ He gloried in accusations of Satanism, delighted in tabloid vilifications of him as “a Wizard of Wickedness,” “the Wickedest Man in the World,” and the “King of Depravity,”²⁷² and, with reference to “the Beast” (Θηριον, *Therion*) in the biblical Book of Revelation, he occasionally referred to himself as “the Great Beast” or the “Master Therion.” In several respects, he was also a good example of “the tragic generation” eulogized by Yeats. While Yeats did not have him in mind—considering him to be an “unspeakable mad person” who had produced, “amid much foul rhetoric,” “about six lines . . . of real poetry”²⁷³—the significant personal wealth Crowley had inherited²⁷⁴ afforded him the space to express himself, to pursue any whim or appetite that occurred to him, and to embrace decadence, in much the same way that Huysmans recounts the perverse pleasures of the wealthy and reclusive aesthete Esseintes.²⁷⁵ Likewise, just as Yeats’s tragic generation was haunted by disillusionment, ennui, and despair, often as a result of the persistent quest for intense experiences, so too there is a shadow across Crowley’s life. His exhaustive search for moments of ecstasy did not always end happily and, in the case of drugs, led to the debilitating pain and ignominy of addiction.

While there are references to drugs and short discussions of their effects scattered throughout his work, only a small percentage of the Crowleian corpus specifically addresses the subject, the principal works being three essays on the psychoactive significance of drugs, “The Psychology of Hashish” (1909), “Absinthe—The Green Goddess” (1917), and “Ethyl Oxide” (1923)²⁷⁶; three discussions of legislation and addiction, “Cocaine” (1917), “The Great Drug Delusion” (1922), and “The Drug Panic” (1922); a Burroughsian diary of his

struggle with addiction, “Liber XVIII: The Fountain of Hyacinth” (1921)²⁷⁷; a short story, “The Drug” (1909); and a hastily written novel, largely based on his own experiences and relationships, *Diary of a Drug Fiend* (1922).²⁷⁸ Moreover, gathered together under the title “The Herb Dangerous,” in successive issues of his journal *The Equinox*²⁷⁹ he published “A Pharmaceutical Study of Cannabis Sativa” (March 1909) by E. P. Whineray, a London pharmacist who often supplied him with drugs; his own essay “The Psychology of Hashish” (September 1909); his translation of Baudelaire’s “The Poem of Hashish” (March 1910); and extracts from Ludlow’s *The Hasheesh Eater* (September 1910).²⁸⁰

From this material it quickly becomes apparent that Crowley was impressed by the ability of drugs, despite all their problematic baggage, to produce what the psychologist Abraham Maslow would later call “peak experiences”—“an illumination, a revelation, an insight.”²⁸¹ “Hashish . . . gives proof of a new order of consciousness, and (it seems to me) it is this *prima facie* case that the mystics have always needed to make out, and never have made out.”²⁸² Consequently, as Martin Booth discusses, he came to believe that “the taking of drugs—at least, the right ‘magical’ drugs—should precede all magical ceremonies because they made access to mystical experiences all the easier.”²⁸³ More specifically, they were treated as powerful technologies in the service of “scientific illuminism,” the core idea behind which was distilled into the motto “The method of science; the aim of religion.”²⁸⁴ Essentially, arguing that the approaches of both science and religion had failed in their attempts to access the true nature of reality, Crowley sought to develop a *via media* in the form of a system that combined the methodologies of both. Psychoactive substances were useful in such a system because, under the right conditions, they were able to induce reproducible (i.e. “scientific”) moments of revelation. That is to say, apart from being peculiarly effective in the production of altered states, they equipped the user with a certain level of control. One could, with reasonable accuracy, determine not only the time and place of a mystical experience but also its intensity and nature. Because of this, psychoactives were enormously appealing to a mystic wanting to apply the scientific method to occult practice. He was particularly impressed and influenced by the research of William James into nitrous oxide intoxication and induced mysticism. “Since 1898,” he tells us, “I have been principally occupied in studying the effects of various drugs upon the human organism, with special reference to the parallelisms between psychical phenomena of drug-neuroses, insanities, and mystical illuminations. The main object has been to see whether it is possible to produce the indubitably useful (see William

James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*) results of 'ecstasy' in the laboratory."²⁸⁵ While Crowley was no James, this does indicate something of the direction of his thought regarding the use of drugs in occult practice.

This brings us to his Thelemic philosophy. Keenly focused on the importance of "the will" (from the Greek θέλημα, *thelema*), he famously insisted that "'Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law.' 'Love is the law, love under will.' 'There is no law beyond Do what thou wilt.'"²⁸⁶ Central to this broadly egoistic philosophy was the notion of the "True Will," which expressed his conviction that all beings have their own purpose, to which, at the expense of all else, they must devote themselves. This is not to say that Crowley's egoism advocated simply doing only what one wants; rather, it insisted on the discovery of one's purpose in life—in accordance with the cosmic laws of the universe—followed by the fulfilling of that purpose. In short, one's True Will must be identified and realized. "Magick"—the term he used for his system, which he defined as "the Science and Art of causing Change to occur in conformity with the Will"²⁸⁷—enabled the identification and realization of the True Will.²⁸⁸ Flowing from this, his declaration that "every man and woman is a star" suggested the potentiality within all of us for glorification.²⁸⁹ As long as we follow our proper course, the struggles of life that inhibit progress toward glorification will dissolve. Although Crowley would discover that drugs can lead to a dulled and diminished will, he was also convinced that in the right hands (and head) they could be incorporated into the Thelemic system.

I have been sucking up the vapour of Ether for a few moments, and all common things are touched with beauty. So, too with opium and cocaine, calm, peace, happiness, without special object, result from a few minutes of those drugs. What clearer proof that all depends on state of mind, that it is foolishness to alter externals? A million spent on *objets d'art* would not have made this room as beautiful as it is just now—and there is not one beautiful thing in it, except myself. Man is a *little* lower than the angels; one step, and all glory is ours.²⁹⁰

Concerning cocaine, while he acknowledges the shadow of addiction, he argues that if it is used carefully, it can be a valuable technology of transcendence: "The happiness of cocaine is not passive or placid as that of the beasts; it is self-conscious. It tells man what he is, and what he might be; it offers him the semblance of divinity, only that he may know himself a worm. It awakes discontent so acutely that never shall it sleep again. It creates hunger."²⁹¹

If drugs are able to create a hunger for glorification and mystical experience, then, as far as Crowley was concerned, they can be an effective means to an important end. This is essentially Israel Regardie's thesis concerning Crowley's understanding of the esoteric significance of drugs. An influential interpreter of Crowleyn magic, having worked as his secretary for four years,²⁹² Regardie argues that he was primarily interested in the ability of drugs to induce "a foretaste or some adumbration of the mystical experience towards which he was focusing all his energies."²⁹³ That is to say, Crowley believed that "if the Neophyte could taste the glory and the ineffability of his goals by means of an introductory dose of hashish, he would then be willing to embark upon a lifelong program of self-discipline to make the divine an intrinsic part of his being."²⁹⁴ That said, he was also very keen to avoid accusations of attempting "a short cut by the means of such drugs as opium and hasheesh."²⁹⁵ It was, insists Regardie, "*never* the intention of Crowley at any time, to use drugs as a substitute for the body-mind-discipline, which he insisted upon beyond all other things. This was the furthest notion from his mind."²⁹⁶ While we will see that the evidence suggests that it was not always the furthest notion from his mind, it is true that he at least claimed that he had "no use for hashish save as a preliminary demonstration that there exists another world attainable—somehow."²⁹⁷ His argument was that "since human nature is human nature after all, and since people tend to become discouraged and, from there, give up the struggle for enlightenment," then, as Regardie insists, "if they could be given some inkling of what the ineffable experience could be like, perhaps . . . they would be willing to overcome their own inertia and despondency—and work. It was the carrot to be waved in front of the donkey's nose. But waved *only long enough* to get the donkey started."²⁹⁸ As Gonne had intimated, while drugs are useful technologies, the aim should always be to move beyond them and to develop one's innate spiritual potential and magical skill. Unfortunately, while Gonne managed to do this, Crowley did not.

Crowley's struggle with drugs is evident in the traces of ambivalence toward them in his work. There were a number of reasons for this ambivalence. First, it is clear from his discussions of drug legislation, as well as a number of other comments scattered throughout his work, that he was conscious of the growing social concern about drug use. As George Viereck, the editor of the *International*, put it in a revealing disclaimer at the beginning of Crowley's article "Cocaine," "We disagree with our contributing editor on some points," noting that "according to police statistics," the drug "is beginning to be a serious menace to our youth."²⁹⁹ While they disagreed "on some

points,” Crowley did not deny that this was a concern. Moreover, while psychoactives were associated with the creative and decadent culture of the fin de siècle, with artists, intellectuals, and the spiritual avant-garde, they quickly became identified with the uncultured, brutal world of the lower classes and “youthful thrill-seekers.”³⁰⁰ For example, Crowley observed that “every other Chinese laundry is a distributing centre for cocaine, morphia, and heroin. Negroes and street peddlers also do a roaring trade. Some people figure that one in every five persons in Manhattan is addicted to one or other of these drugs.”³⁰¹ While he disputes the figures, he says, “the craving for amusement is maniacal among this people who care so little for art, literature, or music, who have, in short, none of the resources that the folk of other nations, in their own cultivated minds, possess.”³⁰² This clearly bothered him, for it was not an area of society that he wanted to be associated with.

Second, as indicated above, the use of drugs as esoteric technologies was resisted as a profane shortcut by many within the occult milieu. For example, Regardie notes that Mathers “frowned upon all such methods, preferring the classical secret techniques of mind and spiritual training.”³⁰³ Elsewhere, he makes the point that “the Golden Dawn never recommended the use of any consciousness expanding drugs.”³⁰⁴ Crowley was aware of this, and he felt it important that his contemporaries understand that his principal focus was the development of techniques of transcendence rooted in the disciplined practice of magick, rather than intoxication. Regardie insists that this “fundamental premise was stated over and over again, in a hundred different ways.”

It was *never* that the drug experience *per se* could possibly replace the basic mental and spiritual discipline that he stood for, and which all previous occult teachers insisted upon What was required beyond all other things was endurance and persistency—the discipline of the body-mind system, in the technical phases of the Work itself, to provide the basic necessary tools through which the mystical state would be reinstated, re-experienced, and re-explored.³⁰⁵

While Crowley did claim this, in practice he found the immediacy of induced experiences difficult to resist. For example, concerning the experience of astral projection, he recommends that it “should be preceded by a (ceremonial) ‘loosening of the girders of the soul.’”³⁰⁶ How to do it is the great problem. I am inclined to believe in drugs.”³⁰⁷

Finally, because his focus was on the development of “the will,” he was highly critical of those whose pursuit of the True Will had been compromised.

He was adamant that “only weaklings fell victim to a drug.”³⁰⁸ This, of course, meant that his own experience of “the restless wretchedness of a morphineuse deprived of the drug” was a deeply humiliating one.³⁰⁹ There were times when, like most addicts, he simply denied that he had a problem and insisted to his followers that drugs had no power over him. To an extent he seems to have believed this, and consequently he struggled with the brutal reality of addiction. For example, he argued that “there are three main classes of men and women: (1) Afraid to experiment with anything . . . (2) Enslaved by anything that appeals to them. (3) Able to use anything without damaging themselves.”³¹⁰ He claimed to belong to the final category, even asserting that, in the service of science, he had attempted to induce addiction through persistent use but failed, such was the strength of his will: “I attempted to produce a ‘drug-habit’ in myself. In vain . . . I was always able to abandon the drug without a pang.”³¹¹ This, of course, was nonsense—and, indeed, frequently repeated nonsense. The truth is that his addiction had an increasingly detrimental impact on his life and work. “There is no harm,” he argued, “in man’s experimenting with opium-smoking, but the moment he ceases to examine, to act from habit without reflection, he is in trouble.”³¹² This comment arose out of his own experience of “trouble,” his own inability to overcome acting from habit. For example, during his time at the Abbey of Thelema—the temple and spiritual training center that he had established in Cefalù, Italy—he “bought drugs from a Palermo pusher named Amatore and made them available to all residents.”³¹³ This led to problems. Although Richard Kaczynski claims that Crowley’s stated goal was “not to encourage drugs, but to make them so readily accessible that he removed all temptation,”³¹⁴ in actual fact, as John Symonds³¹⁵ comments, “his over-indulgence in heroin and cocaine had an adverse effect on the . . . Abbey’s discipline.”³¹⁶ In 1922, he left the abbey for a period of rehabilitation in Fontainebleau, which did not succeed. Some indication of the nature of this struggle is provided in a diary entry he wrote at this time:

I, Baphomet 666, wishing to prove the strength of my will and the degree of my courage have poisoned myself for the last two years and have succeeded finally in reaching a degree of intoxication such that withdrawal of the drugs (heroin & cocaine) produce a terrible attack of the “Storm Fiend.” The acute symptoms arise suddenly, usually on waking up from a nap . . . Medium dose Heroin. This was a real indulgence in the worst sense of the word. It has occurred very frequently that I have taken a dose for reasons at present utterly unfathomable.

(This is a confession indeed, for me, who claims to be the foremost living psychologist!) There is not the slightest discomfort to be removed, or the faintest wish to reach some still superior state. It is an absolutely perverse impulse There has been a constantly increasing indifference to matters of ordinary health, cleanliness and vanity. I seem hardly to know what the state of affairs is, as to defecation, etc There are numerous very alarming mental symptoms, but all really reduce to one only, the feeling that nothing is worthwhile. It is a sort of "philosophical laziness." . . . There is a dull malaise, combined lack of any interest in anything and the knowledge that cocaine would put me right at once. Cocaine is barred altogether of course. The reason is this: The hunger for it is strictly moral and a man ought to be able to master his moral passions. Physical torture, on the other hand, simply throws the moral apparatus out of gear; one cannot be blamed for committing suicide or doing any other foolish act when the pain is so strong as to prevent the manifestation of the Will altogether Only cocaine could help me and I won't take it Medium dose. My feeling is that the safest course is to arrange a mild jag; sufficient to overcome my general lassitude, which is beginning to make me open to violent suggestion to throw the whole cure overboard.³¹⁷

Because he had "not much to thank" heroin and cocaine for, he was disturbed that he could not resist them: "It is for these and these only that I hanker."³¹⁸ "Heroin was," as Symonds recalls, "essential to his existence. He needed, too, rather a lot of heroin owing to his body's toleration: seven or eight or more grains a day, a phenomenal amount really if one considers that the usual dose is one-sixteenth or one-eighth of a grain. More than once I had steadied him while he injected himself in the armpit."³¹⁹ In desperation he "wrote to Dr. Edward Cros . . . telling him the whole story" and requesting that he "call and fix a sanatorium." However, he added that he intended to "direct [his] own treatment."³²⁰ Why? Because, as the prophet of Thelema, he did not believe that he needed medical assistance, despite the severity of his addiction: "To submit to medical treatment would be to destroy my whole theory and blaspheme the Gods whose chosen minister I am!"³²¹ Predictably, he failed, and he must have struggled enormously as a result, in that his addiction placed a question mark against his authority as a teacher of Thelema. Indeed, many of Crowley's ostensibly objective comments about the relationship between addiction and the will can be understood as oblique references to his own torment: "To possess the supply of a drug," is to be "the master, body and soul,

of any person who needs it. People do not understand that a drug, to its slave, is more valuable than gold or diamonds.”³²² While, on the one hand, he was fascinated by the power of drugs to stimulate the imagination and to produce ecstatic states—to “rise to the cloudless and passionless bliss of the philosopher,” to “behold the fantastic glories of fable, and those a thousandfold,” and to “perceive the heart of Beauty in every vulgar and familiar thing”³²³—one the other hand, he was painfully aware that they eroded the power of the will, which was so central to his thought.

For much of the latter half of his life, drugs haunted and enslaved him. While it has been argued that he eventually managed to free himself from heroin in 1924,³²⁴ it has to be acknowledged that even if he did (which is highly unlikely), by 1940 he had succumbed to it again, continuing to use it until his death in 1947. Whatever the truth of Crowley’s private habit, it would be naive to believe that he entirely escaped his longing for heroin once it had found its way into his system.³²⁵ As William Burroughs put it, “junk wins by default If you have never been addicted, you can have no clear idea what it means to need junk with the addict’s special need. You don’t decide to be an addict. One morning you wake up sick and you’re an addict I have learned the junk equation Junk is not a kick. It is a way of life.”³²⁶ Crowley understood this, and we misunderstand him if we do not. Like Burroughs, he knew that “a man who has once experienced the drug-life finds it difficult to put up with the inanity of normal existence. He has become wise with the wisdom of despair.”³²⁷

The “drug-life” began for Crowley when he was introduced to the esoteric significance of psychoactives by his friend, mentor, and fellow member of the Golden Dawn, Allan Bennett. Although it should be noted that George Cecil Jones, who had first introduced Crowley to the Golden Dawn and encouraged his interest in the occult, was an industrial chemist with a knowledge of pharmaceuticals, it was almost certainly Bennett, who was also a chemist by training, who introduced them into his life as technologies that might be useful for the practice of magic. While Bennett could have, like Jones, led a materially comfortable life, his commitment to occultism and then Buddhism, as well as chronic asthma, led to frequent periods of poverty. As we have seen was the case with others during the nineteenth century, it was the medication prescribed to alleviate his suffering that revealed to him the mystical potential of drugs.³²⁸ As Crowley commented, “His cycle of life was to take opium for about a month,” then “when the effect wore off . . . he had to inject morphine. After a month of this he switched to cocaine, which he took until he began to see ‘things’ and was then reduced to chloroform.”³²⁹ As Bennett’s life

became increasingly organized around periods of intoxication, so he became convinced that “there exists a drug whose use will open the gates of the World behind the Veil of Matter.”³³⁰ Crowley was so impressed by his gnostic thesis that once Bennett had “imparted to him the rudiments of his pharmacological knowledge,”³³¹ he began in earnest experimenting with opium, cocaine, ether and hashish in an attempt to gain access “behind the veil of the universe” where “live the mystic and the true artist.”³³² (Such substances were all legally available in Britain until the passing of the Dangerous Drugs Act in 1920.) Together, says Crowley, he and Bennett “for many months . . . studied and practiced Ceremonial Magic, and ransacked the ancient books and MSS of the reputed sages for a key to the great mysteries of life and death.” He continues:

Through the ages we found this one constant story. Stripped of its local and chronological accidents, it usually came to this—the writer would tell of a young man, a seeker after Hidden Wisdom, who, in one circumstance or another, meets an adept; who, after sundry ordeals, obtains from the said adept, for good or ill, a certain mysterious drug or potion, with the result (at least) of opening the gate of the Other-world. This potion was identified with the Elixir Vitae of the physical Alchemists, or one of their “Tinctures,” most likely the “White Tincture” which transforms the base metal (normal perception of life) to silver (poetic conception).³³³

Crowley would later bemoan the project as a series of “fruitless attempts to poison ourselves with every drug in (and out of) the Pharmacopœia,” because, “like Huckleberry Finn’s prayer, nuffin’ come of it.”³³⁴ This reflects the ambivalence in Crowley’s work. It was disingenuous, though, because it is clear that his experiments with Bennett, whom he referred to as “a flawless genius,”³³⁵ were important to him and informed his thinking about drugs. Far from nuffin’ coming of it, a great deal came of it, as we have seen.

Crowley was an ardent admirer of Richard Burton, the Victorian Orientalist, travel writer, and translator of *Arabian Nights*, and in 1903, with his new wife, Rose Kelly, he began his own journey to the Orient. During these and subsequent travels, not only did he betray the influence of Burton’s interests and idiosyncrasies³³⁶ but he claims that in at least one respect he went beyond the great man “who solved nigh every other riddle of the Eastern Sphinx.”³³⁷ Whereas Burton used hashish and regarded it as “no more than a vice,”³³⁸ Crowley had discovered its true significance. In India,

for example, he relates how he was taught “systems of meditation” in which “lesser Yogis employed hashish . . . to obtain Samadhi, that oneness with the Universe.”³³⁹ While this was no doubt true, arguably more significant was what he was reading during this period: “I also had the advantage of falling across Ludlow’s book, and was struck by the circumstance that he, obviously ignorant of Vendantist and Yogic doctrines, yet approximately expressed them, though in a degraded and distorted form.”³⁴⁰ In other words, he claims not only that hashish was used to attain states of transcendence that were normally the result of disciplined meditation, but also that accounts of cannabis intoxication in the West come very close to describing the experiences of mystics in the East. (Such insights bring him within the orbit of Aldous Huxley’s *The Doors of Perception*.) Nevertheless, he is careful to insist that hashish should be used as a tool *along with* “discipline and training in the meditative arts.”³⁴¹ Although we have noted Regardie’s argument that Crowley understood hashish primarily as an initial introduction to mystical experience, he does concede that he taught users to “expect far better results with its use than if the tool of meditation alone was used, and vice versa.”³⁴² Indeed, “there might be occasions, even when one had acquired supreme skill in mediation, when an additional fillip or stimulus provided by judicious and temperate use of hashish would enable one to surmount the sterility and grimness of the long-protracted discipline, to soar exaltedly above the armored restriction of the ego-functions into the ineffable.”³⁴³ In this respect, cannabis, “the grass of the Arabs,” can be considered a “holy herb . . . which might be appointed for . . . Enlightenment.”³⁴⁴ He insists that while some might accuse him of “pure sloth or weariness,”³⁴⁵ of laziness in occult practice, he used hashish as a technology to “loosen the girders of the soul.”³⁴⁶ In 1907, in an analysis of Crowley’s philosophy (which is actually more of an erudite exercise in ingratiation), John F. C. Fuller claims that this was in fact the case: “Hasheesh may in some way be the loosener of the girders of the soul, but this is all.”³⁴⁷ Whether this was all it was for Crowley is doubtful. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that he found in hashish a shortcut to transcendence, and despite his emphasis on the importance of skill, knowledge, and sober ritual, he was never quite able to leave the drug behind. It is unsurprising to discover not only that he struggled to meditate but also that he found hashish to be a significant help in realizing his spiritual goals.

I was aware of the prime agony of meditation, the “dryness” . . . which hardens and sterilizes the soul. The very practice which should flood it with light leads only to darkness more terrible than death . . .

Meditation therefore annoyed me, as tightening and constricting the soul. I began to ask myself if the “dryness” was an essential part of the process. If by some means I could shake its catafalque of Mind, might not the Infinite Divine Spirit leap unfettered to the Light? Who shall roll away the stone?³⁴⁸

The answer, of course, was the “burning daughter of the Jinn”—hashish.³⁴⁹

It is perhaps worth noting that of some significance was the common perception of transcending space and time, which invested his experience with an otherworldly significance. As he notes in his magnum opus, *Magick: Liber ABA*, Book 4, hashish enables us to understand that “Time and Space are forms by which we obtain (distorted) images of Ideas. Our measures of Time and Space are crude conventions, and differ widely for different Beings.”³⁵⁰ Hashish intoxication “involveth the Mystery of the Transcending of Time, so that in One Hour of our Terrestrial Measure did I gather the Harvest of an Aeon, and in Ten Lives I could not declare it.”³⁵¹

While Crowley is often regarded as having “experimented with more drugs more frequently than anybody in the West before the Neurological Revolution of the 1960s,”³⁵² and although he became addicted to cocaine and heroin, when it came to inducing mystical states, his drug of choice was peyote. At the turn of the twentieth century, it was known as *anhalonium lewinii*, a term that acknowledges the groundbreaking research of Louis Lewin, the German pharmacologist who in 1888 published the first scientific report on the psychoactive properties of the cactus.³⁵³ His work led to much interest in peyote and eventually to the isolation of mescaline by Arthur Heffter in 1897 and its synthesis by Ernst Späth in 1919. Crowley’s interest, therefore, was part of a growing fascination with peyote in Europe and America. Bearing in mind that Ellis had introduced Yeats to it and Bennett probably knew of it, it is likely that Crowley first heard of it during his time in the Golden Dawn. He soon familiarized himself with the available research and even made a trip to Parke-Davis, the American company that had originally secured samples of the cactus: “Parke-Davis were charming and showed me over their wonderful chemical works . . . They were kind enough to interest themselves in my researches in *Anhalonium Lewinii* and made me some special preparations on the lines indicated by my experience which proved greatly superior to previous preparations.”³⁵⁴ Although he makes surprisingly few references to the drug—sometimes simply referring to it in code as “31”³⁵⁵—there is little doubt that it was a significant part of his work for several years. Indeed, he indicated that he intended to publish a study of the effects of peyote in *The Equinox*,

entitled “Liber 934: The Cactus.” While it was never published and probably never written, he intended it to be “an elaborate study of the psychological effects produced by *Anhalonium lewinii* (Mescal buttons), compiled from the actual records of some hundreds of experiments; with an explanatory essay.”³⁵⁶ This is supported by a marginal note regarding *anhalonium lewinii* that Crowley scribbled in the Abbey of Thelema’s library copy of *Diary of a Drug Fiend*: “I made many experiments on people with this drug in 1910, and subsequent years.”³⁵⁷ This claim was subsequently repeated to the botanist Arthur Bernhard-Smith. In a short note Bernhard-Smith published in the *British Medical Journal*, he recalls that he had himself “carried out a series of personal experiments, in conjunction with Dr. Havelock Ellis, on the effects of the reputed deliriant mescal (*Anhalonium lewinii*), making use of a strong infusion of seeds or ‘buttons’ of the plant.” He then notes that, “acting on the advice of a literary acquaintance, a latter-day magician well-known in the West End of the London, who claims to have administered this form of the drug to hundreds of his clients, I proceeded to a dose.”³⁵⁸ The magician, of course, was almost certainly Crowley. In 1913 Crowley commented that the results of peyote intoxication “have not as yet been thoroughly studied,” and that “it is my immediate purpose to repair this neglect.”³⁵⁹ It hardly needs mentioning that frequently taking a psychoactive substance and making a thorough study of it are two very different activities. As well as regularly using the drug himself, he managed to intoxicate numerous people at his *anhalonium* parties.³⁶⁰ At one of these psychedelic esoteric soirees he even introduced the drug to the celebrated author Katherine Mansfield³⁶¹ and at another in New York to Theodore Dreiser.³⁶² Such was his growing relationship with peyote that he began referring to it as “the elixir introduced by me to Europe”³⁶³—which, of course, was not true.

The fact that he referred to it as an “elixir” is significant, in that it located it firmly within the tradition of esotericism as a visionary and alchemical technology that could be employed during rituals. Likewise, he also refers to it as a “libation.” For example, during a performance of his theatrical *Rites of Eleusis*, which was composed of seven invocations, a “Cup of Libation” was passed around his audience. Indeed, Crowley notes that the very idea of performing “rites” came to him during a summer spent taking peyote with Commander Guy Montagu Marston.³⁶⁴

The *Rites of Eleusis* presented the ideal occasion for a psychedelic happening, in that it was intended, as Sutin notes, “to unite the performers and the audience in an ecstasy that would, as had the mysteries of ancient Eleusis, reveal the divine capacities of the awakened human soul.”³⁶⁵ In the event, the *Rites*

actually had little to do with the ancient ceremonies of Eleusinian Mysteries, which have been linked with the ritual use of psychoactives.³⁶⁶ Crowley read poetry, Waddell played violin, and Victor Benjamin Neuburg danced as the intoxicated audience gradually slipped into an enchanted world. At one early performance of the “Rite of Luna” at Crowley’s London flat at 124 Victoria Street, we are told that the “Cup of Libation” was “a potent liquid mixture consisting of alcohol, fruit juices, possibly some type of opium derivative, and most certainly an infusion of . . . peyote.”³⁶⁷ Raymond Radclyffe, a reporter for the *Daily Sketch* who attended one of the ceremonies, recorded the following:

The Master of Ceremonies . . . ordered a brother to “bear the Cup of Libation.” The brother went around the room, offering each a large golden bowl full of some pleasant-smelling drink. We drank in turn. This over, a stalwart brother strode into the centre and proclaimed “The Twelfold Certitude of God.” Artemis was then invoked by a greater ritual of the Hexagram. More Libation. Aleister Crowley read us the Song of Orpheus from the Argonauts. Following this song we drank our third Libation, and then the brothers led us into the room . . . By this time the ceremony had grown weird and impressive, and its influence was increased when the poet recited in solemn and reverent voice Swinburne’s glorious first chorus from “Atlanta.” . . . Again a Libation; again an invocation to Artemis.

Following more poetry, Neuburg’s dance, and Waddell’s music, Radclyffe recorded that, intoxicated, “we were thrilled to our very bones” and “most of us experienced the Ecstasy which Crowley so earnestly seeks.” It was “a really beautiful ceremony—beautifully conceived and beautifully carried out.”³⁶⁸

Crowley’s use of drugs within ritual contexts was, of course, not novel. As noted above, it can be traced back to his experiments with Bennett. Symonds makes an interesting observation concerning a comment in one of Bennett’s notebooks, dated 1899—when he was living with Crowley in his flat on Chancery Lane. Bennett had begun to use cocaine during ceremonies for “the evoking of gods and the conjuring up of demons,” because “it doubtless helped the materialisations.”³⁶⁹ With this in mind, it is interesting to read the following in *Liber AL vel Legis* (*The Book of the Law*), which Crowley claimed had been dictated to him by an incorporeal entity he referred to as Aiwass: “I am the Snake that giveth Knowledge & Delight and bright glory, and stir the hearts of men with drunkenness. To worship me take wine and strange drugs whereof I will tell my prophet, & be drunk thereof! They shall not harm ye at

all.”³⁷⁰ Symonds notes that while a sex rite was often used as an introduction to the “Alamantrah Working”—the aim of which was to summon and communicate with an entity called Alamantrah—when this failed, drugs were taken, “usually *anhalonium*, but sometimes opium or hashish.”³⁷¹ There is, in other words, an overlap between Bennett’s use of intoxication in liturgical contexts and Crowley’s use.

Similarly, there is also evidence that he used hashish in his “Augoeides invocations.” The relatively obscure Neoplatonic term *αυγοειδης*—which refers to luminosity—appears infrequently in modern occultism. Crowley probably lifted it from Bulwer Lytton’s Rosicrucian novel *Zanoni*, in which it is discussed in a technical footnote on the “mystical Platonists.”³⁷² Lytton’s novel, which relates the story of Zanoni and Mejnour, the two last survivors of an ancient sect, describes them as seers who have managed to transcend time, freeing themselves from earthly passions and being unaffected by the ravages of death and decay. They were able to do this because they had found a way of living continually in the realm of the spirit, an advanced state that only the most accomplished mystics can hope to achieve. While the path to this state is extraordinarily difficult, requiring absolute devotion in order to survive the daunting trials of mind and body, Lytton also suggested that the answer might be found in a “golden elixir” that “some of the alchemists enjoyed.”³⁷³ The suggestion of an “immortal elixir,” an “elixir that baffles death”³⁷⁴ which, moreover, enables a person to invoke spiritual entities (as Bennett had claimed),³⁷⁵ was certainly of interest to Crowley. Also of interest to him was the notion of Augoeides as the individual “sphere of the soul,” which, says Lytton, “is luminous when nothing external has contact with the soul itself; but when lit by its own light, it sees the truth of all things and the truth centred in itself.”³⁷⁶ Although at times Crowley understood the Augoeides invocation in terms of communion with a distinct spiritual entity, his Holy Guardian Angel, at other times he used it to refer to his “Higher Self”/“Genius” (concepts that were common in Theosophy). Furthermore, as Marco Pasi comments, “the ritual of the Augoeides is interesting because it took place almost exclusively in an imagined ritual space”³⁷⁷—which, of course, Crowley understood drugs to be peculiarly effective in evoking.

It is worth noting that the Augoeides invocation formed part of the “Abramelin Operation” as set out in *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage*—a translation by Mathers of an esoteric German grimoire, a French edition of which he had discovered in the Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal in Paris. The text—which, interestingly, Mathers notes was known to Bulwer Lytton and Éliphas Lévi—included its own founding myth, which identified it as the

magical system of Abramelin/Abra-Melin, an Egyptian mage who passed on his knowledge to Abraham von Worms, a medieval Jewish scholar. Essentially, the ritual consists of a series of laborious and elaborate preparations undertaken over a long period of time, the aim of which is to obtain the “knowledge and conversation” of one’s “Holy Guardian Angel.” Having performed the ritual in inner space, Crowley claimed that he had managed to achieve the same result—namely, “Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel”—as if he had performed it physically. It was, as Pasi says, subsequently “perceived by him as one of the most important magical achievements of his entire life.”³⁷⁸ The point here is that\ in his discussion of the significance of hashish, he mentions an experience of “what Abramelin the Mage calls the Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel, another (and less metaphysically pretentious) way of speaking of the ‘Higher Self’ or ‘Genius.’”³⁷⁹ Speaking of “that supreme state in which the man has built himself up into God,”³⁸⁰ “the final and perfect identity of the Self with the Holy Guardian Angel,” he notes that, while “one may doubt whether the drug alone ever does this,” there are those for whom hashish can be an important instrument in the ritual: “it is perhaps only the destined adept who, momentarily freed by the dissolving action of the drug from the chain of the four lower *Skandhas*, obtains this knowledge which is his by right, totally inept as he may be to do so by any ordinary methods.”³⁸¹ While there is necessarily some speculation in the above discussion, what is clear is that, influenced by Bennett, *Zanoni*, and *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage*, as well as by his reading of Ludlow and Baudelaire, Crowley used drug-induced altered states to “loosen the girders of the soul” within ritual contexts.

As to Regardie’s discussion of Crowley’s use of hashish, this needs to be understood as part of a broader Crowleian apology.³⁸² While it betrays an attitude toward drug use that is conspicuously more restrained than that of his mentor, along with a preference for ceremonial work far closer to the teaching of the Golden Dawn, it is worth noting that his essay was written in 1968. Regardie got to know Timothy Leary and developed a relationship that, as Gerald Suster notes, “stimulated his productivity.”³⁸³ While deploring the undisciplined use of psychoactives and indeed Crowley’s own addiction to heroin and cocaine, he began to appreciate “the use of mind-expanding drugs for willed magical and mystical purposes.”³⁸⁴ He argued that “drugs are just tools for the exploration and enhancement of consciousness.” Each drug, he insisted, “should be employed for a specific purpose and used with intelligence and will.”³⁸⁵ Although Regardie rejected the idea of “Crowley as a Victorian hippie,”³⁸⁶ in an effort to reintroduce Crowley’s work to a new generation of

seekers he sought to demonstrate its relevance to the psychedelic revolution by explicitly drawing parallels between “The Psychology of Hashish” and the ideas articulated by Maslow, Huxley, Robert de Ropp, David Solomon, Alan Watts, and particularly Leary.³⁸⁷ Indeed, he commended “wholeheartedly” *The Psychedelic Experience* by Leary, Ralph Metzner, and Richard Alpert, declaring it to be “the only single text which approximates, albeit distantly, the hashish essays of Crowley.” He continues: “Were Crowley alive today and familiar with this work, I am altogether confident that he would have immediately written a ‘rave’ review of it in one of his *Equinox* publications.”³⁸⁸ He claimed not only that Crowley would have greeted LSD as “the drug of choice, the ideal chemical instrument he had yearned for as the experimental aid to the magico-mystical system he had developed,”³⁸⁹ but also that Huxley, Watts, and Leary in their own discussions of the drug were essentially following a trajectory initiated by Crowley in the early years of the twentieth century. Indeed, possibly influenced by Regardie, the British occultist Kenneth Grant even claimed that Leary “identified himself so entirely with the current initiated by Crowley . . . that he considers one of his aims to be the completion of the work of preparing the world for cosmic consciousness, which Crowley had begun.”³⁹⁰ Regardie, however, went further, insisting that Huxley’s argument that psychedelics can be used “to potentiate the non-verbal education of adolescents and to remind adults that the real world is very different from the misshapen universe they have created for themselves by means of their culture conditioned prejudices” reflects the principal tenets of Crowley’s philosophy; Watts’s conviction that there is “no essential difference between the experiences induced, under favorable conditions, by . . . chemicals and the states of ‘cosmic consciousness’ recorded by R. M. Bucke, William James, Evelyn Underhill, Raynor Johnson and other investigators of mysticism” concurs with the findings of Crowley’s own research; and Leary’s assertion that “the most effective way to cut through the game structure of Western life is the use of . . . consciousness-expanding drugs” goes some way toward Crowley’s own conclusions.³⁹¹ While there are significant lines of continuity between their attempts to dislocate a person’s sense of reality, as far as Regardie was concerned Crowley “had the edge over most of our present-day researchers” because he incorporated drug-induced transcendence into an occult system.³⁹² This, he believed, was Crowley’s genius, from which the new generation of psychedelic explorers needed to learn.³⁹³

Regardie himself was open-minded enough to learn from the hippies. As Suster notes, “he enjoyed the effects of cannabis.” Despite his earlier resistance to recreational drug use, “at the age of 76 he would serve coffee, cognac and

powerful hash cookies for those diners at his home who wanted them, including himself." He also revealed to Suster that "he loved to take LSD once a year in solitude and gaze with gladness upon the surrounding scenery."³⁹⁴

Concerning the conviction of some that Crowley was the father of the psychedelic revolution, it is sometimes claimed that in October 1930, during his time in Berlin, he "gave mescal to, amongst others, the youthful Aldous Huxley."³⁹⁵ This would be significant in that it would establish a very clear historical link between Crowley and the psychedelic counterculture. Unfortunately, there is a comprehensive lack of evidence. There is little doubt that the two briefly met during the evening of October 4 at the Müncher Hofbrau, but there is no evidence that they took mescaline together or that it was even a topic of conversation. Indeed, not only does Huxley never mention the encounter with Crowley, but there is not the slightest suggestion of him ever having taken the drug prior to 1953, when he declared to Humphry Osmond, "I am eager to make the experiment and would feel particularly happy to do so under the supervision of an experienced investigator like yourself."³⁹⁶ "Thus," he recalls, "it came about that, one bright May morning, I swallowed four-tenths of a gramme of mescaline dissolved in half a glass of water and sat down to wait for the results."³⁹⁷ There can be no doubt that he had never taken it before. As his relative Siggie Wessberg has stated: "In May 1953, following correspondence with Canadian psychiatrist Humphry Osmond, then visiting Los Angeles, Aldous Huxley took mescaline for the first time."³⁹⁸ This was indeed, Francis Huxley recalled, "his first mescaline adventure."³⁹⁹ Huxley's friend Sybille Bedford, in her authoritative and detailed biography, lists those who had experimented with mescaline since Lewin and prior to Huxley, but makes no mention of Crowley.⁴⁰⁰ We all meet people in the course of our lives, some of whom have a profound impact on the way we view the world, some whom have no impact at all, and most of whom have an indiscernible influence somewhere in between. Wherever Crowley stood in Huxley's world, he seems not have made much of an impression at all.

A Note on Drugs and Post-Crowleyan Thelemic Thought

That Crowley made an impression on many other people far beyond the occult world of the fin de siècle is unquestionable. That some of these people followed him down the path of psychedelic esotericism is also not in doubt. A good example is the rocket scientist, explosives expert, and occultist John Whiteside Parsons, whose work contributed to the founding of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory. From childhood, he had been "attracted to

tales of hidden, magical mysteries that lurked behind the 'real' world."⁴⁰¹ When he happened upon a copy of Crowley's enigmatic *Konx Om Pax* at a friend's house, he was immediately intrigued. Almost from that moment, his thought turned to the careful study of Thelema. In 1941, along with his first wife, Helen Northrup, he became a member of the Agapé Lodge of Crowley's Ordo Templi Orientis in Pasadena, California. The Lodge was led by the English occultist Wilfred Talbot Smith, who had met Crowley in 1915 and had become a member of the A.:A.:—the order Crowley founded in 1907 to succeed the Golden Dawn. Although Parsons seems to have begun experimenting with technologies of transcendence in 1943,⁴⁰² it is clear that Smith had already worked with peyote in the initial year of the Agapé Lodge's operation. As Martin Starr notes, "Every so often something unexpected sneaks up in his diary, such as an experiment . . . in which Smith took 100 drops of *Anhalonium*."⁴⁰³ Although he seems to have been unimpressed with the results, his use of peyote is significant in that it indicates the extent to which drugs were at least considered useful within the wider Thelemic milieu. Parsons, a devoted follower of Crowley, began using them as part of his esoteric practice. While little is known about how he used them, there is no doubt that they became important to him. Not only did his friend Robert Cornow consider him "an expert on drugs,"⁴⁰⁴ but their significance is sometimes revealed in his work. For example, in a poem written in 1943 for the first issue of his short-lived magazine *Oriflamme*, which he edited with Smith, he writes the following:

*I height Don Quixote, I live on Peyote
 marihuana, morphine and cocaine.
 I never knew sadness, but only a madness
 that burns at the heart and the brain.
 I see each charwoman ecstatic, inhuman,
 angelic, demonic, divine,
 Each wagon a dragon, each beer mug a flagon
 that brims with ambrosial wine . . .
 The wind and the sky are ours, heaven and all its stars,
 waken, and do what you will.⁴⁰⁵*

In his poem "Narcissus" he writes,

*Drug me with drugs.
 Slow acting, sensuous, sweet,
 Co-mingle gin and musk,*

*Hashish and amber.
 Let me drink and breathe
 And hear slow, devious music
 Until aroused
 To subtle, languorous moods.*⁴⁰⁶

His second wife, the artist Marjorie Cameron, also made significant use of psychoactives, both with him and after his death in 1952. Rooted in the Thelemic occultism she practiced with Parsons, her work has been described as emerging from a “hallucinated vision, at the edge of surrealism and psychedelia.”⁴⁰⁷ By the late 1950s she was using a range of drugs in her rituals. In June 1953 she attended a lecture by Huxley’s friend Gerald Heard on the use of hallucinogens for expanding the consciousness and, with her loosely organized occult group, the Children, she developed these ideas within ritual contexts. While her artwork was not widely known during her lifetime, one piece, “Peyote Vision,” did hit the headlines in 1957. Inspired by an image she received while under the influence of peyote, the pen and ink drawing is an arresting illustration of a serpent-tongued woman and an enigmatic male figure in the throes of sexual ecstasy. The Californian Beat artist Wallace Berman reproduced the drawing in the 1955 edition of his catalogue *Semina*. In 1957, at an exhibition in the newly opened Ferus Gallery in Los Angeles, which, following an anonymous tip-off, was visited by the police, a copy of “Peyote Vision” was discovered. The exhibition was promptly shut down, Berman was arrested, and Cameron was charged with obscenity. The profane psychedelia of the Great Beast—sex, drugs, and magic—that emerged out of the decadent culture of the fin de siècle had lost nothing of its power to threaten hegemonic constructions of the sacred and inspire countercultural creativity.

While we will see that many in the high culture of the 1960s were aware of but not familiar with Crowley’s thought, other significant individuals, including John Cooke and Michael Bowen, combined an interest in Crowley with psychoactive substances. One idiosyncratic figure in particular stands out: Harry Smith. Not only was his drug use “both wide-ranging and opportunistic,” but he was an enthusiastic and creative occultist who had a longstanding relationship with the Thelemic occult order, the Ordo Templi Orientis.⁴⁰⁸ In 1986, near the end of his life, Smith was consecrated by William Breeze, the current head of the order, as a Gnostic bishop in the order’s ecclesiastical organization, the Ecclesia Gnostica Catholica. A keen amateur anthropologist, filmmaker, and music collector, he combined his occult interests with key countercultural themes.⁴⁰⁹ This confluence is evident in, for example, his

avant-garde esoteric film *Heaven and Earth Magic* (1957), his compilation of field recordings in Anadarko, Oklahoma, of members of the Native American Church, *The Kiowa Peyote Meeting* (1973), and even his three-volume *Anthology of American Folk Music* (1952), which became the primary document of the American folk revival.⁴¹⁰ Not only did this anthology introduce a host of musicians, including Pete Seeger, Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, John Fahey, and Jerry Garcia, to the music of the 1920s and 1930s, but the liner notes also introduced them to the seventeenth-century English Paracelsian philosopher and physician Robert Fludd, the founder of Anthroposophy, Rudolf Steiner, the anthropologist R. R. Marett, and of course Crowley. At the conclusion of his notes he claimed that the following quotations had been useful in compiling the *Anthology*: “In elementary music the relation of Earth to the sphere of water is 4 to 3, as there are in the Earth four quarters of frigidity to three of water” (Fludd); “Civilized man thinks out his difficulties, at least he thinks he does, primitive man dances out his difficulties” (Marett); “Do as thy wilt shall be the whole of the law” (Crowley); “The in-breathing becomes thought, and the out-breathing becomes the will manifestation of thought” (Steiner).⁴¹¹ Furthermore, as Rani Singh notes, “the cover of each volume was a different color, each of which was associated with an element: green for water (*Ballads*); red for fire (*Social Music*), and blue for air (*Songs*).”⁴¹² Even the most imaginative (and stoned) of esoteric hippies would have had difficulty applying this collection of eclectic gobbets and occult symbolism to the process of compiling an anthology of folk music. But for Smith it all made sense. As Breeze has argued, “It is hard to point to anyone in the twentieth century who better exemplifies the ‘universality’ of Aleister Crowley’s A.:A.: teaching curriculum than Harry.”⁴¹³ Through the blending of sound, imagery, and altered states, his creative work sought to explore and induce mystical experience.

Finally, this particular Crowleyn psychedelic current can be traced into the industrial music and arts occulture of the 1980s, to bands such as Psychic TV, Current 93, and Coil (all of which Breeze has been a member of).⁴¹⁴ Of particular note was the shadowy esoteric project Thee Temple ov Psychick Youth (TOPY), an occult side project of Psychic TV, central to which was Thelemic teaching and particularly the sigil method developed by the occultist Austin Osman Spare, for whom it was important to “embrace reality by imagination.”⁴¹⁵ The principal (or at least most visible) figure in both Psychic TV and TOPY was the artist and musician Genesis P-Orridge, who met Cameron and in many respects can be considered her heir. TOPY’s eclectic method involved weaving together a number of themes that flowed from

fin de siècle occultism, Beat culture, and the psychedelic revolution. As Jason Louv comments in *Thee Psychick Bible*, “TOPY were the inheritors of a century’s worth of occult and countercultural ‘science’ . . . [t]he cut-up method of William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin . . . Austin Spare’s sigil method; sexual magick in the vein of Aleister Crowley and Paschal Beverly Randolph; the otherworldly and psychedelic explorations of John Dee, Timothy Leary and John C. Lilly.”⁴¹⁶

Concluding Comments

We have seen that many of the themes that emerged during the fin de siècle originated before it, just as they would continue beyond it. Thinkers discussed in previous chapters, such as De Quincey, Ludlow, Baudelaire, and Gautier, and the Spiritualists discussed in this chapter, particularly Randolph and Cahagnet, nurtured ideas that subsequently found their way into the occulture of the fin de siècle. Whether or not psychedelic esotericism would have developed in the way that it did without the hothouse environment of the fin de siècle is a matter for speculation, but what we do know is that this was a period during which transgression was fashionable, the popular imagination was haunted by gothic tales of the paranormal, the public was fascinated by lurid reports of profane rituals, powerful psychoactives were both legal and voguish, addiction was as cool as heroin chic in the 1990s, and altered states were pregnant with occult meaning. The fin de siècle—sometimes described in terms of “*le mal du siècle*”⁴¹⁷—provided the ideal cultural context within which to foster the relationship between drugs and the occult.

That said, however, many during the late nineteenth century expressed an ambivalence toward drugs. On the one hand, drugs were undoubtedly powerful psychoactive agents. On the other hand, apart from the moral issues surrounding drug use that clearly weighed on the minds of many Spiritualists, there was also a sense that if a vision had been induced “artificially,” it did not carry the same authority as experiences induced by magical skill and spiritual forces. As Symonds recalls of Crowley, although “he had been taking *anhalonium* for some years . . . he did not want to reveal this in case anyone should think that his . . . visions and conversations with the gods were only mescaline dreams.”⁴¹⁸ We will see that this resistance to what were perceived as occult shortcuts and a reliance on pseudo-spiritual states continued into the twentieth century.

Shaped by the cultural forces of the period, Crowley, who could almost have been a character created in the mind of Huysmans, emerged as the

archetypal fin de siècle occultist. His focus on sex, drugs, and mystical experience led to Regardie's view of him as the father of modern psychedelia becoming an increasingly popular one within Western occulture. Indeed, it is often simply assumed that, as Francis King has insisted, "most . . . occultists who have taken a favourable attitude toward the use of consciousness-altering drugs have been influenced by Aleister Crowley."⁴¹⁹ Similarly, Don Webb, former high priest of the Temple of Set, is clear that Crowley introduced drugs to the West as a method of self-transformation.⁴²⁰ Likewise, Kaczynski portrays Crowley as a psychedelic trailblazer,⁴²¹ and Breeze⁴²² declares him to be "a pioneer in the use of entheogens." Breeze even claims that his short story "The Drug" (1909) "stands as one of the first—if not *the* first—accounts of a psychedelic experience" and that he was responsible for fostering the use of drugs "in literary and occult circles in Europe and America."⁴²³ Booth suggests that he should be placed "at least equal to Aldous Huxley as a writer and chronicler of the part drugs play in visionary experience," and that had he not "developed such a notorious reputation, he would surely have been as seriously considered in due course as Huxley was after the publication of *The Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell*."⁴²⁴

Such assessments are not entirely wide of the mark, in that Crowley was an important occultist who used drugs, but they do tend to overstate his significance. First, as we have seen in previous chapters, not only was creative drug use hardly a novel practice within literary and occult circles, but both Baudelaire's "The Poem of Hashish" (1850) and Ludlow's *The Hasheesh Eater* (1857), both of which had a formative influence on Crowley's thought, predated his birth in 1875.

Second, although it is important to recognize the significance of the link Crowley developed between psychoactives and magic, we have seen that there had already been some reflection on this relationship. Cahagnet, Randolph, Blavatsky, Bennett, Yeats, and Gonne had all, to varying degrees, given the matter some attention. More significant, we have seen that there is evidence to suggest that by the mid-1880s the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor had already experimented with drugs during initiation ceremonies.

Third, his writing on drugs was arguably too outré, rhetorical, and unsystematic to have had the cultural impact of Huxley's far more concise and erudite discussions.

Finally, a distinction needs to be made between Crowley's influence as a profane icon and his influence as an occult thinker. While *the idea of Crowley* found its way into the burgeoning occulture of the 1960s, there is a

question concerning the extent to which *his ideas* had a formative influence on psychedelia. The idea of Crowley—as a symbol of transgression—had a cultural impact. Not only was his image used by Peter Blake in the artwork for the Beatles’ psychedelic classic, *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967), but in *The Politics of Ecstasy* Leary encodes the idea of Crowley with psychedelic meaning by identifying him as one of Britain’s “inveterate trippers, heads, and stoned visionaries,”⁴²⁵ noting that “he experimented with every available drug as a means of transcendence,” that he used peyote “to turn on the audiences at his lectures,” and that he “articulated the viewpoint that drug prohibition was not only useless but actually intensified the problem of drug abuse.”⁴²⁶ Art Kleps, who knew Leary well, has claimed that Crowley was Leary’s “hero.”⁴²⁷ Leary even referenced the title of Crowley’s hastily written drug book in the title of his own hastily written *Confessions of a Hope Fiend*—an account of his escape from the minimum-security prison at San Luis Obispo in 1970. He also mentions Crowley several times in *Confessions*.⁴²⁸ Even Andy Warhol commented that the role of the counterculture in “the evolution of society was similar to that of Alistair [*sic*] Crowley, the occult philosopher who scandalized the previous generation with his flamboyance and his libertarian ideas (‘Do what thou wilt is the whole of the law’).”⁴²⁹ However, it was primarily the idea of Crowley as a profane icon that appealed to the counterculture. There is relatively little evidence during the 1960s psychedelic revolution—beyond the occult milieu and those who had a particular interest in Crowley’s philosophy, such as Jimmy Page of Led Zeppelin, the film director Kenneth Anger, and the writer Robert Anton Wilson—that much detail was known about his thought, let alone his ideas regarding the esoteric significance of intoxication. He was a symbol of countercultural transgression. As Theodore Roszak commented in 1970 regarding a major article on Crowley in the underground paper *International Times*, “The exuberant treatment goes no further than the sensational surface . . . It is the simple principle of inversion which too often dominates the underground press: the straight papers would have said ‘scandalous’; *we* say ‘marvelous.’ But understanding gets no further.”⁴³⁰ Leary may have been an exception, but even so, there are actually only a few references to Crowley in his work and little evidence of any significant influence.⁴³¹ Part of the problem for countercultural occultism was that, as Suster says, during the 1960s Crowley’s “books . . . were expensive and as hard to locate as the work of a Russian dissident.”⁴³² However, by the end of the decade, when the psychedelic counterculture was beginning to fade, a revival of interest in the occult had started to gain ground, central to

which was the republication of his works in affordable editions. Despite the efforts of Regardie, there was little attention given to Crowley's theories of drug-induced transcendence. Even today, this is still a neglected area in the study of Crowley's thought.⁴³³

Crowley's importance in the history of psychedelic mysticism relates principally to the way in which he was able to distill a number of ideas circulating within the *fin de siècle*. He possessed, in a way that few others did, an intellectual arrogance,⁴³⁴ a charismatic authority, and a penchant for transgression that enabled him to immerse himself in the occulture of the *fin de siècle* and to surface with an eclectic esoteric philosophy that inspired belief. Core themes of the period, such as decline and rebirth, and the Romantic notion of a New Age⁴³⁵ were reimagined in terms of the passing of the Aeon of Osiris (characterized by the patriarchal culture of Christian morality) and the apocalyptic advent of the Aeon of Horus (characterized by self-realization and self-actualization).⁴³⁶ If Nordau saw in Baudelaire "at once a mystic and an erotomaniac" inspired by visions of "hashish and opium," Crowley, even more than Randolph, was the epitome of that dark trajectory.⁴³⁷ Vice was transformed into virtue. "The life of the senses," to quote the passage from *Dorian Gray* cited at the beginning of the chapter, "was described in terms of mystical philosophy." Crowley made it difficult to know "whether one was reading the spiritual ecstasies of some medieval saint or the morbid confessions of a modern sinner."⁴³⁸

His articulation of an approach that used "the method of science" to pursue "the aim of religion" was of course a development of ideas already in circulation. Not only have we seen similar approaches in the work of members of the Society for Psychical Research, but Crowley explicitly drew on Jamesian ideas concerning the psychological interrogation of mystical states.⁴³⁹ In particular, as we have seen, drugs emerged as technologies that enabled users to induce states of transcendence in a way that could be controlled and, therefore, examined. As such, they emerged as an important element in the reversal of the modern discourse that differentiated science and religion. Psychoactives were technologies that could be used to access other forms of consciousness and, perhaps, other levels of reality.

This brings us to one of the core themes discussed in the chapter: drugs are able "to relax the ties which bind the body to the soul."⁴⁴⁰ While we have seen that this experience has been central to modern psychedelic history, having been developed within Romanticism, it took on a particular significance within late nineteenth-century occultism. As Gonne remarked, if psychoactives could be used as technologies to release the self from its

corporeal ties and therefore from the tyranny of the physical laws governing material existence, then “how interesting and how useful!”⁴⁴¹ In the following chapters we will see that this potential of psychoactives has continued to demand attention and to ensure a close relationship between drugs and mysticism.

The Antipodes of the Mind

*I read Huxley's *Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell* when they came out in the 1950s, and I was especially excited by his speaking of the "geography" of the imagination and its ultimate realm—the "antipodes of the mind."*

—OLIVER SACKS¹

JUST BELOW THE photograph of Aleister Crowley in Peter Blake's collage for the cover of The Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967) is that of Aldous Huxley. This is hardly surprising. Huxley's "enormous erudition and lucid explanations," recalled Ralph Metzner in 1968, "put the whole business of taking a drug to change your consciousness on a totally new level."² Although Huxley wasn't, as some have claimed, "the first strong proponent in the modern Western world of the validity of chemical mysticism," he was a catalytic figure at an important moment in the postwar Western world.³ Certainly for many in the counterculture he was "the hero" who introduced the notion that "psychedelic drugs can provide illumination" and that they are "the key to the mind's antipodes."⁴ As David Solomon declared in 1964, Huxley is the "*guru extraordinaire*, whose words first beckoned me through the doors of perception."⁵

As we will see, enthused by his experiences under the influence of psychoactive substances, Huxley understood himself to be an explorer. Like Will Farnaby, the fictional Englishman in his novel *Island* who is shipwrecked on the shores of the utopian land of Pala, Huxley finds himself in a strange new world of "*moksha* medicine." And like many explorers of inner space before him, he used geographical and travel metaphors to articulate the significance of his experiences: "A man consists of what I may call an Old World of personal consciousness and, beyond a dividing sea, a series of New Worlds—the not too distant Virginias and Carolinas of the personal subconscious and the vegetative soul; the Far West of the collective unconscious, with its flora of symbols, its tribes of aboriginal archetypes; and, across another, vaster

ocean, at the antipodes of everyday consciousness, the world of Visionary Experience.”⁶ Huxley’s ideas, as well as his descriptions of the psychedelic experience, were enormously influential. A good example, taken from many that could be cited, is the discussion of psychedelic art by Robert Masters and Jean Houston in 1968: “Psychedelic artists of today are using the discoveries of modern chemistry to provide themselves with extraordinary experiences. Where the artists of past travelled to the ends of the earth, these new artists travel inward, to what Aldous Huxley called the antipodes of the mind—the world of visionary experience.”⁷

While this chapter is organized around the work of Huxley, it also introduces a number of other intrepid psychedelic travelers to the antipodes of the mind who prepared the way for him, accompanied him, and challenged the accounts of his travels. What follows provides some necessary analysis of the core ideas feeding into to “the psychedelic revolution.”

Psychedelic Research: Some Background Notes

Since its use during the fin de siècle, mescaline became increasingly prominent as a technology of transcendence. As we have seen, by the early years of the twentieth century peyote buttons were already being used to induce mystical states. W. B. Yeats, Maude Gonne, Havelock Ellis, Crowley, and possibly Allan Bennett had all experimented with the drug. In the scientific community, the work of Louis Lewin, who had published the first report on its properties in 1888, led to much interest in its psychopharmacological potential and eventually to the isolation of “mezcalin hydrochloride” by Arthur Heffter in 1897 and to its synthesis by Ernst Späth in 1919. Although the medicinal properties of mescaline were not immediately apparent, its strength as a serotonergic psychedelic suggested that it was pregnant with therapeutic potential. A number of important scientific studies were published subsequently.⁸ For example, in 1924, Lewin discussed the effects of mescaline in *Phantastica*, his groundbreaking survey of psychoactive plants;⁹ in 1927, Kurt Beringer made available the results of his own research into the effects of mescaline in *Der Meskalinrausch*, for which he had administered the drug to numerous doctors and medical students;¹⁰ and in 1926, Heinrich Klüver published an article in the *American Journal of Psychology*, “Mescal Visions and Eidetic Vision,”¹¹ followed in 1928 by the first English-language book on the drug, *Mescal: The “Divine” Plant and Its Psychological Effects*.¹²

While Klüver was not particularly concerned with religion, the titles of his studies reveal a methodological bias evident in much early research: induced

altered states tended to be discussed using the vocabulary of religious experience. This had the effect of adding scientific weight to the thesis that there exists a relationship between drug-induced altered states and the heightened emotional states described in mystical literature. This was understandable, since not only had the relationship been established within Romanticism, but it had also been suggested in early psychiatric literature. The overall result of the latter was the establishment of a spectrum of altered states, which included drug-induced states, psychotic states, and mystical states. This led to a tendency to pathologize the mystical state, thereby undermining any claims to its specialness. As we have seen, Jean Etienne Dominique Esquirol's work with patients experiencing psychosis led to his definition of a hallucination as "external sensations which the patient believes he experiences, even though no external agent has acted materially on his senses."¹³ This definition was then adopted by his student Jacques-Joseph Moreau de Tours in his work on hashish-induced altered states. His conclusions were, in turn, subsequently used by Louis-Francois Lélut and Alexandre Brierre de Boismont to account "scientifically" for experiences of the supernatural, including the *révélations fantastiques* of Thomas De Quincey and others. The point is that by the time Lewin was carrying out research into peyote, there was already an established theory of continuities between drug-induced altered states, religious experience, and psychosis. Consequently, just as psychoactives were used in early psychiatric research because they were believed to be psychotomimetic¹⁴ and so provided access to psychotic states,¹⁵ so others working in the field, such as William James, were persuaded that they might also be mysticomimetic—able to provide a simulacrum of religious experience.

As James suggested, there was, however, always a question as to whether such experiences could be understood as mimesis. They may be *actual* mystical states. That is to say, the fact that experiences of transcendence can be induced by drugs does not necessarily explain away religious experience, but it may suggest that drugs are technologies capable of inducing states for which religious labeling is appropriate. Experiences of a religious nature may be produced by, but are not reducible to, chemical reactions in the brain. Chemical reactions in the brain simply create an affective space within which such experiences occur. Lewin, for example, makes much of the visions recorded in the biblical book of Ezekiel. The prophet's claim that "the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God" (Ezekiel 1:1) should lead us to "inquire into the cause of such internal visions and perceptions, which in other forms also have for thousands of years been recorded by persons who were vitally healthy, mentally sane and at the same time fully conscious of themselves."

While Lewin acknowledges that such “visions and hallucinations” have “a material cause,”¹⁶ he holds that “there is no need for believers, among whom I number myself, to doubt the divine inspiration.”¹⁷ His argument is that it is a non sequitur to claim that because such states of transcendence have “a material cause” they cannot therefore be spheres of divine activity. This concurs with the overall thrust of John Bowker’s thesis discussed in Chapter 1. That this became an issue as research into psychoactives progressed is evident in a 1957 article on brain chemistry published in *Science* by the neuroscientist Irvine Page:

It has always seemed to me that the chemical approach to the brain is shunned, perhaps among other reasons, from an unconscious fear that it casts doubt on the religious nature of man. My own experience has shown this to be true from the number of unsolicited letters I have received from priests and ministers of all levels of intellectual sophistication, as well as from the public, when my book on *The Chemistry of the Brain* first appeared a good many years ago.¹⁸

Like Lewin and Bowker, however, he resists the conclusions of “dialectical materialism”:

I personally see nothing to persuade me that the functions of the brain are not the functions of protoplasm and that these functions encompass both the material and the transcendent; that there is the necessity to include in the philosophy of biology both those material attributes which are our science and those immaterial attributes which are our values. It is the amalgamation of the two that will close the abyss, which has so destructively separated science from humanity as to make it appear the enemy of man and the enemy of God. In our hearts we know it is neither.¹⁹

While others were unwilling to accept the notion that “phantastica” might function as “miraculous thaumaturgic agents,”²⁰ many agreed that the apparent overlap between drug-induced altered states and mystical states was an interesting one deserving of further research. The impetus for this further research came in 1943 with the discovery of LSD-25.

Although it would be inaccurate to claim, as many do, that “the modern era of hallucinogen research began in the laboratory of Dr. Albert Hofmann,”²¹ it cannot be denied that his discovery of LSD was a seminal moment

in psychedelic history. While the LSD story can be said to have begun in 1936 at the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research, when Walter Jacobs and Lyman Craig isolated the structure of lysergic acid, there is little doubt that Hofmann was the key protagonist.²² In 1943, while engaged in medical research to develop a new analeptic agent at the Sandoz Pharmaceutical Company in Basel, Switzerland, Hofmann was experimenting with alkaloids present in the rye ergot fungus, *Claviceps purpurea*—which was of interest because of historical accounts of ergotism or, as it was known in the Middle Ages, *ignis sacer* (holy fire) or “St. Anthony’s fire.”²³ While Hofmann had first synthesized lysergic acid diethylamide in 1938, he decided against pursuing his research into the compound because the initial results had not proven particularly interesting. However, in 1943 he returned to the work he had done five years previously on the twenty-fifth in a series of lysergic acid amides (LSD-25). “I could not forget the relatively ‘uninteresting’ LSD-25. A peculiar presentiment—the feeling that this substance might possess properties beyond those established in the first pharmacological studies—induced me, five years after the first synthesis, again to produce LSD-25, so that a sample could be given to the pharmacological department for further tests.”²⁴ However, on April 16, 1943, while in the final stages of the process, “during the purification and crystallization,” he accidentally absorbed the compound through his fingertips. In a beautiful example of understatement, he noted that his “work was interrupted by unusual sensations.”²⁵ Unable to continue, he made his way home: “I lay down and sank into a not unpleasant, intoxicated-like condition, characterized by an extremely stimulated imagination. In a dream-like state, with eyes closed . . . I perceived an uninterrupted stream of fantastic pictures, extraordinary shapes with an intense, kaleidoscopic play of colors.”²⁶

It is worth noting here that Hofmann was not unacquainted with visionary states. He was in many respects a Romantic scientist cut from the same cloth as Humphry Davy. For example, at several points in his discussion of the discovery of LSD, his language slips into almost mystical prose:

There are experiences about which most of us are hesitant to speak, because they do not conform to everyday reality and defy rational explanation. These are not particular external events, but rather occurrences in our inner lives, which are generally dismissed as figments of the imagination and then barred from memory. Suddenly, our familiar view of our surroundings becomes transformed in a strange, delightful, or alarming way: it appears to us in a new light, takes on a special

meaning. Such an experience can be as light and fleeting as a breath of air, or it can imprint itself deeply on our minds.²⁷

Referring to these experiences as “enchantments,” he recalled how, in childhood, he had a number of “euphoric moments.” They “shaped my worldview and convinced me of the existence of a miraculous, powerful, unfathomable reality that was hidden from everyday sight.”²⁸ While not wanting to overstate the significance of the continuities between research into hallucinogens and their subsequent interpretation as technologies of transcendence, it is nevertheless noteworthy that Hofmann makes precisely this connection. “I was often troubled in those days,” he notes, “wondering if as an adult I should ever be able to communicate these experiences: whether I should have the chance to depict my visions in poetry or paintings. But realizing that I was not cut out to be a poet nor an artist, I assumed that I would ever have to keep these experiences to myself, however important they were to me.” However, “unexpectedly—though scarcely by chance—much later, in middle age, *a link was forged between my profession and these visionary experiences* from my childhood.”²⁹ He even interprets his career path in vaguely providential terms, claiming that he was “inexorably led to the psychoactive-hallucination-causing substances” that are able to “evoke visionary states similar to the spontaneous experiences I have just described.”³⁰ Moreover, as a result of his self-experimentation with LSD, he “became aware of the great universal significance of visionary experience” and consequently came to the conclusion that both his childhood experiences and those induced by LSD were explicitly “mystical.”³¹

The visionary effects of LSD were similar to those of mescaline, “the first ‘hallucinogen’ or *phantasticum* . . . to become available as a pure substance.”³² Nevertheless, the discovery of LSD provided renewed impetus for hallucinogen research, largely because its “novelty . . . as opposed to mescaline was its high activity, lying in a different order of magnitude. The active dose of mescaline, 0.2 to 0.5 g, is comparable to 0.00002 to 0.0001 g of LSD; in other words, LSD is some 5,000 to 10,000 times more active than mescaline.”³³ Furthermore, “the substance also has qualitative significance insofar as it manifests a high *specificity*, that is an activity aimed specifically at the human psyche. It can be assumed, therefore, that LSD affects the highest control-centers of the psychic and intellectual functions.”³⁴

Werner Stoll, a colleague of Hofmann’s, was the first to carry out LSD research on patients at the psychiatric clinic of the University of Zürich in 1947.³⁵ Gradually, over the next few years, interest in the drug grew. Hoping

that it might have clinical applications and, therefore, commercial value, Sandoz began promoting research on the drug within the scientific community. As a result, by the early 1950s, researchers working for the CIA—who had become interested the potential of psychoactive drugs for “mind control”—became intrigued by its potential. “There is no question,” declared one report, “that drugs are already on hand (and new ones being produced) that can destroy integrity and make indiscreet the most dependable individual.” It concluded, therefore, that LSD should be tested “under new threat conditions beyond the scope of civilian experimentation.”³⁶ As Martin Lee and Bruce Shlain discuss, the CIA had happened upon “a golden opportunity in the making. With a sizeable treasure chest at their disposal they were in a position to boost the careers of scientists whose skill and expertise would be of maximum benefit to the CIA.” Consequently, “almost overnight a whole new market for grants in LSD research sprang into existence as money started pouring through CIA-linked conduits or ‘cutouts’ such as the Geschickter Fund for Medical Research, the Society for the Study of Human Ecology, and the Josiah Macy, Jr. Foundation.”³⁷

One of the principal scientists to benefit from the CIA’s largesse was the psychiatrist Max Rinkel, who had been the first person to bring the drug from Sandoz to the United States. Almost three years prior to receiving CIA funding, he had, with his colleague Robert Hyde, tested the drug on one hundred volunteers at the Boston Psychopathic Hospital. Another psychiatrist who had become interested in LSD research and who would also receive CIA funding was Paul Hoch. He argued, as Moreau had done of hashish, that LSD could be used therapeutically as a psychotomimetic. However, although much research was stimulated by CIA funding, particularly during the early 1950s, initial experiments over this period generally concluded that the effects of LSD were rather more worrying than those initially recorded by Hofmann. The early researchers, notes Steven Novak,

concluded that their subjects went through a temporary psychosis, most commonly categorized as schizophrenia or paranoia . . . Even the euphoria sometimes present was defined as manic and hebephrenic. Researchers had anticipated deleterious effects. The widely used questionnaire devised by the Harold A. Abramson lab in New York presented all of its questions in negative terms By the mid-1950s, when the first wave of LSD research reached the public in popular magazines, undergoing the effects of LSD was portrayed as a harrowing experience.³⁸

The earliest of these popular discussions of LSD was an article, "My 12 Hours as a Madman," written in 1953 for the magazine *Maclean's* by a young journalist, Sid Katz. He recorded his experiences while under the influence of the drug as part of an experiment directed by Osmond to understand schizophrenia. He described, very evocatively, the horrors and transient pleasures of LSD in a way that served to support the psychotomimetic thesis. He began as follows:

On the morning of Thursday, June 18, 1953, I swallowed a drug which, for twelve unforgettable hours, turned me into a madman. For twelve hours I inhabited a nightmare world in which I experienced the torments of hell and the ecstasies of heaven. I will never be able to describe fully what happened to me during my excursion into madness. There are no words in the English language designed to convey the sensations I felt or the visions, illusions, hallucinations, colors, patterns and dimensions which my disordered mind revealed.³⁹

While Katz does note moments of pleasure, the overall experience was clearly harrowing. Of course, bearing in mind the set and setting—he took the drug in a psychiatric hospital and was told to expect the onset of a schizophrenic state—any chance of a positive mystical experience was relatively slim from the outset. However, Katz is significant as the first postwar writer to introduce the general public to the psychedelic experience prior to Huxley's *Doors of Perception*. As Erica Dyck has commented, his "experiences in Weyburn marked the beginning of a new phase of LSD studies. For over a year, these studies had involved biochemical investigations in combination with a select group of individuals, composed almost exclusively of medical researchers, who took the drug themselves."⁴⁰

Hence, when the psychiatrist Sidney Cohen self-experimented with the drug on October 12, 1955, he was surprised to discover that the effects were rather different from those he had read about. He expected to experience "twelve hours as a madman." In fact, he was enveloped by a feeling of peace: "The problems and strivings, the worries and frustrations of everyday life vanished; in their place was a majestic, sunlit, heavenly inner quietude I seemed to have finally arrived at the contemplation of eternal truth."⁴¹ In other words, he was drawn to the vocabulary of mysticism, not that of madness. Impressed by its effects and unconvinced by the findings of previous LSD research, he decided to sponsor three doctoral studies at the University of California, Los Angeles. Unfortunately, the research concurred with the

earlier results: "Subjects showed impaired intellectual ability, lowered IQ, inability to concentrate, and breakdown of ego functioning. Afterward, they reported that under LSD they felt emptiness, loneliness, and isolation."⁴² This research, which conflicted with Cohen's own experience, was disappointing, so he decided to administer the drug to those who might be able to interpret the experience more sensitively. Influenced by Osmond, who had introduced Huxley to mescaline in 1953, he was convinced that what would later be referred to as "set" and "setting" were key to the LSD experience. Relatedly, he began to think in terms of something approaching psychedelic elitism, in that it appeared to him that the effects of the drug depended very much on the quality of the minds into which it was introduced. Although he initially administered doses of LSD to psychoanalysts, because they were "experts on the unconscious," the results were again unsatisfactory. Finally he turned to Gerald Heard, a British intellectual who had an interest in mysticism, a theory of the evolution of the human consciousness, and numerous creative, intellectual friends.⁴³ As he was aware, it was Heard whom Huxley had invited to join him for his first experience with mescaline. (Although he was unable to attend that first session, he joined Huxley for his second.)⁴⁴ Heard had not taken LSD before, but he was enthusiastic about the prospect of becoming, as he put it in a letter to the Idealist philosopher William Ernest Hocking, one of "the human guinea pigs in the lysergic acid research."⁴⁵ His experience was exactly what Cohen had hoped for, and Heard articulated it in terms that reflected both Hofmann's and Huxley's own descriptions of induced transcendence. He had experienced, he wrote to Hocking, "a shift in consciousness," which was "so clearly similar to the accounts given by the mystics that none of us feel able to deny that this is in fact the experience which we undergo."⁴⁶ Cohen subsequently administered LSD to Huxley in 1955 and also to Bill Wilson, the co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, in 1956.⁴⁷

Finally, before turning to Huxley's thought, something should be said about the famously enigmatic Captain Alfred M. Hubbard, who had become acquainted with many of the key psychedelic researchers and thinkers of the 1950s and 1960s. In Huxley's writings, we first come across a reference to him in a letter he sent to Osmond on January 12, 1955: "Your nice Captain tried a new experiment—group mescalization."⁴⁸ Instead of an individual taking the drug and being supervised by others, as was common at the time, Hubbard persuaded him to experiment with group intoxication. The result, Huxley recorded, was "a transcendental experience within *this* world and with human references."⁴⁹

A “stout crew-cut figure” who drove a Rolls-Royce, he was “a mystery to those who knew him. A spy by profession, he lived a life of intrigue and adventure befitting his chosen career. Born dirt poor in Kentucky, he served with the OSS [Office of Strategic Services] during the Second World War and went on to make a fortune as a uranium entrepreneur. His prestigious government and business connections read like a *Who’s Who* of the power elite in North America.”⁵⁰ However, bizarrely, he eventually became known as the “Johnny Appleseed of LSD” as a result of a widely held belief that he was the first person to emphasize publicly the drug’s potential as a technology of transcendence. Whether this is true or not, it does indicate something of his significance and his commitment to the visionary potential of LSD. A popular badge produced in the 1960s that declared “Mother Hubbard Is My Connection” referred directly to his significance for the counterculture.⁵¹ As Lee and Shlain note, “He made it his life’s mission to turn on as many men and women as possible. ‘Most people are walking in their sleep,’ he said. ‘Turn them around, start them in the opposite direction and they wouldn’t even know the difference.’ But there was a quick way to remedy that—give them a good dose of LSD and ‘let them see themselves for what they are.’”⁵² The gnostic emphasis on self-knowledge was there from the outset.

Although Lee and Shlain claim that Hubbard had been introduced to the drug in 1951 by the British psychiatrist Ronald Sandison, this is almost certainly incorrect.⁵³ Not only does Sandison note that he only acquired samples of LSD in 1952 when he met with Hofmann at the Sandoz laboratories,⁵⁴ but in an interview in 2007 he revealed the following: “I do not think that I ever met him. If I did it must have been briefly in the States, and certainly not in the UK. I certainly never gave him his first, or any other LSD trip.”⁵⁵ Nevertheless, whoever introduced Hubbard to his first trip, it was, he recalled, “the deepest mystical thing I’ve ever seen.”⁵⁶

If there is some doubt as to certain areas of Hubbard’s life, there is no doubt that it was he who first gave LSD to Huxley. “We had our LSD experiment last week,” Huxley wrote to Osmond, “with Al, Gerald and myself taking 75 micrograms.”⁵⁷ Although Hubbard and Huxley were two very different characters, they shared a commitment to exploring the antipodes of the mind. Like Wilson, who argued that one of the most important factors in an alcoholic’s recovery is “a deep and genuine religious experience,” Hubbard became convinced that LSD-induced mystical experiences had significant therapeutic potential. He thus became an important if shadowy figure in its use, administering “large doses of acid to gravely ill alcoholics in the hope that the ensuing

experience would lead to a drastic and permanent change in the way they viewed themselves and the world.”⁵⁸

If Hubbard was a rather obscure figure, other converts to the psychedelic gospel were not. Of particular significance in this respect was the actor Cary Grant, who had first taken the drug under the supervision of the psychiatrist Arthur Chandler and the radiologist Mortimer Hartman. Not only did he use LSD many times, but, while he had previously been reluctant to discuss his private life, he became almost evangelistic about the psychedelic experience, frequently discussing its positive impact on his life in popular magazines such as *Good Housekeeping* (which had a circulation of 4.4 million in 1960).⁵⁹ “All the sadness and vanities were torn away,” he explained. “I’ve had my ego stripped away . . . Now I cannot behave untruthfully toward anyone, and certainly not to myself.”⁶⁰ By the close of the 1950s LSD was becoming widely known as a revolutionary psychotherapeutic technology.

A Mystic and a Scientist

The postwar period was intellectually vibrant, with a growing occulture and an emerging counterculture⁶¹. Not only were idealist notions of perennial wisdom being discussed, but so also was what Huxley had, as a young writer, mocked as “the wisdom of the East.”⁶² Theosophy, Buddhism, and the ideas of Jiddu Krishnamurti (whom Huxley visited at his home in Ojai, California) were all becoming increasingly influential. Likewise, Huxley, Heard, and particularly Christopher Isherwood were attracted to the teaching of Swami Prabhavananda, who had founded the Vedanta Society of Southern California in 1930. Huxley’s ideas during this period were articulated both in his *Perennial Philosophy* in 1944 and in a number of articles published in *Vedanta and the West*, a bimonthly magazine produced by the Vedanta Society.⁶³ He was also discovering a range of new psychological ideas related to what would become known as the human potential movement. For a short period in the 1950s he became interested in, as Nicholas Murray puts it, a “new fad: dianetics and its language of ‘engrams’ and ‘being clear’ etc.”⁶⁴ Having recently carried out research for his historical work *The Devils of Loudun*, he thought that L. Ron Hubbard’s ideas might shed some light on the extraordinary experiences of the nuns described in the book.⁶⁵ Hence, he and his wife, Maria, had several “auditing” sessions with Hubbard, to which, he said, he “proved to be completely resistant.”⁶⁶ Furthermore, he was unimpressed by Hubbard himself, whom he considered to be “a very queer fellow—very clever, rather immature, far from being ‘clear’ himself . . . and in some ways rather pathetic.”⁶⁷ As well

as Vedantic thought and Dianetics, Huxley was becoming fascinated with much of what 1950s occulture had to offer. For example, following the first popular wave of UFO sightings in 1947, interest in extraterrestrial visitation had grown significantly.⁶⁸ Although he ultimately had “no settled opinion” on the subject,⁶⁹ he did discuss UFOs with Heard, who had written a rather idiosyncratic, not to say bizarre book in 1950, *The Riddle of the Flying Saucers: Is Another World Watching?*⁷⁰ Likewise, he was fascinated by the potential of contemporary scientific research into the paranormal. One of the first places he visited on arriving in the United States in 1937 was Joseph Banks Rhine’s parapsychology laboratory at Duke University.⁷¹

While a great deal could be said about the burgeoning occulture of mid-twentieth-century America, the point here is simply that while many were skeptical or simply dismissive of such ideas, Huxley and the coterie of friends and literati with whom he surrounded himself were not. There were few things, he believed, that had nothing to contribute to one’s overall understanding of reality, which was far broader and deeper than was immediately apparent to the five senses. This intellectually generous open-mindedness was often interpreted as gullibility. For example, Grace Hubble, the wife of astronomer Edwin Hubble, commented that “Aldous and Gerald seem to me, in pursuit of religion, like two small boys working over a conjuror’s box of parlour tricks. No, that isn’t quite it, they are looking for magic and power, for the secret words, the open sesame that rolls back the door.”⁷² While Huxley rejected such accusations of naivety and faddism, he despised what he called “the Baconian-pyramidological-cryptographic-spiritualist-theosophical syndrome” that “afflicts a large part of the human race.”⁷³ While open-minded, he always considered himself to be engaged in objective, scientific enquiry, not wholly dissimilar in method to the work of his brother Julian Huxley and half brother Andrew Huxley. He was, as Robert de Ropp said in 1958, “at the same time a mystic and a scientist.”⁷⁴ Informed by a Romantic mystical *Weltanschauung*, driven by a fascination with the rejected knowledge of occulture (ESP, psychokinesis, magnetism, and so on),⁷⁵ he nevertheless adopted a largely rational approach to religion and the paranormal. This is conspicuous in his writing on psychedelics, which he understood to be technologies capable of producing controlled experiments in mysticism.

On a more mundane level, one cannot help wondering whether his near blindness significantly contributed to his fascination with psychedelic vision.⁷⁶ This has been suggested by his nephew Francis Huxley. When Osmond introduced him to “his first mescaline adventure” at eleven o’clock on the morning

of May 4, 1953, "vision flooded his being."⁷⁷ In the hills above Los Angeles, "Osmond took a photograph⁷⁸ of him as he looked, eyeless no longer, over the unmeaning distances of this modern Gaza.⁷⁹ Though but a snap, it immortalizes Aldous Redivivus as he stands solid, upright, buoyant . . . demonstrating what happens when the doors of perception are . . . cleansed."⁸⁰ It was "only with mescaline" that he was able to discern "the realities of outer light. 'This is how one ought to see,' he kept exclaiming."⁸¹ But what ought one to see? Quite simply, the world hidden from ordinary sight, "the world without any labels and concepts," for it is this vision of the world that "immediately" evokes "the impression of its being supernatural."⁸² The world, which was obscured by his visual disability, seemed to be revealed in all its depth and breadth. Psychoactive substances not only transported him to the antipodes of the mind but in so doing enabled him to see what his eyes could not: "One cultivates Wordsworth's 'wise Passiveness' and opens oneself receptively to the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* within and without."⁸³ For Huxley, we will see, this was undoubtedly an experience of gnosis.

Osmond, the agent of Huxley's first mescaline excursion, was an English psychiatrist who had, by the early 1950s, become interested in the therapeutic potential of hallucinogens. However, because in Britain the psychiatric establishment was not interested in such outré research, in 1951 he relocated to Saskatchewan Hospital in Weyburn, Canada, where he received research funding from the Canadian government and the Rockefeller Foundation. With John Smythies, he began researching schizophrenia, the initial results of which were published in a 1952 article in the *British Journal of Psychiatry*.⁸⁴ "Suppose that we start with the signs and symptoms and natural history of schizophrenia and ask ourselves how these could be produced, refusing to be diverted by the existing schools of thought," they write.⁸⁵ The novel approach they took began with the identification of drugs capable of producing psychotomimetic effects: "The first question that one asks is whether any known substance could produce . . . a disturbed mental state which could be mistaken for schizophrenia." They discovered that mescaline appeared to produce "symptoms almost identical with schizophrenia, including catatonia and thought disorder."⁸⁶ As they readily acknowledged, this was hardly a groundbreaking observation, since it had "been taken for years by psychiatrists who wish to experience schizophrenic symptoms and to investigate synaesthesia." The formula of mescaline had itself "been known for at least twenty-five years, and probably much longer."⁸⁷ However, what they did discover, along with their colleague Abram Hoffer, was that "the chemical constitution of mescaline is a fairly simple compound and . . . not very dissimilar from adrenaline."⁸⁸

This led them to a new hypothesis about schizophrenia based on the observation that adrenaline undergoes a process of oxidation in the brain, the result of which is a naturally occurring psychoactive substance, adrenochrome, which was believed to have a mild hallucinogenic effect. Schizophrenia, they suggested, could be the result of adrenochrome intoxication. If their findings were correct, they argued, mescaline might be used as a psychotomimetic to train medical professionals treating the disorder, in that it replicated adrenochrome intoxication in a healthy brain.

Huxley was intrigued by this research. "Two or three years ago," he wrote,

a new and perhaps highly significant fact was observed. Actually, the fact had been staring everyone in the face for several decades; but nobody, as it happened, had noticed it until a young English psychiatrist . . . was struck by the close similarity, in chemical composition, between mescaline⁸⁹ and adrenalin. Further research revealed that lysergic acid, an extremely potent hallucinogen derived from ergot, has a structural biochemical relationship to the others. Then came the discovery that adrenochrome, which is a product of the decomposition of adrenalin, can produce many of the symptoms observed in mescaline intoxication. But adrenochrome probably occurs spontaneously in the human body. In other words, each one of us may be capable of manufacturing a chemical, minute doses of which are known to cause profound changes in consciousness. Certain of these changes are similar to those which occur in that most characteristic plague of the twentieth century, schizophrenia.⁹⁰

After reading another article by Osmond and Smythies in the *Hibbert Journal*⁹¹ (a scholarly review of religion and philosophy), which raised a number of issues directly related to his own areas of interest, he wrote a letter to Smythies indicating that he was "willing, indeed, eager, to be a guinea-pig."⁹² Smythies recalls the following sequence of events (which conflicts a little with Osmond's canonical account):⁹³ "He wrote to me saying that he was very interested in these phenomena and had long wished to take mescaline himself. So, if I planned to be in Los Angeles at any time, would I consider giving him some? I replied that, whereas I had no plans myself, my colleague Humphry Osmond would shortly be attending a conference in Los Angeles and he might be willing to do so. The rest is history."⁹⁴

Huxley then wrote a letter to Osmond—the like of which, it is safe to assume, he had not received before—in which he made a number of points that would become central to his thesis in *The Doors of Perception*: "It looks as

though the most satisfactory working hypothesis about the human mind must follow, to some extent, the Bergsonian model, in which the brain with its associated normal self, acts as a utilitarian device for limiting, and making selections from, the enormous possible world of consciousness, and for canalizing experience into biologically profitable channels.”⁹⁵ His suggestion was that “disease, mescaline, emotional shock, aesthetic experience and mystical enlightenment have the power, each in its own different way and in varying degrees, to inhibit the functions of the normal self and its ordinary brain activity, thus permitting the ‘other world’ to rise into consciousness.”⁹⁶ His principal concern, therefore, was “how to make the best of both worlds—the world of biological utility and common sense, and the world of unlimited experience underlying it.”⁹⁷ This world was the antipodes of the mind to which psychedelics provided access. (As we have seen, the notion of distinct worlds or spheres of consciousness between which one can travel is a common one in studies of mysticism, psychedelic experience, and psychosis.)⁹⁸ While he suspected that “the complete solution of the problem can only come to those who have learned to establish themselves in the third and ultimate world of ‘the spirit,’ the world which subtends and interpenetrates both of the outer worlds,”⁹⁹ it appeared to him that Osmond’s work had unwittingly revealed a “partial solution.”

Under the current dispensation the vast majority of individuals lose, in the course of education, all the openness to inspiration, all the capacity to be aware of other things than those enumerated in the Sears-Roebuck catalogue which constitutes the conventionally “real” world. That this is not the necessary and inevitable price extorted for biological survival and civilized efficiency is demonstrated by the existence of the few men and women who retain their contact with the other world, even while going about their business in this. Is it too much to hope that a system of education may some day be devised, which shall give results, in terms of human development, commensurate with the time, money, energy and devotion expended? *In such a system of education it may be that mescaline or some other chemical substance may play a part by making it possible for young people to “taste and see” what they have learned about at second hand, or directly but at a lower level of intensity, in the writings of the religious, or the works of poets, painters and musicians.*¹⁰⁰

Here then, in embryo, is Huxley’s psychedelic gnostic thesis: drugs have the potential to introduce individuals to a larger reality from which they are typically shut out in everyday life.

Osmond, having recently read Huxley's *The Devils of Loudun*, was clearly flattered, if a little discombobulated, to have been contacted by "the formidable author."¹⁰¹ However, as Smythies had indicated to Huxley, since Osmond would be attending a congress of the American Psychiatric Association in Los Angeles, it would be a good opportunity for them to meet up. Huxley was delighted and invited him to stay at his house. Osmond was later told that, "at breakfast one morning Aldous had looked up and said, 'Let's ask this fellow Osmond to stay,'" and that Maria [his first wife] replied, "But he may have a beard and we may not like him." Aldous thought for a bit, and said, "If we don't like him we can always be out."¹⁰² Happily, he was beardless, they liked him, they stayed in, and a dose of mescaline was administered.

Following this significant meeting, one of the first tasks to be faced was the very practical one of nomenclature. Both Huxley and Osmond sought a term that did not carry the medical and pathological baggage of the available pharmaceutical terms but would rather indicate their visionary significance. Huxley sifted through his Liddell and Scott's Greek-English lexicon and discovered the Greek words φανερός (*phaneros*, "manifest") and θύμος (*thumos*, "soul, spirit"). The verb *phaneroein* means "to make visible or manifest" and the adjective *phaneros* means "manifest, open to sight, evident."¹⁰³ "Could you call these drugs psychophans? or phaneropsychic drugs?" he asked Osmond. "Or what about phanerothymes? *Thumos* meaning soul, in its primary usage, and is the equivalent to the Latin *animus*." He concluded his letter with the following rhyme:

Phanerothyme—substantive. Phanerothymic—adjective.
To make this trivial world sublime,
*Take half a gram of phanerothyme.*¹⁰⁴

Osmond responded with his own verse:

To fathom Hell or soar angelic,
*Just take a pinch of psychedelic.*¹⁰⁵

In 1969, in a letter to Alexander Shulgin, Osmond provided a variant reading that combined both:

To make this mundane world sublime,
Take half a gram of phanerothyme.
To sink in Hell or soar angelic,
*You'll need a pinch of psychedelic.*¹⁰⁶

In a 1957 article he made the following point, which reveals his rationale for the term:

I have tried to find an appropriate name for the agents under discussion: a name that will include the concepts of enriching the mind and enlarging the vision. Some possibilities are: psychephoric, mind-moving; psychehormic, mind-rousing; and psycheplastic, mind-molding. Psychezymic, mind-fermenting, is indeed appropriate. Psycherhexic, mind bursting forth, though difficult, is memorable. Psychelytic, mind-releasing, is satisfactory. My choice, because it is clear, euphonious, and uncontaminated by other associations, is psychedelic, mind-manifesting.¹⁰⁷

The term is taken from the Greek *ψυχή* (*psyche*, “conscious self, mind”) and *δηλοῦν* (*deloun*, “manifest, visible”). Although it might have seemed a rather arcane and cumbersome neologism at the time, it quickly became, as Peter Haining has commented, “the label for the generation that would experiment with . . . what became known as ‘tripping.’”¹⁰⁸ Indeed, as we will see, it became much more than a label.

The Doors of Perception, which doesn’t actually use the term, became the most influential book on the psychedelic bookshelf. It became psychedelic scripture, “the set text for the Beat generation and the psychedelic sixties”¹⁰⁹ and “the book that introduced enteogens to the contemporary West.”¹¹⁰ Enthused by his experiences of transcendence, it took Huxley only a month to write and takes up only an hour or so of the average reader’s time. Along with its sequel, *Heaven and Hell*, it provides an evocative exploration of the mystical significance of the psychedelic experience. The revealing title of the book is taken from William Blake’s *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*: “If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear to man as it really is—infinite.” That is to say, for Huxley, mescaline is a cleansing technology of gnosis, which reveals to the user an enlarged understanding of reality.

Just as other psychedelic experiencers had discovered, “the sense of space, and in the end, the sense of time, were both powerfully affected.”¹¹¹ “Yage¹¹² is space time travel,” wrote William Burroughs in 1953.¹¹³ As Lester Grinspoon and James Bakalar have shown, “slowed time or timelessness is a pervasive aspect of the psychedelic experience.”¹¹⁴ “I could, of course, have looked at my watch,” notes Huxley, “but my watch, I knew, was in another universe. My actual experience had been, was still, of an indefinite duration or alternatively of a perpetual present made up of one continually changing apocalypse.”¹¹⁵

The result, for Huxley, was that he found that he was no longer concerned “with measures and locations, but with being and meaning.”¹¹⁶ He sensed that he had perceived the fundamental nature of being. He pondered “the divine source of all existence” within a vase of flowers, within chair legs, and within the folds of his own trousers. The world around him opened up and appeared as “a labyrinth of endlessly significant complexity.”¹¹⁷ It wasn’t simply that he was struck by the transfiguration of the visual world and its investment with beauty and luminosity—which he certainly was—but, more profoundly, he was moved by a sense of oneness with reality. As he stared at a glass vase containing three flowers, the cleansing power of mescaline allowed him to see “what Adam had seen on the morning of his creation—the miracle, moment by moment, of naked existence.”¹¹⁸ “Is it agreeable,” somebody asked him. “Neither agreeable nor disagreeable,” he answered. “It just *is*.” In other words, to label the experience was to misrepresent it. “*Istigkeit*—wasn’t that the word Meister Eckhart liked to use? ‘Is-ness.’ The Being of Platonic philosophy—except that Plato seems to have made the enormous, the grotesque mistake of separating Being from becoming, and identifying it with the mathematical abstraction of the Idea.”¹¹⁹ That is to say, what Plato could not see, mescaline had enabled him to experience in an encounter with everyday objects. Without the aid of drugs, Plato

could never, poor fellow, have seen a bunch of flowers shining with their own inner light and all but quivering under the pressure of the significance with which they were charged; could never have perceived that what the iris, rose, and carnation so intensely signified was nothing more, and nothing less, than what they were—a transience that was yet eternal life, a perpetual perishing that was at the same time pure Being, a bundle of minute, unique particulars in which, by some unique and yet self-evident paradox, was to be seen the divine source of all existence. I continued to look at the flowers, and in their living light I seemed to detect the qualitative equivalent of breathing—but of a breathing without returns to a starting-point, with no recurrent ebbs but only a repeated flow from beauty to heightened beauty, from deeper to ever deeper meaning. Words like Grace and Transfiguration came to my mind, and this of course is what, among other things, they stood for. My eyes travelled from the rose to the carnation, and from the feathery incandescence to the smooth scrolls of scented amethyst which were the iris. The Beatific Vision, *Sat Chit Ananda*, Being-Awareness-Bliss—for the first time I understood, not on the verbal

level, not by inchoate hints or at a distance, but precisely and completely what those prodigious syllables referred to.¹²⁰

Although Huxley's experience was conspicuously informed by his perennialist and broadly Vedantic and Buddhist interests (his set),¹²¹ nevertheless, as discussed in Chapter 1, the very nature of the psychedelic experience does tend toward that "general experience of a unity, which the mystic believes to be in some sense ultimate and basic to the world." It is this, argued Walter Stace, that constitutes "the very inner essence of all mystical experience."¹²² During psychedelic states, claimed Huxley, "we both become one with the Absolute and we become aware of our oneness. This is the everlasting and triumphant mystical tradition, hardly altered by differences of clime or creed."¹²³ As Evelyn Underhill put it, "Mysticism, in its pure form, is the science of ultimates, the science of union with the Absolute, and nothing else."¹²⁴ It is not difficult to understand why users, particularly those already interested in mysticism, interpret their psychedelic states in the way that Huxley did:

The world is now seen as an infinite diversity that is yet a unity, and the beholder experiences himself as being at one with the infinite Oneness that manifests itself, totally present, at every point of space, at every instant in the flux of perpetual perishing and perpetual renewal. Our normal word-conditioned consciousness creates a universe of sharp distinctions, black and white, this and that, me and you and it. In the mystical consciousness of being at one with infinite Oneness, there is a reconciliation of opposites, a perception of the Not-Particular in particulars, a transcending of our ingrained subject-object relationships with things and persons.¹²⁵

For Huxley this sense of oneness was important, for he had, in *The Perennial Philosophy*, already reached the conclusion that *unio mystica* "can be achieved *only* by the annihilation of the self-regarding ego, which is the barrier separating the 'thou' from the 'That.'"¹²⁶ Psychedelics were simply technologies that assisted in this annihilation.

As to how they do this, their psychopharmacological processes are fairly well understood. As Grinspoon and Bakalar comment, "a common interpretation of the perceptual effects is that an unusual number of sensory stimuli from outside and within the body are reaching the centers of awareness in the brain, which can no longer code and integrate them in the ordinary way." As a result, "anticipation, recollection, and all forms of functional classification that

serve the needs of action and survival are eclipsed; formerly familiar phenomena are either neglected as irrelevant or actually not perceived, like the chair that Huxley had to struggle to recognize through the metaphysical-esthetic prism as the utilitarian object it normally was." Consequently, "the controlling, designing, and planning (executive) ego becomes otiose and tends to dissolve: combined with a heightened awareness of body sensations, this may cause the body to seem to melt into its surroundings." All of this accounts for the experience of mystical unity. "Experience overflows the boundaries of the specific sensory channels that confine it for practical purposes; the result is synesthesia," and "the normal habituation to sensory stimuli that keeps the world usefully stable and dull seems to fail, so the objects of the senses take on a pristine immediacy, looking as they may have looked to Adam on the first day or to the user as a child."¹²⁷

While there are good psychopharmacological reasons for the nature of psychedelic experiences, this does not alter the fact that they create spaces within which meaning is made. Regardless of their chemical cause, as Huxley insisted, psychedelic states have frequently had a religious effect.¹²⁸ A philosophical or theological idea that may have previously been "only a vaguely pregnant piece of nonsense" becomes within the space created by a psychoactive substance "as clear as day, as evident as Euclid."¹²⁹ As Crowley had argued, when skillfully employed, psychedelics can become useful pedagogic tools.

In order to unpack this point, we need to return to the broadly gnostic comments Huxley made in his first letter to Osmond regarding the possibility that psychedelics might be able to circumvent normal cognitive processes. He argued that they can be understood as technologies that enable the mind to break through culturally conditioned constructions of reality imposed on us all from birth. They allow us "to cut a hole in the fence and look around us with what the philosopher Plotinus describes as 'that other kind of seeing which everyone has, but few make use of'"; they modify "the subject's normal waking consciousness . . . in many different ways."¹³⁰ Whereas the transcendence of the "normal waking consciousness" had typically been the preserve of a few visionaries and contemplatives in the history of the West, this need not now be the case: "widespread training in the art of cutting holes in cultural fences is now the most urgent of necessities."¹³¹

He had, of course, been thinking about the prosthetic potential of hallucinogens for some years. In 1932, in *Brave New World*, he had speculated about the government's cynical use of *soma*—a fictional, mescaline-like drug, named after the psychoactive substance mentioned in the R̥gveda the "euphoric, narcotic" effect of which had "all the advantages of Christianity and alcohol" but

“none of their defects”: “*Soma*, delicious *soma*, half a gramme for a half-holiday, a gramme for a weekend, two grammes for a trip to the gorgeous East, three for a dark eternity on the moon.”¹³² While *soma* effectively functioned as “the opium of the people,” stifling any feelings of unease and unhappiness that might lead to revolution, by the early 1950s his position had shifted significantly. Indeed, in *Island* (1962),¹³³ a utopian fantasy about a community threatened by a materialistic world corrupted by greed, he discussed a way of life based on a perennial philosophy, practical hypnotherapy, human potential ideas, *maithuna*, yogic discipline, and psychedelics. A substance akin to psilocybin “could be used to potentiate the nonverbal education of adolescents and to remind adults that the real world is very different from the misshapen universe they have created for themselves by means of their culture-conditioned prejudices.”¹³⁴

As with other early and mid-twentieth-century thinkers with an interest in metaphysics and mysticism, such as Underhill, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, and Alfred North Whitehead, Huxley was influenced by the philosophy of Henri Bergson. As Laura Huxley, his second wife, recalled, “especially after his psychedelic experiences, Aldous often mentioned the Bergson theory—that our brain and nervous system are not the source of our ideas, but rather a reducing valve through which Mind-at-Large trickles only the kind of information that is necessary for us to survive on this planet.”¹³⁵ That is to say, he was persuaded that the brain operates as a filter that allows access only to information that is practically useful for the survival of the species. This is a small fraction of a broader range of unfiltered knowledge—what Huxley, following the philosopher Charlie Dunbar Broad, referred to as “Mind-at-Large.”¹³⁶ According to Broad, who shared Huxley’s interest in psychical research,¹³⁷ “Each person is at each moment capable of remembering all that has ever happened to him and of perceiving everything that is happening everywhere in the universe. The function of the brain and nervous system is to protect us from being overwhelmed and confused by this mass of largely useless and irrelevant knowledge, by shutting out most of what we should otherwise perceive or remember at any moment, and leaving only that very small and special selection which is likely to be practically useful.”¹³⁸ We simply accept that this truncated view of reality is the only reality.

If we are to transcend this received understanding of the world, insisted Huxley, there needs to be “a temporary widening of that valve, or ‘a hole in the head,’” thereby permitting “a fragment of Mind-at-Large to flow in.” This, he argued, “is what we usually call inspiration”¹³⁹—or, of course, gnosis. It explains those altered states experienced by mystics, psychics, or people under

hypnosis, or those who have taken a psychedelic drug. There flows into their minds “not indeed the perception ‘of everything that is happening everywhere in the universe’ (for the by-pass does not abolish the reducing valve, which still excludes the total content of Mind-at-Large), but something more than, and above all something different from, the carefully selected utilitarian material which our narrowed, individual minds regard as a complete, or at least sufficient, picture of reality.”¹⁴⁰ This thesis brings us to the heart of Huxley’s psychedelic gnosticism. Psychoactives are technologies that enable the individual to access Mind-at-Large.

Interestingly, the prominent British philosopher of religion John Hick also followed Broad’s thought fairly closely at this point, and although he was by no means a psychedelic thinker, he arrived at a tentative conclusion similar to Huxley’s: “The filtering function of the brain and nervous system, and of our own conceptual frameworks, protects our individuality by screening out the virtual infinity of information flowing around us all the time. For a finite consciousness is constituted by a grid that excludes all except a minute aspect of reality. From this point of view, the mind/brain functions as a kind of reducing valve, evolved to keep out far more than it lets in.”¹⁴¹ Hick even suggested that “in altered states of consciousness this filtering mechanism is partially suspended, releasing a flood of information not normally available to us. Drugs which act directly on the brain to inhibit its normal screening function have for this reason long been used for religious purposes.”¹⁴² While he had a limited grasp of psychedelic research (even claiming, rather bizarrely, that LSD is “not used in religious contexts”),¹⁴³ his general line of argument was close to Huxley’s. Mystical states, including psychedelic states, are states of self- or ego-transcendence. They are experiences of gnosis in which the mind has pierced through the “network of traditional thinking-and-feeling patterns, of second-hand notions that have turned into axioms, of ancient slogans revered as divine revelations.”¹⁴⁴

Finally, it should be noted that Huxley was by no means a frequent drug user. For example, in 1961, two years prior to his death, he recorded that he had “taken mescaline twice, and LSD about five times.”¹⁴⁵ He received his final dose on his deathbed. As he slipped from life, Laura administered it to him under the supervision of the psychiatrist Sidney Cohen: “Light and free, you let go darling; forward and up. You are going forward and up; you are going toward the light. Willingly and consciously you are going, willingly and consciously, and you are doing this beautifully—you are going toward the light—you are going toward greater love—you are going forward and up. It is so easy—it is so beautiful.”¹⁴⁶

Mysticism, Sacred, and Profane

It is hardly surprising that Huxley's work was not universally welcomed within the predominantly conservative intellectual and religious cultures of the 1950s. As Sybille Bedford observed, many found the whole idea worrying, and Huxley understood why they did. While the logic of his position was compelling, there was still something disconcerting about his claims. "What comes through," she asks, "after swallowing a powder or a pill"? The question that bothered many at the time was this: Was the experience "qualitatively, substantially the same as what comes through after weeks or years of asceticism and the more violent physical austerities? *Ought* it to be the same? As Aldous said, there seems to be something discreditable or unfair about it: indeed to many of us the whole thing is offensive or at least disquieting." She then makes an important point, which has been discussed in Chapter 1: "It goes against the grain of what is left of our Christian or Puritan tradition."¹⁴⁷

Such concerns have troubled minds throughout the modern period. Baudelaire, we have seen, was suspicious of psychoactives for a number of reasons, including their apparent ability to guarantee mystical states. He was not alone. Again, as briefly discussed in Chapter 1, his comments reflect a general suspicion in the West regarding the circumventing of moral effort and unmerited reward. In Protestantism, regardless of its theological emphases on *sola gratia*, *sola fide*, *sola Christus* and on the general inability of sinners to earn salvation, typically the line of sight has been bent toward devotion, discipline, moral effort, and what Max Weber identified as the Protestant ethic.¹⁴⁸ More explicitly, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reminds its readers that "the moral virtues are acquired by human effort. They are the fruit and seed of morally good acts; they dispose all the powers of the human being for communion with divine love."¹⁴⁹ So it is hardly surprising that throughout the history of mysticism great importance has been accorded to ascetic privation and moral effort. Although there are examples of spontaneous, unbidden mystical experiences, these are typically treated with suspicion. In the final analysis, the default position is that there can be no shortcuts to mystical ecstasy. Indeed, the temptation to circumvent effort is often profaned as the work of the Devil—a conviction supported by biblical texts such as Genesis 3, Matthew 4:1–11, Mark 1:12–13, and Luke 4:1–13. Not only does succumbing to this temptation not end well, but the results are often pale simulacra of the actual ends for which one is striving. It is no coincidence that the figure of Faust is, after Christ, Mary, and the Devil, arguably "the single most popular character in the history of Western Christian culture."¹⁵⁰ He provides

readers with a stark warning against seeking shortcuts to knowledge, magical power, meaningful relationships, and worldly success. These cannot simply be purchased, even at the cost of one's soul. As Baudelaire argued, drugs can only ever produce an artificial paradise. With implicit reference to Faust and possibly also to Jesus' comment regarding the importance of discipleship in Mark 8:34–37,¹⁵¹ he makes the following point:

Man has always yearned for the infinite, has always been driven by a desire to revive his hopes, has demonstrated in all countries and at all times a frantic appetite for all substances, however dangerous, which, in exalting his personality, might for an instant reveal to his astonished eyes this one-time paradise, the object of all worldly desire; and, finally, this hazardous impulse, in pushing him unconsciously toward the very brink of hell, has thus testified to his original grandeur. But man is not abandoned, so bereft of honest ways of reaching heaven, that he should invoke sorcery and pharmacy; he need not sell his soul to pay for the affection and luxurious caresses of the houris. What is a paradise purchased at the cost of eternal salvation.¹⁵²

Moreover, unlike the “honest ways of reaching heaven,” not only do drug-induced experiences lack moral effort, but they operate outside the regulatory framework that determines the nature of that effort. That is to say, the basic idea of untethered mystical experience has always bothered institutional religion because self-oriented, unregulated ecstasy subverts doctrinal control. More particularly, that *individuals are themselves the agents* of psychedelic mystical experience exacerbates the problem. It's not just that such experiences happen outside accepted theological frameworks, but also that individuals have control over their own mystical experiences. For many religious critics, this is an explicitly profane proposition in that it claims to liberate mystical experience and religious knowledge not only from doctrinal control, but also from divine control. This, Robert C. Zaehner suggested, is to repeat the “original sin” of Adam who disobeyed God and succumbed to the temptation to acquire rejected knowledge for himself.¹⁵³

Zaehner was never going to welcome Huxley's book with open arms. Not only had he converted to Roman Catholicism in 1946, but he was also a strident opponent of perennialism. Many at the time considered his appointment to the Spalding Chair of Eastern Religions and Ethics at Oxford University a little odd. Not only had he not published in that area (or, indeed, published very much at all), but the Spalding Chair had been established to promote a

broadly perennialist view of harmony among the world's religions, a task his predecessor, the Indian philosopher Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, had carried out with distinction. Not being one to mince words, Zaehner effectively confirmed his inappropriateness for the chair to those who had gathered to listen to his inaugural address, entitled "Foolishness to the Greeks,"¹⁵⁴ in which he openly attacked Radhakrishnan's approach and the principles on which the chair had been established.¹⁵⁵ However, it is perhaps important to understand that there were reasons for the uncompromising nature of his challenge other than the obvious academic ones. Before becoming an academic, he had worked for MI6 counterintelligence in Persia during World War II, and so he had been immersed in a culture in which, he later recalled, "truth is seen as the last of the virtues and to lie comes to be a second nature."¹⁵⁶ He hated deceit, whether as a result of ignorance, laziness, or plain dishonesty. This helps to explain his criticism of those, such as Radhakrishnan, who he believed were attempting to find harmony where rigorous scholarship would reveal that none actually existed; that sort of project "may well be commendable in a statesman" (such as those he had worked with while in MI6), but "in a profession that concerns itself with the pursuit of truth it is damnable."¹⁵⁷

Those who knew Zaehner were therefore not surprised when he read *The Doors of Perception* and subsequently turned on Huxley with all the intellectual power at his command. "Mr. Huxley left us no choice."¹⁵⁸ As Zaehner stated at the beginning of *Mysticism, Sacred and Profane*, Huxley's work had led him to completely refocus his research on the broad area of comparative mysticism: "Had *The Doors of Perception* never been published, it is extremely doubtful whether the present author would have been rash enough to enter the field of comparative mysticism."¹⁵⁹ More than a decade later, in 1970, as a result of similar claims by Leary and others belonging to what he dismissed as "the psychedelic cult"¹⁶⁰ of the 1960s, he produced a series of three broadcast talks for the BBC under the title *Theology, Drugs, and Zen*. These were subsequently published in an expanded form in 1972 as *Drugs, Mysticism, and Make-Believe*.¹⁶¹

With Huxley's perennialism and the changing culture of the 1960s in mind, it's also worth noting that, as Jeffrey Kripal says, "as conservative and dogmatic as Zaehner often sounds, he saw himself writing and thinking within a religious context of loss and absence." This is important, for if, as he says, "Zaehner failed to mourn the cultural loss of religious objects, he was certainly aware of what had been lost, and he insightfully saw that the rise of the comparative study of religion was linked inextricably to the decline of religion in the West."¹⁶² "The old certainties have gone," he bemoaned, "and

so departments of religion are springing up like toadstools throughout our demented Anglo-Saxon world. The less we believe, the more we talk about what other people believe.”¹⁶³ Again, as Kripal says, he was “convinced that the modern study of mysticism, and in particular the Western world’s turn East, stems from Christianity’s failure to nurture and proclaim its own mystical riches alongside its more developed prophetic character.”¹⁶⁴ As we will see below, it wasn’t so much that he decried the very idea of a turn to the East, but more that he was concerned about the way it was being done. After all, he argued that Hinduism could be considered “both the fountainhead and the typical manifestation of mystical religion in all its forms.”¹⁶⁵ There was a lot that Western religion could learn from the East. His point was simply that the contemporary fascination with mysticism, subjective experience, and Eastern thought was “growing in the rot of modern secularism and the confusion of cross-cultural communication and interreligious borrowing.”¹⁶⁶ Hence, his critique of Huxley needs to be understood as being driven not only by his Catholicism but also by both a concern for the future of religion in an increasingly secular, experience-oriented society and a desire for rigorous scholarship.

Zaehner was both intrigued and incensed by Huxley’s thesis that mescaline could function as a technology of transcendence. While he was frustrated by *The Doors of Perception* for the reasons given above, Huxley’s account of his experience under the influence of mescaline interested him. Following in his footsteps, on December 3, 1955, he approached Smythies, who was then working in the Psychological Laboratory at the University of Cambridge. Like Huxley, he wanted, he said, to be “the subject of an experiment with mescaline.”¹⁶⁷ His choice of clinician is mildly interesting, for, it will be recalled, Smythies had recently worked with Osmond in Canada and had been instrumental in inspiring Huxley to take the drug. (It’s also worth noting that Smythies would go on to introduce mescaline to Broad, who had been an influence on Huxley. Moreover, it is interesting that Smythies eventually came to accept a version of Huxley’s perennialist thesis.)¹⁶⁸ When Smythies met with Zaehner, the latter was accompanied by Edward Osborn, a member of the Society of Psychical Research who had an interest in mediumistic trance states and had recently carried out an experiment on the medium Eileen Garrett using an electroencephalograph.¹⁶⁹ Reading between the lines, it would seem that Zaehner was keen to explore a number of avenues: the psychological, the spiritual, and the parapsychological. Unfortunately, while the 0.4 gram of mescaline clearly induced an enjoyable experience, it didn’t induce much else. It certainly didn’t bring him any

closer to agreement with Huxley: "I would not presume to draw any conclusions from so trivial an experience. It was interesting and it certainly seemed hilariously funny. All along, however, I felt that the experience was in a sense 'anti-religious,' I mean, not comformable with religious experience or in the same category. In Huxley's terminology 'self-transcendence' of a sort did take place, but transcendence into a world of farcical meaninglessness."¹⁷⁰ This was not, he insisted, because his mind had been made up from the outset, for he claimed that he had "half hoped it would" reproduce a type of "natural mystical experience." The fact that the lens through which he would view the experience was already in place meant that having the experience "he hoped for" was always going to be a long shot. As well as being a Catholic critic of perennialism, suspicious of the very notion of psychedelic mysticism, he was also "an assiduous reader of *Alice Through the Looking-Glass*." This was, he readily concedes, "probably not irrelevant to the nature of my experience,"¹⁷¹ for "once the drug started working," like Alice, he was "plunged into a world of farce."¹⁷²

A central concern of Zaehner's was that Huxley "seemed to assume that praeternatural experiences, conveniently described by the all-embracing term 'mysticism,' must all be the same in essence, no matter whether they be the result of intensive ascetic training, of a prolonged course of Yoga techniques, or simply of the taking of drugs."¹⁷³ As well as articulating the general concern discussed at the beginning of this section, Zaehner does not hide his irritation with what he considered to be the sloppy thinking underlying the premise that all religious experiences are the same at their core. Not only did this fundamentally challenge his own thesis regarding the distinctiveness of the world's religious traditions, but it was precisely this type of "foolishness" that allowed Huxley to conclude that chemically induced experiences are in fact religious experiences. As far as Zaehner was concerned, in the final analysis, perennialism itself was proved false by the psychedelic argument. There is no continuity between a preternatural feeling of oneness with a vase of flowers and the Beatific Vision experienced by Christian mystics. Only perennialists would make this category mistake. The two experiences are not merely different in degree but different in kind. That said, Zaehner did not doubt the ability of drugs to "modify the normal human consciousness and produce what can literally be called ec-static states—states in which the human ego has the impression that it escapes from itself and 'stands outside' itself. Indian hemp and hashish have long been used in the East to produce precisely this result."¹⁷⁴ His principal concern, therefore, was not whether Huxley had experienced a state of transcendence, but rather whether the state of transcendence he had

experienced was of the same variety as those that result from ascetic effort and religious devotion.

Again, to a large extent, this concern was driven by a wider concern regarding the subjective turn in the West, which he believed, quite correctly, was both informing and also informed by postwar Easternization.¹⁷⁵ He viewed "Huxley's . . . extravagant conclusions" in *The Doors of Perception* as the tip of this iceberg.¹⁷⁶ It was the most visible manifestation of an increasing reliance on the authority of personal experience accompanied by a conspicuous lack of critical distance regarding the information garnered from such experiences. All this was "alarming" to Zaehner, not least because he detected the gnostic impulse. "The terms *jñāna* and *gnosis* are in fact conventionally (and arrogantly) used by the adherents of different metaphysical theories to designate their own particular theory which claims . . . to lead to 'liberation' or, in the case of the Gnostics, to the understanding of a particular metaphysical 'truth.'" However, he insisted, this is not to speak of "knowledge" as that word is commonly understood in the English tongue: it means simply a 'strongly held opinion' or 'conviction.' His point was that "to call such opinion 'knowledge' is to assert one's own infallibility, which is either fatuous or a sign of acute mania."¹⁷⁷

Furthermore, "if mescaline can produce the Beatific Vision here on earth—a state that we had hitherto believed to have been the reward for much earnest striving after good—the Christian emphasis on morality is not only all wrong but also a little naïve."¹⁷⁸ Because a distinction needs to be made between varieties of mysticism, he develops a typology. He begins by accepting that because psychedelic experiences produce "unitive" states of transcendence, they should be considered "mystical" in some sense. They are a type of "nature mysticism," which should be carefully distinguished from two further types: "monistic mysticism" and "theistic mysticism." This is significant because it enables Zaehner to lump together—in a very similar way to that which he has criticized in Huxley's treatment of mysticism—a range of anomalous human experiences of transcendence, including psychotic states, such as the manic stage of schizophrenia. "Oddly enough," he says, "Huxley realized the connection between the effects of mescaline and schizophrenia, yet he seems to have refused to face the fact that what he calls religion is simply another word for the manic-depressive psychosis. If religion really does boil down to this, then Huxley deserves much credit for having brought this important fact to the public notice."¹⁷⁹ Yet, as we have seen repeatedly, the similarities between induced states of transcendence, psychosis, and religious experience were well known and had been widely discussed in scientific

literature. Not only was it the observation of these similarities that had motivated research into the psychotomimetic and mysticomimetic potential of psychedelics, but it was this research that had inspired Huxley to suggest himself as a guinea pig. There was, in fact, nothing “odd” at all about his understanding of the relationship. It was central to his own interest. The difference between Zaehner and Huxley was simply that while the former had a negative conception of drug-induced experiences because of their relationship to psychotic states, the latter had a much more positive understanding of what this might reveal to us about both states. There was, in other words, a difference in labeling. Huxley thought that mescaline could certainly be used as a psychotomimetic, for

the schizophrenic is a like a man permanently under the influence of mescaline, and therefore unable to shut off the experience of a reality which he is not holy enough to deal with, which he cannot explain away because it is the most stubborn of primary facts, and which, because it never permits him to look at the world with merely human eyes, scares him into interpreting its unremitting strangeness, its burning intensity of significance, as the manifestations of human or even cosmic malevolence, calling for the most desperate counter-measures, from murderous violence at one end of the scale to catatonia, or psychological suicide, at the other.¹⁸⁰

Psychosis is, in effect, what happens when a disordered mind, which is ill-equipped to deal with the mundane experiences of everyday life, is presented with the expansiveness of Mind-at-Large.¹⁸¹ Such experiences can even be traumatic for devout mystics: “The literature of religious experience abounds in references to the pains and terrors overwhelming them who have come, too suddenly, face to face with some manifestation of the *Mysterium tremendum*.”¹⁸² “Following Boehme and William Law,” he argues, “we might say that, by unregenerate souls, the divine Light at its full blaze can be apprehended only as a burning, purgatorial fire.” He noted that in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* “the departed soul is described as shrinking in agony from the Clear Light of the Void, and even from the lesser, tempered Lights, in order to rush headlong into the comforting darkness of selfhood as a reborn human being, or even as a beast, an unhappy ghost, a denizen of hell. Anything rather than the burning brightness of unmitigated Reality—anything!”¹⁸³ Unlike the mystic, without an interpretative framework to make sense of such

experiences, the schizophrenic finds them disorienting and frightening. The raw experiences are, however, much the same.

Zaehner's version is quite different because he effectively pathologizes psychedelic experience. It is qualitatively different from that of the mystic and very similar to that of the schizophrenic. Whereas Huxley traces lines of continuity between psychosis and religious experience, a relationship that is fairly well established nowadays,¹⁸⁴ Zaehner insists on constructing a dualistic interpretation, whereby some experiences can be lumped together as profane ("nature mysticism") and others can be lumped together as sacred ("religious mysticism").¹⁸⁵ He is even forced by the logic of his argument to dismiss an early profound experience of his own following his reading of Arthur Rimbaud's poem "Saison en Enfer," which, he says, "was so similar to that of Mr. Huxley after he had taken mescaline." However, he assured Huxley (rather patronizingly) that, regardless of its significance at the time, it could now be "set aside" as a moment of nature mysticism, for which "the adjective 'holy' would appear to be singularly out of place."¹⁸⁶ His overall point is that anyone, regardless of maturity, morality, or sanity, can have a *natural* mystical experience. This is not the case with *religious* mystical experiences.

Central to Zaehner's argument, therefore, is a fundamental distinction between natural mystical states, which have negligible religious significance, and monistic and theistic mystical states, which are authentic experiences of the Absolute. For example, the Beatific Vision within theistic mysticism "means a direct apperception of God, not through a glass, darkly, but face to face, with all the veils of sense stripped aside, as the Muslim mystics would say."¹⁸⁷ This is entirely different from the psychedelic experience: "Unless Huxley's descriptive powers have failed him altogether, I am afraid I cannot discern any likeness between what he experienced and what is generally understood as the Beatific Vision."¹⁸⁸ There is an "I-Thou" quality to theistic mystical experience, a "subject-object structure," which requires that even if there is "an utter abandonment of self," there is not a dissipation of the personality into the objective world. Rather, "the human personality is wholly absorbed into the Deity Who is felt and experienced as being something totally distinct and other than the objective world."¹⁸⁹ This is categorically distinct from Huxley's experience of "not merely gazing at those bamboo legs, but actually *being* them—or rather being myself in them."¹⁹⁰ In the first type of experience, says Zaehner, "we have the 'deification' of a human soul in God, the loss of consciousness of all things except God; in the second we have the identification of the self . . . with the external world to the exclusion, it would appear, of God."¹⁹¹ Zaehner cannot even bring himself to discuss Huxley's theory in

terms of pantheism, for this implies an experience of God—"all-God-ism." It would, he argued, be far more accurate to describe Huxley's experience as "pan-en-hen-ism"—"all-in-one-ism."

Does this mean, therefore, that monistic mystical experiences cannot be considered "religious"? Apparently not, for while monistic mystical experiences lack the core characteristics of theistic mysticism, they can be distinguished from Huxley's experience, which is devoid of all perceptual content, being an experience of "undifferentiated unity." The burden of this argument rests on the Vedantic notion of the *brahman-ātman* synthesis, which he explains as follows:

Brahman is the word used to represent the Absolute: it is the sole truly existing and eternal reality, beyond time and space and causation and utterly unaffected by these which, from its own standpoint, have no existence whatsoever. *Ātman* means "self," the individual soul. The proposition, then, that "*Ātman* is *Brahman*" means that the individual soul is substantially and essentially identical with the unqualifiable Absolute. From this it follows that the phenomenal world has no true existence in itself: from the point of view of the Absolute is absolutely non-existent. Therefore, the soul which realizes itself as the Absolute, must also realize the phenomenal world as non-existent. This, then, is to experience one's own soul as being the Absolute, and not to experience the phenomenal world at all.¹⁹²

Vedantism, we have seen, is central to Huxley's thinking during this period,¹⁹³ and most objective observers would conclude that his psychedelic experiences as he describes them, if not identical with this understanding of oneness, certainly brought him within view of it. Zaehner disagrees. There is a "radical difference" between the two.¹⁹⁴ Any other conclusion is "patently and blatantly untrue. For what sort of sense does it make to say that to experience oneself as actually being three chair legs which represent a minute proportion of the phenomenal world, is the same as to experience oneself as the Absolute for which the phenomenal world is simply not-being?"¹⁹⁵ That is to say, unlike Huxley's experience, there is a purity in monistic experience in which the self becomes wholly detached from the material world; there are no longer any chair legs with which the self can feel at one; there is no perception of self to feel at one with anything.

To summarize, the general thesis of *Mysticism, Sacred and Profane* is that "in strictly religious mysticism, whether it be Hindu, Christian or Islamic,

the whole purpose of the exercise is to concentrate on an ultimate reality to the complete exclusion of all else; and by 'all else' is meant the phenomenal world or, as theists put it, all that is not God." This means, he says, "the total and absolute detachment from Nature, and isolation of the soul within itself either to realize itself as 'God,' or to enter into communion with God." Therefore, "the exclusion of all that we normally call Nature is the *sine qua non* of this type of mystical experience: it is the necessary prelude to the further experience of union with God in the Christian and Muslim sense, or to the realization of oneself as Brahman in the Vedāntin sense."¹⁹⁶ This is why Zaehner focuses repeatedly on Huxley's experience of oneness with bamboo chair legs.

While he makes a number of important points, there are problems with his analysis.¹⁹⁷ Not only is he selective in his choice of those he calls to witness against Huxley, but those he does call are not subjected to anywhere near the same levels of forensic scrutiny. While there are obviously differences between the types of mystical experience Zaehner discusses, to point these out is to state little more than that individuals with different sets and in different settings offer different interpretations of their experiences—which is not to state very much at all. Furthermore, having drawn up his typology of mystical experiences, he fails to account for the similarities between religious, psychotic, and psychedelic interpretations. To do this, according to Zaehner's thesis, would be to confuse the sacred with the profane. In other words, his analysis is skewed by the imposition of a sacred-profane dualism that takes little account of the actual nature of mystical experiences. For example, not only does he fail to explore the significance of the continuities between the types of mystical experience he identifies, but he also systematically fails to attend to the differences within the types themselves. This means that any theistic or monistic varieties of psychedelic experience, such as those of Dunlap, are summarily dismissed or simply ignored.¹⁹⁸ For instance, he acknowledged James Slotkin's research into the use of peyote in the Native American Church, in which "they see visions, which may be of Christ Himself. . . . Sometimes they become aware of the presence of God and of those personal shortcomings which must be corrected if they are to do his Will."¹⁹⁹ This is a significant example of a conspicuously theistic psychedelic experience.²⁰⁰ However, rather than explore the implications, he simply opened his Bible and declared that Paul "condemns persons who turn up to the Eucharistic sacrifice drunk." He imagined "St. Paul debating the question: Was it legitimate to use alcohol to stimulate the senses at the time of the sacrificial meal? Was it legitimate to employ physical means in order to produce an artificial ecstasy and to enable

the senses of a sensual man to partake of the spiritual union between man and God"?²⁰¹ While it is debatable whether Paul actually thought about the matter in these terms, it is clear why Zaehner chose to interpret the passage in this way. The point, however, is that he rather clumsily sidesteps the implications of the theistic nature of some psychedelic experiences in order to attack Huxley for contradicting his own theological presuppositions.

Zaehner's overall rejection of Huxley's thought on this matter highlights a problem with much religious analysis of the psychedelic experience: that (as discussed in Chapter 1) it is skewed by theological bias organized around a sacred-profane dualism. Once the use of chemicals has been profaned, for the reasons discussed above, it is very difficult for the experiences they induce to be treated as "religious." Zaehner concludes by closing down discussion on the subject: "In principle, artificial interference with consciousness is, except for valid medical reasons, wrong."²⁰² Other theologians of the day, even more progressive ones such as Harry Abbot Williams, simply followed his lead and denounced Huxley: "Even in this age there are no supersonic flights to the Celestial City or even to the Palace beautiful. Increased awareness can be obtained only by a journey on foot by way of the Slough of Despond, the Hill of Difficulty, Doubting Castle, and the rest."²⁰³

Huxley was unconcerned by such criticisms, the like of which he surely expected and to which he never formally responded. That said, he had effectively provided his response the previous year in *Heaven and Hell*. To "those whose philosophy is unduly 'spiritual' . . . an experience which is chemically conditioned cannot be an experience of the divine." However, "in one way or another, *all* our experiences are chemically conditioned, and if we imagine that some of them are purely 'spiritual,' purely 'intellectual,' purely 'aesthetic,' it is merely because we have never troubled to investigate the internal chemical environment at the moment of their occurrence."²⁰⁴ This certainly applies to Zaehner's work, which, because of his theological presuppositions, failed to interrogate "religious mysticism." Furthermore, "it is a matter of historical record that most contemplatives worked systematically to modify their body chemistry, with a view to creating the internal conditions favourable to spiritual insight."²⁰⁵ Thankfully, nowadays, "we know how to lower the efficiency of the cerebral reducing valve by direct chemical action, and without the risk of inflicting serious damage on the psycho-physical organism." Hence, "for an aspiring mystic to revert, in the present state of knowledge, to prolonged fasting and violent self-flagellation would be as senseless as it would be for an aspiring cook to behave like Charles Lamb's Chinaman, who burned down the house in order to roast a pig."²⁰⁶

Concluding Comments

The cultural ripples caused by the impact of *The Doors of Perception* and, to a lesser extent, *Heaven and Hell* became waves by the dawn of the 1960s. Many aspiring mystics, typically working with Buddhist and Hindu ideas, agreed with Huxley that the house need not be burned down in order to roast a pig. There was little point in following the arduous path of asceticism if a mystical state could be experienced simply by swallowing a psychedelic substance while sitting in a comfortable chair listening to one's favorite music. By the close of the 1950s, there was not only a burgeoning countercultural interest in Zen Buddhism, as evocatively described in Jack Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums* (1959), but also a fascination with what Alan Watts referred to as "adventures in the chemistry of consciousness,"²⁰⁷ as discussed in the work of Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs. There was an emerging feeling, particularly amongst young people, that, as Watts put it, "modern chemists [had] prepared one or two substances . . . that in some cases . . . induce states of mind remarkably similar to cosmic consciousness."²⁰⁸

Having said that, while Watts became an enthusiastic advocate of Huxley's thesis, he had initially expressed concerns similar to Zaehner's about spiritual shortcuts: "For one thing, mystical experience seems altogether too easy when it simply comes out of a bottle, and is thus available to people who have done nothing to deserve it, who have neither fasted nor prayed nor practiced yoga. For another, the claim seems to imply that spiritual insight is after all only a matter of body chemistry involving a total reduction of the spiritual to the material." However, as noted in Chapter 1, he decided that while "these are serious considerations," it needs to be understood that "the difficulty is found to rest upon semantic confusion as to the definitions of 'spiritual' and 'material.'"²⁰⁹ In other words, the public concern about psychedelics rests on a false opposition of spirit and matter—one of the principal themes of his work. As with Huxley and some of the principal currents of the 1960s psychedelic revolution, his overall point was that "the use of such chemicals does not reduce spiritual insight to a mere matter of body chemistry." Indeed, "even when we can describe certain events in terms of chemistry this does not mean that such events are merely chemical."²¹⁰ Brain chemistry, altered states of consciousness, and spiritual experiences are fundamentally related. In response to criticisms such as those of Zaehner, he argued that we need at least to consider the possibility that "some of the chemicals known as psychedelics provide opportunities for mystical insight in much the same way that well-prepared paints and brushes provide opportunities for fine painting, or a beautifully constructed piano for great music."²¹¹

Revolution in the Head

The recent, eager unearthing of the psychedelic tradition signifies a revolution in consciousness. It revives the longing for sacramental experience.

—THEODORE ROSZAK¹

THE CONFLUENCE OF drugs, religion, psychology, and popular culture contributed to a catalytic moment in the late twentieth century when the underground surfaced and the counterculture became culture.² Of course, this happened at a historically propitious moment. Unlike Crowley's work on drugs, much of which was published as the decadent counterculture of the fin de siècle was waning, Aldous Huxley's psychedelic writings appeared as a new counterculture was waxing.³ This new generation of seekers, which still sourced much of its idealism from books, seized upon his work and that of Beat writers such as Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, and William Burroughs, who also discussed the significance of psychedelic states of transcendence.⁴ Moreover, they had the money and leisure time to experiment. Prosperity, as Hugh McLeod has argued, "allowed the emergence of more exotic cultures, overtly resistant to all established norms of respectable behavior."⁵ Young people, observed Robert Cottrell, "presumed that they could transform society and achieve spiritual bliss in a manner only the sanctified few had ever accomplished . . . They were sure that their path toward illumination was eased or ensured altogether by lifestyle changes they effected, by discarding of the competitive and rational ways that had brought so much misery to so many, and by the ingesting of pharmacological substances that seemingly promised instant enlightenment."⁶ Many agreed with Timothy Leary's bold declaration (which was itself informed by the ideas circulating within Beat culture) that "if you are serious about your religion, if you really wish to commit yourself to the spiritual quest, you must learn how to use psychochemicals. Drugs are the religion of the twenty-first century."⁷ As Ginsberg put it, a psychedelic drug was a "spiritual potion. The message [was]: Widen the area of consciousness."⁸

Hence, reflecting on the period, Roszak commented in 1995 that, because nowadays “drugs have become so much the refuge from despair and the staple of organized criminality . . . it is difficult to appreciate a time when they were seen as an integral part of a political-cultural-spiritual agenda.” In the sixties, he recalled, “psychedelic experience was intended to cleanse the doors of perception so that everything might be seen as holy in a culture where it seemed that nothing about the human soul or the natural world was any longer sacred.”⁹

Adventures in the Chemistry of Consciousness

On New Year's Day 1961, shortly after midday, the scholar of religion Huston Smith and his wife, Eleanor, sat down in Timothy Leary's living room. “After coffee and pleasantries Tim sprinkled some capsules of mescaline onto the coffee table and invited us to be his guests. One, he said, was a mild dose, two an average dose, and three a large dose. I took one; Eleanor, more venturesome, took two. After about half an hour, when nothing seemed to be happening, I too took a second capsule.”¹⁰ While initially Smith felt tense and needed to lie down, once he had done so, gradually and imperceptibly he “passed into the visionary state.” It was not, however, quite what he had expected: “The world into which I was ushered was strange, weird, uncanny, significant, and terrifying beyond belief.”¹¹ As the experience progressed, he noted that “Bergson's notion of the brain as a reducing valve struck me as accurate.”¹² As this comment indicates, Huxley had been enormously important to Smith—“not only as a writer, but as a friend and mentor.”¹³ In particular, he later recalled that *The Doors of Perception* had excited him, “precisely because it promised a larger reality.”¹⁴ In 1960 he invited Huxley to lecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he was Professor of Philosophy. This led to several discussions about mescaline and mysticism. Huxley then suggested that he should get in touch with “a new researcher at Harvard University” who had contacted him about his work on altered states.¹⁵

Now here he was on New Year's Day, lying on that researcher's sofa and experiencing what it was that had led Huxley to write *The Doors of Perception*. “Plotinus's emanation theory, and its more detailed Vedantic counterpart, had hitherto been only conceptual theories for me. Now I was *seeing* them I found myself amused, thinking how duped historians of philosophy had been in crediting the originators of such worldviews with being speculative geniuses. Had they had experiences such as mine . . . they need have been no

more than hack reporters.” Moreover, he noted, “beyond accounting for the origin of these philosophies, my experience supported their truth.”¹⁶ He also entered into an ecstatic state similar to the “near-death experiences” recorded by nineteenth-century Spiritualists during hashish intoxication:¹⁷ “I was aware of my body, laid out on a couch as if on an undertaker’s slab, cool and slightly moist. But I also had the sense that it would only reactivate if my spirit chose to reenter it. Should it so choose? There seemed to be no clear reason for so doing. Moreover, could it reconnect if I willed it to?”¹⁸

Following this experience, for a number of years psychoactives became central to Smith’s thought. “Reflectively, to have become overnight a visionary—one who not merely believes in the existence of a more momentous world than this one but who has actually visited it—was no small matter. How could what felt like an epochal change in my life have been crowded into a few hours and occasioned by a chemical?”¹⁹ While he was, as Huxley had been, fully aware of the findings of scientific research, which typically explained the psychedelic experience in physiological terms, he could not suppress the conviction that there was more to it than this. Hence, he “sought out associates” who shared his “compulsion to talk about and understand” what he called their “shared secret.” This was “the stuff of which churches are made.” Indeed, he viewed the psychedelic project based at Harvard University, with which he became involved, as an “*ad hoc* church,”²⁰ the organizing theology of which was a “resistance to epiphenomenal, reductionistic explanations of our revelations, and our certainty . . . that it was impossible to close our accounts with reality without taking these revelations into consideration.”²¹

The culture of the 1960s quickly became a melting pot of creativity and innovation, in which a counterculture powered by hallucinogens rethought art, literature, music, psychology, psychiatry, physics, relationships, politics, and of course religion, particularly Oriental religion.²² The key idea was to “feed your head,” as Grace Slick put it in one of the most famous psychedelic songs of the period, Jefferson Airplane’s *Alice in Wonderland*–inspired “White Rabbit” (1967). While much shelf space has been filled with studies on this head-feeding culture of the 1960s, the thinker central to all of them is Leary. Although there are numerous important figures in the development of psychedelic thought during this period, the paths of most of them cross that of Leary—many being fellow travelers. As such, he provides a useful focal point for much of what follows. If Huxley was the psychedelic guru of the 1950s, Leary, in a different, distinctively public way, assumed that mantle in the 1960s. Having said that, while Leary’s cultural impact was significant, and while we will see that by 1962 he came to think of himself in terms of a guru

and a prophet, his intellectual legacy was negligible when considered against the backdrop of the innovative philosophical and political developments that were taking place in the 1960s, particularly in Europe.²³ It should also be kept in mind that he was never one to let truth get in the way of a good story. Much of what he says is entirely trustworthy and corroborated by his contemporaries, but at other times there is, as Huxley discerned, something of the trickster about him, in that he plays with facts, metaphors, and identities so blatantly that one is left wondering whether he ever took any of them seriously.

While Leary's life can be considered charmed in a number of respects, it also included a deep undercurrent of sadness and tragedy. His father was an abusive alcoholic, and on October 21, 1955, the day before his thirty-fifth birthday, his first wife, Marianne, committed suicide—partly, it should be noted, as a result of his infidelity. Her suicide note read, "My Darling, I cannot live without your love. I have loved life but lived it through you. The children will grow up wondering about their mother. I love them so much and please tell them that. Please be good to them. They are so dear."²⁴ After her death, Leary married four more times; all of those unions ended in divorce.

Leary's early education, which included a short period at West Point, was not promising. However, he eventually received a master's degree in psychology from Washington State University and a doctorate from the University of California at Berkeley. He soon began to attract attention as a rising star in psychological research during a period when increasing numbers of Americans were turning away from religious counseling and toward psychotherapy. As Don Lattin put it, "Therapists were becoming the new high priests."²⁵ He quickly became involved in the new Department of Psychology at Kaiser Hospital in Oakland as the director of psychological research. During this period he wrote his most accomplished work in psychology, *Interpersonal Diagnosis of Personality: A Functional Theory and Methodology for Personality Evaluation* (which he dedicated to Marianne).²⁶ However, in 1958, following a short-lived marriage to the project manager at the Kaiser Foundation Hospital, Mary Della Cioppa, he took his children to Spain, ostensibly in order to concentrate on a second book. This was not a happy time. Leary was under great stress, and his mental and physical health deteriorated: his scalp felt as though it was burning; welts appeared on his back and stomach; his wrists, ankles, and face swelled up; large blisters appeared on his cheeks; his eyes filled with pus; and his temperature rose.²⁷ However, during a particularly low point, he experienced an episode of *ekstasis* that was to have a profound effect on him. "I was weak and trembling. I slumped in the chair for the rest of the dark night . . . I died. I let go. I surrendered. I slowly let every

tie to my old life slip away. My career, my ambitions, my home. My identity.”²⁸ This was, he perceived, a type of near-death experience.

Such experiences of identity dissolution are not uncommon. Not only do they often occur during moments of suffering, disease, or threat, but there are also references to the death of the self and the rebirth of the soul in the history of mysticism. Some mystics refer to this as a loss of the “I” (what Huxley referred to as the experience of “Not-I”).²⁹ Russell Nieli’s discussion of Ludwig Wittgenstein’s notion of being “absolutely safe” is helpful here: it is “a state of mind,” notes Wittgenstein, “in which one is inclined to say ‘I am safe,’ nothing can injure me whatever happens.”³⁰ This can be understood as an expression of “the mystic-flight experience in its disengagement of the self or ‘I’ from identity with the body.”³¹ Drawing on R. D. Laing’s discussion of the “divided self,” Nieli makes the point that because the embodied self has “a sense of being flesh and blood and bones,” it tends to experience itself as “subject to the dangers that threaten [the] body, the dangers of attack, mutilation, disease, decay, and death.” However, in “the mystic-flight experience . . . the self or sense of ‘I’ is disembodied. Ecstatically removed from the body and all objects of the space-time-matter world, it experiences itself as beyond the dangers that accompany existence in such a world.”³² While others have written about this in relation to the psychedelic experience,³³ it is perhaps most evocatively articulated by Arthur Koestler in his autobiographical account of an experience he had while languishing in a prison cell during the Spanish Civil War, conscious that he might be executed at any moment.³⁴ Struggling with anxiety at the prospect of his own dissolution, he began to occupy his thoughts by considering Euclid’s proof that there is an infinite quantity of prime numbers. The confluence of anxiety and the thoughts of infinity evoked a profound and life-changing experience:

The infinite is a mystical mass shrouded in a haze; and yet it was possible to gain some knowledge of it without losing oneself in treacherous ambiguities. The significance of this swept over me like a wave . . . I must have stood there for some minutes, entranced with a wordless awareness that “this is perfect—perfect”; until I noticed some slight discomfort nagging at the back of my mind—some trivial circumstance that marred the perfection of the moment. Then I remembered the nature of the irrelevant annoyance: I was, of course, in prison and might be shot. But this was immediately answered by a feeling whose verbal translation would be: “So what? Is that all? Have you got nothing more serious to worry about?”—an answer so spontaneous, fresh

and amused as if the intruding annoyance had been the loss of a collar-stud. *Then I was floating on my back in a river of peace, under bridges of silence. It came from nowhere and flowed nowhere. Then there was no river and no I, the I had ceased to exist.*³⁵

While Leary's "ordeal in Spain" was rather different from Koestler's, it seems to have evoked a similar moment of *ekstasis*.³⁶ He "let go" of his body, which was threatened by an unknown malady—the "I" died and he experienced the dissolution of identity. Because of their very nature, such experiences always have the quality of ineffability, being difficult to articulate to those who have not had them. As Koestler remarked, "When I say that 'the I had ceased to exist,' I refer to a concrete experience that is verbally as incommunicable as the feeling aroused by a piano concerto, yet just as real—only much more real. In fact," he continued, "its primary mark is the sensation that this state is more real than any other one has experienced before—that for the first time the veil has fallen and one is in touch with 'real reality.'"³⁷ Leary's reflection on his own experience indicated that there was something of this mystical quality to it. This is important because it is exactly how he subsequently framed the psychedelic experience. He understood the "ordeal in Spain" to have been his "first trip." As such, it contributed to the construction of the set that shaped his experience of subsequent trips. For example, his influential manual for drug-induced transcendence, *The Psychedelic Experience*, is an interpretation of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* (1964) in which he described a process of "ego disintegration" very similar to what he had experienced during his illness. "The ordeal in Spain was the first of some four hundred death-rebirth trips I have experienced since 1958. The first was non-chemical. Or was it?"³⁸ (The question relates to Huxley's point that all our experiences involve brain chemistry.)

In 1959, following his recovery, Leary and his children relocated to Florence. His friend and colleague Frank Barron, whom he had first met at Kaiser Hospital, visited him. As they sat chatting, Barron enthusiastically shared some recent experiences. Leary later recalled that he revealed that "his research on creativity had led him to Mexico, where he interviewed a psychiatrist who had been producing visions and trances using so-called 'magic Mushrooms.' Frank had taken a bag filled with the mushrooms back to Berkeley and ingested them." His conversation then wandered off into unfamiliar territory for Leary: "Frank lost me with his talk about William Blake revelations, mystical insights, and transcendental perspectives produced by the strange fungi." He even remembered being concerned that if

Barron shared his enthusiasm with others, he might lose credibility in the academic community.³⁹ Before he left, he mentioned that David McClelland of Harvard University's Center for Research in Personality was, coincidentally, on sabbatical in Florence.

Having just read *Interpersonal Diagnosis of Personality* (which was named the best book in psychotherapy for the year 1957), McClelland arranged a meeting with Leary.⁴⁰ Impressed with his ideas, he offered him a position. As Leary remembers the conversation, he stated that there was "no question" that what Leary was advocating was "going to be the future of American psychology." He continued, "You're spelling out frontline tactics. You're just what we need to shake things up at Harvard."⁴¹ As it turned out, his appointment led to far more shaking up than either of them had anticipated.

During his time at Harvard, while enjoying a summer vacation in Cuernavaca, Mexico, Leary became acquainted with Gerhart Braun, an anthropologist and linguist based at the University of Mexico. "He had discovered," says Leary, "frequent references in Nahuatl to the use of magic mushrooms. The mushrooms were used by soothsayers to forecast the future and were passed around to everyone on ceremonial occasions. Gerhart's curiosity was aroused. He asked me if I would like to try them."⁴² Recalling Barron's enthusiasm, he agreed. As we will see in Chapter 8, while the use of mushrooms was relatively unknown, in 1957 Gordon Wasson had published an article in *Life* in which he revealed that he and his wife had taken the mushrooms, seen visions, and "emerged from the experience awestruck."⁴³ This widely read account had contributed to a growing interest in their potential as technologies of transcendence.⁴⁴ Although the fungi were not always easy to acquire, Gerhart managed to secure some from a contact in the village of San Pedro. He put them in two bowls, placed them on the table, and recommended eating six each. Leary "picked one up. It stank of dampness." He put it in his mouth. "It tasted worse than it looked. I took a slug of Carta Blanca, jammed the rest in my mouth, and washed [them] down." He ate a total of seven. After a while, he "began to feel strange . . . Detached." He went back into the house and laid on the bed: "I gave way to the delight, as mystics have for centuries when they peeked through the curtains and discovered that this world—so manifestly real—was actually a tiny stage constructed in the mind. There was a sea of possibilities out there (in there?), other realities, an infinite array of programs for other futures."⁴⁵ Reminiscent of the Orientalist Romantic visions recorded by Coleridge, De Quincey, and Ludlow, there appeared before him "Nile palaces, Hindu Temples, Babylonian boudoirs, Bedouin pleasure tents, gem flashery, woven silk gowns breathing color,

mosaics flaming with Muzo emeralds, Burma rubies, Ceylon sapphires. Here came those jeweled serpents, those Moorish reptiles sliding, coiling, tumbling down the drain in the middle of my retina." As he pondered these images, he was transported back in evolutionary time: "Calmly observing the first sea thing to crawl to shore, I lay with her, sand rasping under my cheek, then floated down to the deep green ocean. Hello, I am the first living thing." The "journey," as he put it, "lasted a little over four hours. Like almost everyone who had the veil drawn, I came back a changed man."⁴⁶ Later he commented, "I was first drugged out of my mind in Cuernavaca, August 1960. I ate seven Sacred Mushrooms of Mexico and discovered that beauty, revelation, sensuality, the cellular history of the past, God, the Devil all lie inside my body, outside my mind."⁴⁷

Not everyone was happy with this newly "changed man." Because McClelland was a Quaker and Leary thought of the Society of Friends as a "transcendental religion . . . founded upon the wild visionary experiences of George Fox," he expected McClelland to be receptive to his accounts of psychedelic revelations. He wasn't!⁴⁸ Leary sought to persuade him of the value of altered states for psychological research, outlining an embryonic "proposal for systematic drug experiments at Harvard." McClelland was bemused and more than a little concerned at the prospect of such outré research; the person he had sponsored to "shake things up at Harvard" was now off the leash. As far as Leary was concerned, the meeting with McClelland reminded him of his own reception of Barron in Florence and helped him to realize what Koestler had concluded: namely, that "it was practically impossible to convey the experience of altered states to someone who had not been there."⁴⁹ The psychedelic session, he argued, "is like sex. Anyone who has not had the experience cannot really grasp the meaning."⁵⁰

Undeterred by McClelland's concern, Leary and Barron immersed themselves in the writings of previous Harvard psychologists who had pursued an interest in altered states, particularly those of William James and Morton Prince. "I felt like I was being initiated into a secret order of the Cambridge Illuminati."⁵¹ It was during this heady period that Leary's colleague George Litwin introduced him to Huxley's *Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell*. "I read Huxley. And then I read those two books again. And again. It was all there. All my vision. And more too."⁵² Shortly afterward, in October 1960, when Huxley was lecturing at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (at the invitation of Smith), Leary wrote to him, outlining his planned research. "Two days later he telephoned me at the office, even more excited than I was. He volunteered to participate in our experiments. We set up lunch for the

very next day." Leary drove to pick him up. He was, he recalled, "exactly the person you'd expect as a British philosopher—a serene Buddha with an encyclopedic mind. His elegant Oxford voice bubbled, except in moments of amused indignation when its pitch rose at the arrogance of the power-holders who labeled altered states of consciousness a disease."⁵³ Throughout the rest of October 1960 the Harvard researchers met frequently with Huxley to discuss their plans. Eventually the psilocybin pills they had ordered arrived and the experiments began. Huxley was "subject no. 11" in a session in November 1960. This early period at Harvard was, Leary later recalled, "a naïve romantic time. We were excited by the notion that we humans could fly, cut loose from the synaptic cords that held us to low levels of mentation, soar into uncharted realms of the brain We were on our own. Western psychological literature had almost no guides, no maps, no texts that even recognized the existence of altered states. We had no rituals, traditions, or comforting routines to fall back on"⁵⁴—although Huxley did provide some guidance in the form of accounts taken from the works of Gautier and Baudelaire.

At one of their meetings, Leary recalled, "Aldous sat up, lanky legs crossed, and looked at me quizzically. 'So, you don't know what to do with this bloody philosopher's stone we have stumbled onto? In the past, this powerful knowledge has been guarded in privacy, passed on in the subdued, metaphorical obscurantism of scholars, mystics, and artists.'" Leary's response identified the trajectory the 1960s psychedelic revolution would take and exposed the differences between the approaches of the two men. Huxley's tendencies were more conservative, in that had the matter been left up to him, psychedelic exploration would have been limited to an elite coterie of intellectuals and religious thinkers: "We must try to train up a *sufficient and effective minority of individuals*, capable of profiting by language and culture without being stultified or made mad by them, capable of changing obsolete behaviour patterns."⁵⁵ This antagonized Leary: "'But society needs this information,' I said passionately. My anti-elitist button had been pushed."⁵⁶ Huxley thought a little and, it would seem, accepted Leary's point. "Suddenly he clapped his hands against his bony leg. 'Your role is quite simple. Become a cheerleader for evolution. That's what I did and my grandfather before me. These brain-drugs, mass-produced in the laboratories, will bring about vast changes in society. This will happen with or without you or me. All we can do is spread the word.' Then, almost certainly thinking of critics such as Zaehner, he added, 'Timothy, you must expect opposition. There are people in this society who will do everything within their considerable power to stop our research The managers of consciousness, from the Vatican to Harvard, have been in

the business for a long time, and they're not about to give up their monopoly. And, after all, they're the experts and we're the amateurs. They're the pros and we're just the lovers.'"⁵⁷

Leary was, in many respects, the right person for the job. Although Huxley had reservations and others, such as Wasson, openly disliked him, he was naturally subversive, headstrong, and intelligent, with a charismatic personality.⁵⁸ Michael Hollingshead was not alone in believing him to be "one of the wisest, most illuminatory beings that the world has ever known."⁵⁹ Walter Houston Clark even discussed him with reference to James's analysis of "saintliness": "His equanimity, keenness of mind, his sense of humor, empathy and compassion under misfortunes, which would crush ordinary men, would be impossible were it not linked to some source of strength in that wider life James also connects with 'strength of soul.'"⁶⁰ While such assessments are extravagant, they do indicate something of Leary's charisma and countercultural status during the 1960s. However history judges him, there is certainly some truth to Ginsberg's claim that, for many, he was "a hero of American consciousness . . . faced with the task of a Messiah."⁶¹ But as Huxley quickly realized, messiahs are often idiosyncratic and unpredictable. In a letter he wrote to Osmond in 1962 following an evening spent with Leary, he expressed some frustration with what the latter was planning: "He talked such nonsense . . . that I became quite concerned. Not about his sanity—because he is perfectly sane—but about his prospects in the world; for this nonsense-talking is just another device for annoying people in authority, flouting convention, cocking snooks at the academic world . . . I am very fond of Tim . . . but why, oh why, does he *have* to be such an ass?"⁶² This was precisely why Huxley favored a more conservative approach. It was important to spark the fire of revolution, but not in a way that would lead the authorities to douse the flame before it had a chance to take hold.

Another catalytic moment on Leary's path to the psychedelic revolution was an encounter with Hollingshead's mayonnaise jar. Huxley had suggested that Hollingshead, who was working in New York as the executive secretary of the Institute for British Cultural Exchange, and who had managed to get his hands on some Sandoz LSD, contact Leary: "If there is any one single investigator in America worth seeing . . . it is Dr Leary."⁶³ He took Huxley's advice and in September 1961 arranged to meet Leary at Harvard.⁶⁴ Hollingshead invited him to his bedroom and presented him with a mayonnaise jar filled with LSD-infused sugar paste. There were, he estimated, 4975 trips left. "There it is, he said. The key to miracle and meaning. When are you going to take it?"⁶⁵ Leary resisted. "Everything I had heard about lysergic acid

sounded ominous to me. The mushrooms and peyote had grown naturally in the ground and had been used for thousands of years in wise Indian cultures. LSD, on the other hand, was a laboratory product and had quickly fallen into the hands of doctors and psychiatrists.” Moreover, he admitted that he had been “scared.” LSD threatened to shift him beyond his comfort zone. “It was obvious that the more powerful LSD swept you far beyond the tender wisdom of psilocybin.”⁶⁶ Eventually, however, he submitted to his curiosity. The result was a profound and revolutionary mystical experience: “Michael’s heaping spoonful had flipped consciousness out beyond life into the whirling dance of pure energy, where nothing existed except whirring vibrations, and each illusory form was simply a different frequency. It was the most shattering experience of my life.”⁶⁷

So far, we have seen that Leary’s initial exposure to psychedelics highlights a number of significant points of interest concerning the set and setting of induced visionary experiences at the beginning of the 1960s. First, he was a subversive psychologist with countercultural sympathies. Unhappy with much contemporary psychological theorizing and interested in novel forms of self-transformation, the use of hallucinogens was always going to be appealing to him. Second, one cannot help wondering whether his interest in psychedelics was stimulated by his vulnerability at the beginning of the 1960s. Certainly his troubled emotional life—the suicide of his first wife; his divorce from his second wife; the longing to care for his children, who had lost their mother; adjusting to a new country—appears to have manifested in severe physical symptoms that culminated in extreme exhaustion and an experience of death and rebirth, which he understood as his “first trip.” Third, his first significant discussion of drug-induced transcendence was with Barron, who appears to have interpreted the experience in terms of a mystical state. Hence, regardless of the psychological setting within which the initial experiments took place, from the outset his interpretation of psychedelic states was largely shaped by the notion that they were in some sense mystical. Finally, his subsequent reflection on the psychedelic experience was explicitly informed by Huxley’s work and by the increasingly Easternized occulture of the early 1960s. He notes that his ideas were influenced not only by James’s *Varieties of Religious Experience*—as, indeed, were those of his friend Allen Ginsberg⁶⁸—but also by “the pop-Hindu and pop-Buddhist texts” of the period.⁶⁹ (The 1964 manual for induced altered states based on the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, which he co-authored with Metzner and Alpert,⁷⁰ was the result of a suggestion by Huxley and Gerald Heard to use the book as a guide for psychedelic sessions.)⁷¹ Having said that, because Leary was one of the principal architects

of the psychedelic revolution, his interests in psychology and psychotherapy contributed to its trajectory. In particular, like Huxley, he was interested in consciousness and “human potentialities” (a term popularized by Huxley and developed within humanistic psychology). As Roszak observed, “among a growing number of those who move with the forward currents of psychotherapy and the healing arts, ‘consciousness research’ and the new religions, a spontaneous consensus has sprung up around the evolutionary image of human potentiality.”⁷² It was within this context that Leary theorized the value of psychedelics. “Huxley was the trailblazer,” Leary insists in Lattin’s rendition of a conversation he had with Andrew Weil and Ronnie Winston.

You know, I didn’t have a clue as to the potential of this research until I had my own experience with psilocybin mushrooms over the summer. At its core, you have to understand that this is not an intellectual exercise. It is experiential. It is, and I’m almost embarrassed to say it, religious. But it is more than religious. It is exhilarating. *It shows us that the human brain possesses infinite potentialities.* It can operate in space-time dimensions that we never dreamed even existed. I feel like I’ve awakened from a long ontological sleep.⁷³

While informed by the spiritual perspectives of the counterculture, his understanding of the psychedelic experience was fundamentally physiological, unlike those of Smith and Huxley. Although in 1966 he established the League for Spiritual Discovery, which was incorporated as a religious organization in New York State, his dominant frame of reference was always experimental psychology. He thought that personal and political liberation would be achieved by a greater understanding of the potential of the brain. His starting point was always that “all events in nature, including human behavior, exist for us only as registered, recorded and mediated by the Brain.”⁷⁴ It is interesting that he sometimes used an upper-case *B*, just as an upper-case *G* is typically used for the word “God” in theological literature: “Your Brain is God.”⁷⁵

Regardless of the various esoteric ways in which Leary sought to popularize psychedelics following his controversial dismissal from Harvard in 1963⁷⁶—the first firing in Harvard’s history—and his subsequent rise to the status of a countercultural icon, his principal interest was in their potential as a psychological tool. He was particularly interested in their subversive ability to access the brain’s full potential and to inhibit conditioned reflexes.⁷⁷ The countercultural significance of psychedelics was their efficacy in liberating individuals from “game reality.” Although Leary rarely mentions Eric

Berne's popular 1964 book *Games People Play: The Psychology of Human Relationships*, it is clear that it had a formative influence on the development of his thought.⁷⁸ Leary, however, insisted that the influence was actually in the opposite direction: "Eric Berne popularized *my* concepts of transactional analysis and game theory in *Games People Play*, making accessible to the public concepts of behavior-change that had formerly been reserved to the psychological priesthood," though Berne never mentions Leary in the book.⁷⁹ Still, regardless of the direction of influence, "the humanist psychological boom was on the way" and, largely thanks to Leary, the psychedelic revolution was destined to become part of it.⁸⁰ Focusing on the whole person, humanistic psychology was the ideal vehicle for psychedelic ideas, with its emphasis on the importance of observing human behavior, not merely from the psychologist's perspective but also from the perspective of an individual's subjective experience. Driven particularly by the work of Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, it refocused psychology on the experiencing self.

Influenced by these new psychological currents,⁸¹ Leary organized his theorizing around the idea of the "game," which he directly related to Huxley's thought. His work, while drawing on a number of ideas, can be understood in terms of a humanistic psychological reading of Huxley. This places him firmly within the emerging "psychological spirituality" of the 1960s, the focus of which was self-actualization. As Paul Heelas comments, "Experiences of harmony, loving oneself and others, peace and tranquility, being healed and becoming 'whole' are stressed; hallucinogenic drugs might be used to develop . . . 'special inner sensations or moods'; inner spirituality is put to work to accord greater (expressive) value to aspects of life in this world."⁸² The psychedelic experience, as Roszak comments, "becomes a limited chemical means to a greater psychic end, namely, the reformulation of the personality, upon which social ideology and culture generally are ultimately based." Consequently, the psychedelic revolution can be reduced to a simple syllogism: "change the prevailing mode of consciousness and you change the world; the use of dope *ex opera operato* changes the prevailing mode of consciousness: therefore, universalize the use of dope and you change the world."⁸³ This understanding of the potential of psychedelics begins to become evident in the first article Leary wrote on psilocybin in 1964:

Cultural learning has imposed a few, pitifully small programs on the cortex. These programs may activate perhaps one-tenth or one one-hundredth of the potential neural connections. All the learned games of life can be seen as programs which select, censor, alert and thus

drastically limit the available cortical response (Mr. Aldous Huxley's reducing valves). The CE (i.e. consciousness-expanding) drugs unplug these narrow programs. They unplug the ego, the game machinery, and the mind (that cluster of game concepts). And with the ego and mind unplugged, what is left? Not the "id"; no dark, evil impulses. These alleged negative "forces" are, of course, part of the game, being simply anti-rules. What is left is something that Western culture knows little about: the open brain, the uncensored cortex—alert and open to a broad sweep. Huxley and Dr. Barron have told you in their own words what is left, and there is no need to add my lumbering prose.⁸⁴

Reaching beyond conventional psychology to the work of the Austrian zoologist Konrad Lorenz, he argued that psychedelics functioned as technologies of deconditioning, of reconstructing the self, of "reimprinting." Lorenz, who had been present while goose eggs were hatching in an incubator, discovered that upon emerging from their shells and seeing him, the goslings responded as if he was their "protective, maternal object." This, concluded Leary, "reminds us that each of us sees the world through perceptual structures (biochemical-neurological) which are laid down accidentally in our earliest moments."⁸⁵ Furthermore, it "has implications for our understanding of the effect of psychedelic drugs."⁸⁶ With Huxley's thesis in mind regarding their ability to temporarily disrupt the mind's reducing valve, he now proposed that "psychedelic drugs may not only suspend old imprinted patterns, they may also provide the possibility if *reimprinting*."⁸⁷ In his first article on LSD (1964), he suggested

a neurological restatement of the "death-rebirth" experience which is so often reported during psychedelic moments. Reimprinting means that during the psychedelic session the subject's nervous system is in a state of disorganized flux closely analogous to that of infancy. The planned, voluntary release of fixed perceptual patterns and the temporary opening up of fluid, boundaryless awareness suggests the hope of controlled, self-controlled reimprinting. And here we come to the psychological implications of the psychedelic experience. The accelerated personality change, the rapid learning, the sudden life changes so regularly reported by psychedelic researchers.⁸⁸

For Leary, therefore, *ecstasy/ekstasis*, which traditionally referred to "the flight of the soul from the body,"⁸⁹ can be understood in terms of being

“released from a fixed or unmoving condition.” He was, in effect, proposing a humanistic psychological interpretation of psychedelic gnosis. Psychedelics “propel awareness out beyond normal modes of consciousness. They are properly called psychedelics—i.e., mind-opening substances.”⁹⁰ Spiritual experiences are not dismissed, but rather reinterpreted in terms of psychological states. For example, because the brain can be understood “as God,”⁹¹ his little 1965 book *Psychedelic Prayers*—based on the *Tao Te Ching*—is intended to assist a person during LSD sessions to “tune in” to “patterns of neurological signals which are usually censored from mental life.”⁹² While using spiritual vocabulary, his prayers and meditations are rooted in humanistic psychological theory:

*Can you float through the universe of your body and not lose your way?
Can you focus on the billion-celled diamond network
Pull the sensory streams into your brain
Create an incandescent solar flare
A thousand petalled
Lotus of light?*⁹³

The principal teaching of *The Psychedelic Experience* was, as its co-author, Ralph Metzner, insisted,

to recognize the beautiful and horrible visions that one encountered, what the *Barda Thödol* called “peaceful and wrathful deities,” as emanations or projections of one’s own mind. With such recognition, triggered by spoken words of the guide, one could avoid grasping for the beauties and fleeing from the terrors, stay centered and have a reasonable chance of making it through the experience to a balanced re-entry or “rebirth.” Summing up the basic advice repeated many times throughout the guidebook, we would tell psychedelic voyagers to “relax and float down stream.”⁹⁴

Asian religious texts, with which Leary became acquainted, were interpreted as descriptions of the psychological states that he was hoping to induce with drugs. They were understood to be, as Metzner put it, “centrally concerned with transcendence, with learning to go beyond the ego-centered perspectives of ordinary human consciousness, beyond the dualities of right and wrong and with becoming liberated from the fears and cravings that characterize human existence.”⁹⁵ Asian religions had developed spiritual techniques

of ecstasy to achieve such states, but their goal was essentially the same as that of psychedelic research.

A Religious Set and Setting

For many the relationship between drugs and religious experience could not be reduced to brain chemistry. Psychedelic experiences were able to provide access to explicitly religious experiences. Some, such as Wasson, who had visited Leary at Harvard in spring 1961, claimed not only that “every world religion had originated in the botanical hallucinations of some early visionary”⁹⁶ but also that a psychoactive substance “puts many, if not everyone, within reach of a visionary state without having to suffer the mortifications of Blake and St John. It permits you to see vistas beyond the horizons of this life. To travel backwards and forwards in time. To enter other planes of existence. Even, as the Indians say, to know God.”⁹⁷ In perhaps the most famous experiment of its type, Walter Pahnke, for his doctoral dissertation in 1962, which was supervised by Leary, sought to test this thesis.⁹⁸

As is generally well-known by those with an interest in the area, Pahnke, a medical doctor and a Christian minister, with the help of Leary and particularly Clark, experimentally examined whether a religious set and setting would lead to a psychedelic mystical state. He secured the support of the influential African American theologian and civil rights campaigner Howard Washington Thurman, who was at that time the dean of Marsh Chapel at Boston University, and, aided by Clark, recruited twenty theology students as volunteers and ten guides, two of which were Leary and Smith.⁹⁹ As Leary recalls, the subjects were divided into five small groups. “In each group there would be four divinity students: two would be given psilocybin and the other two a placebo. Each group would be monitored by two trained guides.”¹⁰⁰ Although Pahnke was not happy with Leary’s suggestion that the guides should also be involved in the experiment (one in each group receiving a half dose of 15 micrograms), “Professor Clark and I insisted. Selected by lot, one guide would be straight and one would be high. The guides would seek the same thing as the subjects—a deep spiritual experience on Good Friday.”¹⁰¹ Thurman agreed that his two-and-a-half-hour Good Friday service in the larger chapel could be relayed to the small chapel where the volunteers were congregated. The experiment Pahnke designed for the volunteers, whose religious backgrounds and personalities had been measured *before* the experiment, was double-blind, because neither the researchers nor the subjects knew who had been administered psilocybin and who had received the placebo

(nicotinic acid, which would induce a tingling sensation in order to make those who received it believe that they had been given psilocybin): "Thirty capsules which were identical in appearance were prepared eight hours before the experiment. Ten contained 30 mg of psilocybin; five contained 15 mg of psilocybin; and fifteen contained 200 mg of nicotinic acid. Powdered sugar was used to fill any unused space in the capsules. Each capsule was sealed in an unmarked envelope."¹⁰² The preparation of the subjects with the help of the guides, along with "the setting under which the drug was administered and the collection of data about the experience were made as uniform as possible."¹⁰³ On the morning of the experiment, a helper, who did not know any of the subjects and who was not otherwise involved, flipped a coin to decide who would receive the psilocybin. Moreover, Pahnke was keen to note that he had "collected the data and evaluated the results without ever having had a personal experience with any of these drugs."¹⁰⁴ The data were gathered from personal "phenomenological accounts" that each subject was asked to produce, as well as from "147-item questionnaires," tape-recorded interviews following the session, and a subsequent group discussion.

In order to compare his data with accounts of mystical experiences, drawing on the work of James and particularly Walter Stace, he constructed "a nine-category typology of the mystical state of consciousness . . . as a basis for measurement of the phenomena of the psychedelic drug experiences."¹⁰⁵ Stace's conclusion that "in the mystical experience there are certain fundamental characteristics which are universal and are not restricted to any particular religion or culture (although particular cultural, historical, and religious conditions may influence both the interpretation and description of these basic phenomena) was taken as a presupposition."¹⁰⁶ This presupposition, it could be argued, was an unnecessary bias that informed his conclusions. Throughout he is uncritically guided by Clark,¹⁰⁷ James, Stace, Evelyn Underhill, James Pratt,¹⁰⁸ Richard Maurice Bucke,¹⁰⁹ and a number of other scholars, who can support his perennialist assumption that, quoting from Pyotr D. Ouspensky, "in mystical states there is no difference of religion. All experiences are absolutely identical."¹¹⁰ (He even challenges certain statements by Rudolf Otto and Zaehner when they contradict this thesis.)¹¹¹ Nonetheless, his aim was not to determine whether psychedelic experiences are "religious,"¹¹² but simply whether they are similar to those identified as "mystical"—although it is difficult to understand why, if this is the case, one would not then identify them as "religious," as others have done on the basis of Pahnke's research.¹¹³ The typology of mysticism he constructed—which is an "enriched and expanded"¹¹⁴ version of Stace's shorter typology—was as

follows: unity; transcendence of time and space; deeply felt positive mood; sense of sacredness; objectivity and reality; paradoxicality; alleged ineffability; transiency; and persisting positive changes in attitude and behavior.

Unity. In accordance with his perennialist presupposition, for Pahnke unity is the most important characteristic of mystical experience.¹¹⁵ Within this general category of unity, he distinguished between internal and external types, the principal difference being that while the former identifies a turn within to the interior world, the latter identifies a sense of unity with the external world. The key characteristics of the former are an erosion of the “usual sense impressions and a loss of self without becoming unconscious.” He continues:

The multiplicity of usual external and internal sense impressions (including time and space), and the empirical ego or usual sense of individuality, fade or melt away while consciousness remains. In the most complete experience, this consciousness is a pure awareness beyond empirical content, with no external or internal distinctions. In spite of the loss of sense impressions and dissolution of the usual personal identity or self, the awareness of oneness or unity is still experienced and remembered. One is not unconscious, but is rather very much aware of an undifferentiated unity.¹¹⁶

External unity, on the other hand, is essentially what Zaehner had described as “natural mystical experience,” in that it involves an empirical perception of the external world, with which the experiencer feels at one—as Huxley had described with reference to flowers and chair legs. While the experiencer is cognizant of a distinction between the self and the external world, there is a sense of underlying metaphysical unity. This can lead to the conviction that there is a unifying reality behind the appearance of diversity: “all is one.”¹¹⁷

Transcendence of time and space. As we have seen time and again, a particularly common perception during psychedelic experiences is spatio-temporal distortion. As Pahnke says, the user is liberated not only from “clock time” but sometimes also from “one’s personal sense of . . . past, present, and future.”¹¹⁸ This is often linked to a loss of ability to locate oneself spatially. As he indicated, the loss of spatiotemporal anchors is religiously significant in that it is often interpreted as an experience of “eternity” or “infinity.”¹¹⁹

Deeply felt positive mood. “The most universal elements (and, therefore, the ones that are most essential to the definition of this category) are joy,

blessedness, and peace.”¹²⁰ The intensity of these feelings is such that “they are highly valued by the experiencers” and, as such, become an integral feature of the mystical state. “Tears may be associated with any of these elements because of the overpowering nature of the experience. Such feelings may occur either at the peak of the experience or during the ‘ecstatic afterglow,’ when the peak has passed, but while its effects and memory are still quite vivid and intense.”¹²¹ Moreover, as might be expected, it is not uncommon for experiencers to express love as a core component of a deeply felt positive mood. This is related to a sense of relational oneness with the world and other selves.

Sense of sacredness. Unsurprisingly, bearing the above in mind, psychedelic experiences are typically invested with a “sense of sacredness.” “The sacred” is understood by Pahnke as “that which a person feels to be of special value . . . The basic characteristic of sacredness is a non-rational, intuitive, hushed, palpitant response of awe and wonder in the presence of inspiring realities.”¹²² While often invested with religious meaning, it need not be.¹²³ He is not, however, taking a sociological approach to the sacred (as discussed in Chapter 1). As with much discussion of psychedelic esotericism and certainly perennialism, he tends to assume an ontological understanding of the sacred close to what Otto identified as the experience of *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*.¹²⁴ Indeed, it could be argued that too little account was taken by Pahnke of the social construction of mystical experience.

Objectivity and reality. Drawing on James’s work, Pahnke argued that two elements can be identified in all mystical experiences: “insightful knowledge or illumination felt at an intuitive, non-rational level and gained by direct experience” and “the authoritative nature of the experience, or the certainty that such knowledge is truly real, in contrast to the feeling that the experience is a subjective delusion.”¹²⁵ These two elements are connected in that, for the experiencer, “the knowledge through experience of ultimate reality (in the sense of being able to ‘know’ and ‘see’ what is really *real*) carries its own sense of certainty. The experience of ‘ultimate’ reality is an awareness of another dimension unlike the ‘ordinary’ reality . . . yet the knowledge of ‘ultimate’ reality is quite real to the experiencer.”¹²⁶ As in the case of religious experiences generally, it is not that experiencers have any evidence for such claims, but only that they have a clear conviction that their experiences are true. In other words, psychedelic experiences have a noetic quality. “What becomes ‘known’ (rather than merely intellectually assented to) is intuitively felt to be authoritative, requires no proof at a rational level, and produces an inward feeling of objective truth”¹²⁷—that is, gnosis.

Paradoxicality. When the intellectual content of the experience is analyzed, it often contains contradictions. “For example, in the experience of internal unity there is a loss of all empirical content in an *empty* unity which is at the same time *full* and complete. This loss includes the loss of the sense of self and the dissolution of individuality; yet something of the individual entity remains to experience the unity. The ‘I’ both exists and does not exist.”¹²⁸ As we have seen regarding Huxley’s experience, there is a sense of separateness from, and at the same time unity with, external objects. Such paradoxes are often accounted for by the next characteristic of mystical experience.

Alleged ineffability. It is common for states of transcendence to be described as ineffable.¹²⁹ As Leary and Koestler (who, incidentally, became friends)¹³⁰ concluded, “It was practically impossible to convey the experience of altered states to someone who had not been there.”¹³¹ The reason for this, says Pahnke, is that there is “an embarrassment with language because of the paradoxical nature of the essential phenomena.”¹³² While this may be true, it is also the case that the experience is felt to be too special to be identified with other everyday experiences. That is to say, to articulate a profound mystical experience with a vocabulary developed for everyday use is to reduce its significance and, therefore, to misrepresent it. As Ann Taves has commented, “People often use the terms ‘mystical’ and ‘spiritual’ to mark events, places, objects, or experiences as very special and, depending on what they mean by the terms, sometimes to signal that they consider the thing in question so special that it cannot or should not be compared to other, less special things.” They may use these terms “to mark things as belonging to another realm or manifesting a different sort of energy or exemplifying a higher aspect of reality that is not just special, but so special that it cannot be compared with more ordinary things.”¹³³ This is why, of course, religious language is used of psychedelic experiences. Religion provides a vocabulary that accords such “special” experiences with something approaching the gravity they deserve.

Transiency. As James had discussed, mystical experiences are transient.¹³⁴ They are temporary interruptions into everyday experience—extraordinary events. It is for this reason, it could be argued, that they are considered “special.” The mystical state of consciousness cannot be sustained indefinitely if it is to be considered special and sacred. When altered states cease to be transient events, they are pathologized as psychoses or profaned as possession.

Persisting positive changes in attitude and behavior. Finally, because Pahnke is concerned not with psychosis but rather with temporary experiences generally considered to be healthy and life-enhancing, he examines, as

James did, the effect they have on everyday life. To this end, he conducted follow-up research six months later to identify any positive changes regarding the self, others, life in general, and the mystical experience itself.¹³⁵

Regarding the self: He argues that “an increased integration of the personality is the basic inward change in the personal self. Undesirable traits may be faced in such a way that they may be dealt with and finally reduced or eliminated.”¹³⁶ This may lead to a heightened “sense of inner authority” and an increase in “the vigor and dynamic quality of a person’s life.”¹³⁷ Relatedly, some subsequent research has shown that psychedelic experiences appear to increase creativity. According to the findings of one such study in 1966: “Psychedelic agents seem to facilitate creative problem-solving . . . The results also suggest that various degrees of increased creative ability may continue for at least some weeks subsequent to a psychedelic problem-solving session.”¹³⁸

Regarding others: “Changes in attitude and behavior toward others include more sensitivity, more tolerance, more real love, and more authenticity as a person by virtue of being more open and more one’s true self with others.”¹³⁹

Regarding life in general: All of this generally led to an increased sense of well-being and a greater “vocational commitment, need for service to others, and new appreciation of life and the whole of creation. Life may seem richer.”¹⁴⁰ A subsequent study of nearly four hundred patients reported a number of changes in values and personality. Based on test data, observer ratings, follow-up interviews, and subjective reports, the following were noted: “greater spontaneity of emotional expression, more adequate ego resources, reduction in depression and anxiety, less distance in interpersonal relations, more openness to experience, increased aesthetic appreciation, deeper sense of meaning and purpose in life, and an enhanced sense of unity with nature and humanity.” Hence it was concluded that, “used in an appropriate context, psychedelic agents may facilitate lasting change in the direction of increased creative expression and self-actualization.”¹⁴¹ Moreover, Pahnke notes that his subjects subsequently seemed to devote more time to the cultivation of a “devotional life.”¹⁴²

Regarding the mystical state itself: The state of transcendence is itself valued as an important life experience, being typically “remembered as a high point.” Subsequent attempts are, therefore, made by users “to recapture the experience or, if possible, to gain new experiences as a source of growth and strength.”¹⁴³ As is commonly the case with religious experiences (e.g., conversion narratives), the testimonies of others are appreciated in that they

contribute to the construction of a community of verifiers. That is to say, one's own experience of transcendence is affirmed by the testimony of others. As a result, one is drawn closer to people with similar experiences and a community is formed. As Smith put it, this is "the stuff of which churches are made."¹⁴⁴

Nine of the ten student volunteers who were administered psilocybin reported religious or mystical experiences, while only one in the placebo group reported anything similar. Clark later recorded that the subject who ingested psilocybin but *did not* have a mystical experience subsequently admitted that it had been his intention to disprove the connection.¹⁴⁵ Concerning the subject in the control group who *did* have an experience, Pahnke later noted that he compared its impact unfavorably to previous experiences, which were considered more important.¹⁴⁶ Without trawling through the details of Pahnke's experiment, which was careful and thorough, his conclusion was essentially that while "not all the phenomena of each category" were experienced,¹⁴⁷ "persons who received psilocybin experienced to a greater extent than did the controls the phenomena described by our typology of mysticism."¹⁴⁸ Indeed, although we have seen that Leary's approach to religious experience was complex and ambiguous, he was enthusiastic about his student's findings. In an explicit affirmation of Huxley's thesis, he stated that "the statistical results were clear cut. Our administration of the sacred mushrooms in a religious setting to people who were religiously motivated provided a scientific demonstration that spiritual ecstasy, religious revelation, and union with God were now directly accessible. Mystical experience could be produced for and by those who sought it."¹⁴⁹ Consequently, just as earlier researchers had argued that psychoactives might be used to investigate psychotic experiences, so Pahnke concluded that they could be used to investigate mystical states: "Many unknown conscious and unconscious factors operate in mystical experience. Much investigation is needed in this area and drugs like psilocybin can be a powerful tool. Experimental facilitation of mystical experience under controlled conditions can be an important method of approach to a better understanding of mysticism. Better understanding can lead to an appreciation of the role and place of such experiences in the history and practice of religion."¹⁵⁰

Sensationalized by the media as "the miracle of Marsh Chapel," this was a significant moment in the history of the study of psychedelic experiences.¹⁵¹ As Smith says, ten theological students and five of their guides "were visited by what they generally reported to be the deepest religious experience of their lives."¹⁵² Smith would later recall in an interview in 1996:

The experiment was powerful for me, and it left a permanent mark on my experienced worldview. (I say “experienced worldview” to distinguish it from what I think and believe the world is like.) For as long as I can remember I have believed in God, and I have experienced his presence both within the world and when the world was transcendently eclipsed. But until the Good Friday Experiment, I had had no direct personal encounter with God of the sort that *bhakti yogis*, Pentecostals, and born-again Christians describe. The Good Friday Experiment changed that.¹⁵³

He confirmed this to me eight years later, in 2004, when I asked him about the significance of his psychedelic experiences.

Within academia, however, the tide was turning. There was increasing resistance to this type of research. While it was an impressive piece of work, Pahnke’s thesis was “uneasily approved,” he wasn’t allowed to pursue his research further, and subsequent requests for funding were denied.¹⁵⁴ And, as noted above, shortly after the Good Friday experiment Leary and Alpert were dismissed from Harvard.

The Good Friday experiment fundamentally challenged (with substantial evidence) one of the central arguments of Zaehner’s withering critique of Huxley’s psychedelic experiences, namely, that they are always of the panenhenic, natural mystical variety, always absolutely other than theistic mystical experience. Zaehner’s bias is particularly conspicuous in a later discussion of Pahnke’s work, which simply ignored the cogency of his findings. Indeed, he complained that not enough attention had been given to specifically Christian ideas, such as “the meaning of the crucifixion of the God-man, Jesus.”¹⁵⁵ Because the findings revealed little evidence of reflection on Jesus, the Good Friday experiment tells us “very little of the *religious* experience of these young Protestants.”¹⁵⁶ Blinkered by his theological presuppositions, his argument flies in the face of the facts. Leaving aside Pahnke’s explicit statement that the experiment was *not* intended to explore “*religious* experience,” it did reveal a number of Christian elements ignored by Zaehner. For example: “I heard PK (or whoever it was) return to the chapel and play, ‘Jesus Christ Is Risen Today, Hallelujah!’ I had a brief, but violently intense feeling of joy”; “I read the Scripture, put out the candles (which I believe to be symbolic of the crucifixion of Christ), and after more *blackness*, found myself in the pulpit preaching love and peace . . . I attempted to play the organ, wanting to play ‘Christ the Lord Is Risen Today,’ being motivated by a strange sense of joy in the reality of this event.”¹⁵⁷ Rick Doblin’s follow-up research a quarter of a

century later, for which he interviewed many of the subjects again, revealed a number of similar experiences.¹⁵⁸ One subject still recalled an “overwhelming feeling of Jesus,”¹⁵⁹ and another, meditating on the Passion, was able to “view the procession of the cross.”¹⁶⁰ Even without this explicitly Christian content, the findings still challenge Zaehner’s principal thesis in *Mysticism, Sacred and Profane*, which is that psychedelic experiences are not theistic. There is little doubt that while there was an overall emphasis on unity, some of the subjects recalled an experience of an “I-Thou” relationship with God. Smith certainly had a fully *personal* experience of God:

It enlarged my understanding of God by affording me the only powerful experience I have had of his personal nature. I had known and firmly believed that God is love and that none of love’s nuances could be absent from his infinite nature: but that God Loves me and I love him, in the concrete way that human beings love individuals, each most wanting from the other what the other most wants to give and with everything that might distract from that holy relationship excluded from view—*that* relation with God I had never had before had.¹⁶¹

Furthermore, this can almost be understood as a conversion event, in that he was convinced that, as a result of this personal encounter, “from somewhere between six weeks and three months . . . I really *was* a better person—even at this remove, I remain confident of that.”¹⁶²

Leary’s experience was, unsurprisingly, rather different from that of Smith. Prior to eating mushrooms in Cuernavaca he described himself as “an atheist, a rationalist, skeptical of any sort of authority, ritual, tradition, faith, or magic, an empiricist—intolerant of scholastic speculation and Talmudic juggling.”¹⁶³ However, it is clear that psychedelics did introduce him to moments of Huxleyan transcendence, which led to an interest in religious perspectives. He certainly found the vocabulary of religion helpful in articulating his experiences and referred to his afternoon in Cuernavaca as “the deepest religious experience of my life.”¹⁶⁴ His understanding of the nature of that experience was distinct from Smith’s: “The religious experience is the ecstatic, incontrovertibly certain, subjective discovery of answers to four basic spiritual questions . . . the Ultimate-Power question, the Life question, the Human-Destiny question, and the Ego question.”¹⁶⁵ He unpacked these as follows. First: “What is the Ultimate Power or Basic Energy which moves the universe, creates life?” What is the cosmic plan? Second: “What is life, where did it start, where is it going?” Third: “What is man, whence did he

come, and where is he going?" Fourth: "What am I? What is my place in the plan?"¹⁶⁶ While these are questions that appertain directly to the religious quest, as he is keen to point out, they are also questions that "are continually being answered and re-answered . . . by the data of the natural sciences." There is, he argues, a need for a "religious-scientific quest,"¹⁶⁷ a confluence of religious enquiry and scientific research: "Science is the systematic attempt to record and measure the energy process and the sequence of energy transformations we call life. The goal is to answer the basic questions in terms of objective, observed, public data. Religion is the systematic attempt to provide answers *to the same questions* subjectively, in terms of direct, incontrovertible, personal experience."¹⁶⁸ Throughout his work on psychedelics, his understanding of spirituality is informed by and embedded within the discourses of science: "The human being might be able to become directly aware of energy exchanges and biological processes for which we now have no language and no perceptual training. Psychedelic foods and drugs were suggested as one key to these neurological potentials, and subjective reports from LSD sessions were compared with current findings from the energy sciences."¹⁶⁹ For Leary, the Good Friday experiment supported the thesis that "there are experiential-spiritual as well as secular-behavioral potentialities of the nervous system."¹⁷⁰

Notes on the Counterculture

Since the 1960s, a great deal of thoughtful scholarly analysis, as well as much exceptional popular writing, has been published both on psychedelic research and on the psychedelic counterculture. However, not only is much of this work tangential to the focus of this study, but even to review all that is directly relevant would be unnecessarily arduous, in that it would take us little beyond the conclusions already reached. However, there are a number of areas of the counterculture during the "long 1960s" that do need to be discussed before turning to the emergence of psychedelic shamanism in Chapter 8.

While the word "counterculture," which became popular following the publication of Theodore Roszak's *The Making of a Counter Culture* in 1969,¹⁷¹ refers to a set of dissenting beliefs, values, and behaviors and also to the subcultures that embodied these, it should not be imagined that it refers to a single social movement that appeared fully formed in the early 1960s. The term itself has a history within academic discourse, and so does the movement.¹⁷² "The counterculture" took different forms across Western societies, and there were numerous social groups—from the Beats to Black Power activists, from love-oriented hippies to the Hell's Angels—that had very different understandings

of themselves, society, and what a revolution might look like.¹⁷³ As became tragically apparent during the last few months of the decade, it was not always a happy combination of music, love, peace, and pot. The contours of individualistic expressivism that shaped the counterculture often led to manipulation, abuse, and violence.¹⁷⁴ The most extreme manifestation of this happened during July and August 1969, when the members of the Family were directed by their leader, Charles Manson, to commit a number of horrific murders. Then on December 6, as the West was still reeling from the shock of the Manson murders, there was another eruption of countercultural dark energy at the Altamont Free Festival in northern California. Although the gathering was intended to be a celebration of peace and music following the Woodstock Festival a few months earlier, violence broke out—exacerbated by excessive drug use and the presence of Hell’s Angels, some of whom were providing security for The Rolling Stones—and a young black man, Meredith Hunter, was beaten to death.

While the counterculture was deeply heterogeneous, there were some core ideas that became common currency for many, even if they were not fully accepted by all and expressed in conflicting ways. As Colin Campbell notes, there was “a rejection of all hierarchy, bureaucracy, and established forms of authority, coupled with an associated dismissal of (what were perceived to be) the values and attitudes of ‘the older generation.’”¹⁷⁵ Such negative ideas were linked to the more positive aspirations required for the revolutionary construction of an alternative society. These were expressed in an “involvement in drug use, sex, and, to a lesser extent, mysticism and meditation, together with such communal events as open air concerts, ‘be-ins’ and ‘love-ins,’ and occasionally the establishment of communes.”¹⁷⁶ While Campbell’s overview is generally accurate, when the counterculture is viewed through a psychedelic lens, mysticism and meditation move more clearly into the foreground. Indeed, the “be-ins” and “love-ins,” which typically included drug use, were often understood as important spiritual happenings. As Philip Deloria comments, “What really drove the counterculture was a crisis of meaning that was spiritual at base.”¹⁷⁷ Reflecting on the period, the social critic and anarchist thinker Paul Goodman opined that “in the end it is religion that constitutes the strength of this generation and not, as I used to think, their morality, political will, and common sense.”¹⁷⁸ Regardless of how it was expressed (or, in some cases, whether it was expressed at all), the search for transcendence—however that was conceived—united many of those exploring the psychedelic experience within the counterculture. As Leary claimed, “The psychedelic movement was to develop without organization, without leaders, without

dogmatic doctrines and become a full-blown religious renaissance of the young.”¹⁷⁹ While he cannot always be trusted as an impartial observer of the culture with which he was so closely associated, the general thrust of his point is supported by a good amount of careful research. For example, Robert Wuthnow’s work in the San Francisco Bay Area demonstrated that counter-cultural involvement frequently indicated significant experimentation with drugs and an allied interest in Eastern religious thought.¹⁸⁰ There was often a confluence of the two, in that, as we will see, the psychedelic experience contributed to the turn East.¹⁸¹ Those identified as “mystics” in his survey were also the most likely, by a significant margin, to consider drug use important.

The reasons for this are socially and culturally complex. Account needs to be taken of the unprecedented rise in affluence, the increased leisure time, the greater levels of education, the exposure to other faiths and lifeworlds, the rapid decline of Christian hegemony, and the increasingly widespread questioning of the values of previous generations.¹⁸² It is clear, for example, that the emphasis on choice and exploration in the service of the self during the 1960s would have made little difference had it not been for postwar prosperity, which, as Wuthnow comments, “made it possible for growing numbers of Americans to take advantage of the new opportunities available to them.”¹⁸³ They were able to explore new experiences that were virtually unknown to their parents and grandparents.

This widening horizon of opportunity led to the emergence of a conspicuous focus on “freedom.” Hugh McLeod has commented, “The leitmotiv of the 1960s was the drive toward greater individual freedom, and nowhere was this seen as dramatically as in the varied counter-cultures which began to emerge around 1965 in California’s Bay Area, and then quickly spread eastward, to New York, reaching London and Amsterdam in 1966—eventually meeting the Pacific again in Sydney and Auckland.”¹⁸⁴ Leary even confessed that while he was “afraid of the prudish social forces that attack freedom,” at times he was “scared by the freedom” that some defended.¹⁸⁵ It is no coincidence that in the autumn of 1962, when Harvard University sought to regulate the use of psilocybin and LSD in research, their avant-garde psychologists founded a separate organization: the International Federation for Internal Freedom (IFIF).¹⁸⁶ It was of central importance to Leary that he had “come to know the meaning of freedom and the joys that come of it.”¹⁸⁷ Central to the expression and exploration of freedom was the personal use of psychedelics. Ginsberg, for example, “wanted everyone to take mushrooms. Who has the right to keep them from someone else? And there should be freedom for all sorts of rituals.”¹⁸⁸

The notion of “freedom” was redefined in the counterculture, but it became increasingly problematic. As Wuthnow has observed:

The freedom that living in a secure community of like-minded individuals offered was gradually replaced by a freedom to exercise choice in a marketplace of ideas and lifestyles. Freedom of choice was attractive to those who in fact were confronted with an immense array of alternatives. Yet most people recognized that some choices are less healthy than others and that exercising choice for its own sake is not always the most desirable alternative. As a way of reining in freedom of choice, a new emphasis was also placed on the dangers of external constraints, such as those imposed explicitly by government or implicitly by technology. In the process, freedom came to be more subjective. In spirituality, freedom of conscience thus came to mean paying attention to the inner voices of feelings, and freedom of choice meant exposing oneself to alternative experiences that would help develop these voices.¹⁸⁹

Central to discourses of freedom in the 1960s was a particular focus on self-oriented narratives of exploration and expression. Leary, Alpert, and Metzner argued that the goal of the research sessions run by IFIF was “to produce the ecstatic experience, to expand consciousness, to provide the subject with the most memorable, revelatory, life-changing experience of his life.”¹⁹⁰ Personal experience was central—regardless of its nature. Ginsberg’s vision, while under the influence of peyote, of “the robot skullface of Moloch in the upper stories of a big hotel glaring into [his] window”¹⁹¹ was just as valuable as Watts’s encounter with “the unbelievable beauty of the everyday world.”¹⁹²

Millbrook and Psychedelic Religion

From around the time that Leary and the IFIF were dismissed from Harvard in 1963, their ideas for a psychedelic revolution rapidly gained traction. Initially, however, the prospect of success was less than promising: not only had the core members of IFIF been ejected from Harvard, but after they relocated to Zihuatanejo, Mexico, they were also expelled from there after only six weeks. Fortunately, they didn’t have to wait long for a new center. For a nominal rent, they were offered a sixty-four-room mansion in the small village of Millbrook, in Dutchess County, New York. Set on 2,500 acres, private and tranquil, it provided an ideal environment for psychedelic research. “As a setting for the exploration of psychedelic consciousness,” recalled Nina Graboi, “the vast estate could not have been more perfect.”¹⁹³ The house had recently been

purchased by the twin brothers Billy and Tommy Hitchcock—two grandchildren of William Larimer Mellon, the founder of Gulf Oil—whose sister Peggy had recently become interested in psychedelic research. A conspicuous member of the counterculture (she was one of Harry Smith's patrons and had already had a brief affair with Leary), she arranged for Alpert to administer the drug to Billy. He was impressed with the results. As a young stockbroker at Lehman Brothers, he was also alive to the entrepreneurial potential of psychedelics. He agreed to let the property to IFIF as a research center.

Millbrook soon became an important and controversial experimental commune that attracted numerous visitors, from local New York youth hungry for new experiences to Watts, Ginsberg, Ken Kesey, and R. D. Laing (whose book *The Politics of Experience*, which was enormously popular in the late 1960s, influenced Leary, as is evident in the title of the latter's own book *The Politics of Ecstasy*).¹⁹⁴ It was likely that visitors would encounter not only leading intellectual and religious figures but also a number of musicians. It was not unusual, for example, to see Charles Mingus there or to hear the resident musician Maynard Ferguson, a close friend of Leary's, playing his trumpet on the roof.¹⁹⁵ "A weekend at Millbrook," recalled Leary, "was the chic thing for the hip, young rich of New York. At the same time, we entertained biologists from Yale, Oxford psychologists, Hindu holy men."¹⁹⁶ Millbrook was a hotbed of psychedelic, artistic, intellectual, and spiritual creativity: "We saw ourselves as anthropologists from the 21st century inhabiting a time module set somewhere in the Dark Ages of the 1960's. On this space colony we were attempting to create a new paganism and a new dedication to life as art."¹⁹⁷

It's also worth noting that, initially under the auspices of IFIF, Leary, Metzner, and Gunther Weil had founded the *Psychedelic Review*, the first issue of which was published in June 1963, a month after Leary and Alpert had been shown the door at Harvard. Its aim was "to serve as a forum for the exchange of information and ideas" about psychedelic subjects: "It will publish original research reports, scholarly and historical essays, outstanding phenomenological accounts of spontaneous or induced transcendent experiences, and reviews of relevant pharmacological and other literature."¹⁹⁸ As well as encouraging research into psychoactive substances, the *Psychedelic Review* publicized drug-related ideas that would contribute to "the individual's control over his own mind, thereby enlarging his internal freedom."¹⁹⁹

While it served as an important organ for psychedelic thinking across an impressive range of disciplines, including pharmacology, anthropology, religion, philosophy, and even poetry, as the 1960s waned—and particularly after passage of the Controlled Substances Act of 1970—its readership declined and its future became uncertain. As the editorial in the eleventh issue (1971)

declared, "After issue Number 10 there was some talk of letting the journal die a natural death." However, the editors, Robert Mogar and Gerald Pearlman, defiantly insisted that they did not "believe that the time has yet come for the *Review* to cease publication. As long as misunderstanding about the nature of drugs is the norm and all forms of consciousness expanding activity are sensationalized in the daily press, we feel the *PR* still serves an important function in communicating the most authentic information and research in these fields."²⁰⁰ Unfortunately, the eleventh issue of the journal was indeed the last, though the publication still stands as an evocative reminder of a culturally important period in Western history when the type of experimental interdisciplinary thinking encouraged at Millbrook was able to flourish.²⁰¹

In 1963, shortly after the publication of the first issue of the *Psychedelic Review* and IFIF's arrival at Millbrook, Leary disbanded the organization and established a successor, the Castalia Foundation, which, he claimed, emulated "the fellowship of mystic scientists in Hermann Hesse's *The Glass Bead Game*."²⁰² The significance of both the book and the notion of an order of scholar-mystics had recently been discussed by Watts in *The Joyous Cosmology*, to which Leary and Alpert contributed an enthusiastic foreword.²⁰³ Because of the growing opposition to psychedelics, the IFIF plan to set up local centers throughout America became untenable. The Castalia Foundation sought to focus much more closely on psychospiritual research at Millbrook and fundraising. For example, it hosted retreats, for which clients would pay a fee and undergo a psychedelic experience. There would be psychedelic workshops that might include "a walk in the woods," intended as a "silent experience of looking" that would immerse participants in the "sensuous impact of the grass, and the trees, and the animals."²⁰⁴ They would also study texts, such as Gurdjieff's *Meetings with Remarkable Men*.

They increasingly ran non-chemical sessions, too, focusing on the power of meditation, yoga, group therapy, and a number of other psychological methods as techniques to explore states of transcendence. As Hollingshead has recalled, "Probably the most highly-publicized feature of our work at Millbrook was the Weekend Experiential Workshop. These were held on alternate weekends when some fifteen guests would arrive at 7:30 on Friday evening and leave on Sunday afternoon." The aim of the weekend was "to simulate the LSD experience by means of Hindu and Buddhist yogic traditions, Gestalt therapy, Gurdjieff's self-awareness training, and Psychedelic Theatre techniques. We wanted to use all the means at our disposal to provide a non-chemical means of transcendence."²⁰⁵

Still, there was a general sense at Millbrook that drugs were better. "Undoubtedly many of our visitors obtained genuine spiritual edification

from these simulated sessions,” argued Hollingshead, “though it is my experience that they can never substitute for the sacrament of LSD.”²⁰⁶ Leary agreed. Indeed, this is how he interpreted much of Hesse’s work:

The critics tell us that Hesse is the master novelist. Well, maybe. But the novel is a social form, and the social in Hesse is exoteric. At another level Hesse is the master guide to the psychedelic experience and its application. Before your LSD session, read *Siddhartha* and *Steppenwolf*. The last part of the *Steppenwolf* is a priceless manual With more psychedelic experience, you will grapple with the problem of language and communication, and your thoughts and your actions will be multiplied in creative complexity as you learn how to play with the interdisciplinary symbols, the multi-level metaphors. *The Bead Game*.²⁰⁷

As indicated previously, discerning exactly how Leary understood the religious concepts he used is not always easy. While it is clear that his approach shifted a little as the 1960s progressed, overall it is probably true to say that Oriental religion provided a culturally appropriate and therapeutically useful vocabulary for interpreting the psychedelic experience. A fellow resident at Millbrook, Arthur (“Art”) Kleps, has commented that Leary tended to call himself “a ‘Hindu’ or a ‘Buddhist’ or a ‘Taoist’ as the spirit moved and the wind blew.” As Kleps noted, “he was not alone in this. A lot of people in those days who should have known better, tended to treat these distinct ideational systems as virtually interchangeable brand names for a generic Oriental ‘wisdom’ all pumped out of the same hole. The packaging might change, but Slobovenoid Blobovenoidalism was what you got.” So, Kleps asked, “was Tim ever a Buddhist? Not in my opinion.” Indeed, “it did eventually dawn on Tim that genuine Buddhism . . . was alien to his way of thinking, and he said so, at least to me and a couple other guys. I don’t know if he ever said it in public or in print.”²⁰⁸ We will see below that not only did Kleps become highly critical of Leary, considering him to be “a very depraved man” and deserving of “condemnation when considered as a philosopher,”²⁰⁹ but that the evidence, including that taken from Leary’s own work, does seem to support the general thrust of his account. As Watts once commented, Leary “had become a charismatic religious leader who, well trained as he was in psychology, knew very little about religion and mysticism and their pitfalls.”²¹⁰

It’s also worth noting that, from a purely practical perspective, a religious interpretation of the psychedelic experience contributed to Leary’s efforts to challenge the growing tide of opposition to psychoactive drugs. That is to

say, if he could present the psychedelic experience as a religious experience, drugs could be defended as a First Amendment right. Impressed by the efforts of the Native American Church in 1965 to defend their ritual use of peyote, he effectively established his own “religion” in an effort to protect the use of psychedelics. As he insisted on more than one occasion, “For both psychedelic and legal reasons you must form your own cult.”²¹¹ The claim by some scholars, such as Robert Fuller, that Leary was deceitful in some way, in that he failed to reveal that the formation of a psychedelic religion “might also provide a smoke screen under which persons could use drugs without government prosecution,”²¹² misunderstands him. He was always quite explicit about this. As Metzner recalled, “His attitude toward religion as a form of social organization was that we should use it for our own purposes. That’s why he incorporated The League for Spiritual Discovery as a church . . . His attitude was, if we have to have a religious organization to get state protection, then start your own religion.”²¹³ As well as seeking state protection, he wanted explicitly to challenge what he felt was an irrational and conspicuously discriminatory law.

In September 1966 (the month before it was made illegal to sell LSD and DMT in California) he announced to an increasingly hostile media that he had founded a new religion, the League for Spiritual Discovery (LSD). The core doctrines of this new religion were outlined the following year in his provocative pamphlet *Start Your Own Religion*:²¹⁴

Drop out—detach yourself from the external social drama which is as dehydrated and ersatz as TV.

Turn on—find a sacrament which returns you to the Temple of God, your own body. Go out of your mind. Get high.

Tune in—be reborn. Drop back in to express it. Start a new sequence of behaviour that reflects your vision.²¹⁵

He intended this to be a cyclic, reflexive, therapeutic search for meaning, in which a person moves through phases of experience and reflection in order to transcend the routines and hegemonies of everyday life:

When the individual’s behaviour and consciousness get hooked to a routine sequence of external actions, he is a dead robot, and it is time for him to die and be reborn. Time to “drop out,” “turn on,” and “tune in.” This period of robotization is called the Kali Yuga, the Age of Strife and Empire, the peak of so-called civilisation, the Johnson

Administration, etc. This relentless law of death, life, change is the rhythm of the galaxies and the seasons, the rhythm of the seed. It never stops.²¹⁶

And so “any action that is not a conscious expression of the drop-out-turn-on-tune-in-drop-out rhythm is the dead posturing of robot actors on the fake-prop TV studio stage set that is called American reality.”²¹⁷ While Leary makes use of popular religious concepts, these are detraditionalized, in that the locus of authority is internalized and invested with psychological content. It’s worth quoting from a discussion by Linda Woodhead and Paul Heelas on the process of detraditionalization:

Rejecting what the past has to say and all that is merely “external,” *strongly detraditionalized* religion turns elsewhere for authority. Faith is placed in a knowledge and wisdom obtainable by each individual in the here-and-now, without the benefit of some “higher”—as self transcendent—authority. Truth is found in direct experience rather than “second-hand” reception. The divine is found within the individual or the natural order, and provides the basis for life. Only thus can one be liberated from the anti-spiritual (capitalistic, consumeristic) tendencies of the modern world.²¹⁸

Leary’s League for Spiritual Discovery was a conspicuous example of this: “Actions which are conscious expressions of the turn-on, tune-in, drop-out rhythm are religious.”²¹⁹ Central to this detraditionalized form of religion was the sacramental technology for inducing direct experience: “Today the sacrament is LSD.”²²⁰ It has the power to shift a person beyond the everyday routines and hegemonic discourses that limit freedom, restrict access to inner gnosis, and inhibit psychological development. LSD enabled a person to “drop out” of “the social game.” As a result of repeated therapeutic use, claimed Leary, a person will begin “to look like a happy saint. Your home slowly becomes a shrine. Slowly, gently, you start seed transformations around you. Psychedelic art. Psychedelic style. Psychedelic music. Psychedelic dance. Suddenly you discover you have dropped out.”²²¹

Of course, he did not claim that a person needed to join the League for Spiritual Discovery to experience this. He simply wanted to introduce people to the constructive and healthy use of psychedelics, not convert them to a particular religion. Hence the guidance provided in *Start Your Own Religion*: “Select members who share or complement your style, your way

of tuning in, your temperament, your sexual orientation.”²²² “Next, sit down with your spiritual companions, and put on a page the plan for your trip.” In other words, decide on the religion’s “goals, roles, rituals, rules, vocabulary, values, space/time locales, [and] mythic context.” Attention also needs to be given to a number of practical issues: “You will find it necessary to be explicit about the way your clan handles authority, responsibility, sexual relations, money, economics, defence, communication.”²²³ This is important because to form a religion is also to form a “natural political unit,” which will be able to resist social pressure and defend its sacrament, just as the Native American Church had done. That said,

you don’t have to make your spiritual journey sound “religious.” . . . Religion is consciousness expansion, centred in the body and defined exactly the way it sounds best to you . . . So write out your own language for the trip. “God” or “evolution,” “acid” or “sacrament,” “guide” or “guru,” “purgatorial redemption” or “bad trip,” “mystic revelation” or “good high.” Say it naturally. Develop your own rituals and costumes. “Robes” or “grey flannel suits,” “amulets” or “tattoos.” You will eventually find yourself engaged in a series of sacred moments which feel right to you.²²⁴

While this broadly humanistic psychological articulation of psychedelic mysticism remained central to life at Millbrook, as indicated above, some did begin to explore more explicitly religious paths that would eventually lead them away from the focus on drugs—even if they didn’t abandon them altogether.²²⁵ For example, in 1967, Alpert traveled to India and met Neem Karoli Baba, to whom he gave some LSD and with whom, on and off, he spent a total of nearly two years.²²⁶ As a result, he came to feel that he had entered “the yogic stage of his life” and returned to America as Baba Ram Dass.²²⁷ Although he continued to use psychoactive substances intermittently, including being a “light user of marijuana,” his focus shifted away from psychedelic mysticism.²²⁸

Likewise, William Haines (Swami Abhayananda), having being expelled from Sri Brahmananda Sarasvati’s Ananda Ashram in Monroe, New York, in 1966, relocated with a number of disciples to Millbrook, established the Sri Ram Ashrama,²²⁹ and began to develop a form of psychedelic Orientalism along the lines of Leary’s League for Spiritual Discovery. “You must have a discipline with the use of drugs,” insisted Haines, “which is one of the highest of the yogas, and that can be brought into the picture with Teachings and Zen

or in Yoga. With it you can have a greater understanding and mind-expansion.”²³⁰ Kleps commented that although Haines “didn’t smoke grass,” he did ingest “large doses of acid at least once a week.”²³¹ However, following his departure from Millbrook in 1968, with the financial support of Hitchcock and the flamboyant show business lawyer Seymour Lazar (who was friendly with Leary and who was himself no stranger to psychedelics), he relocated to Arizona, where he purchased a property, abandoned psychedelics, and taught a form of Patañjali’s yoga.²³²

This path away from psychedelics was a common one. While they were understood to be, as Jack Kornfield has argued, “enormously useful as an initial opening for people,” long-term use tended to be detrimental to well-being, and many concluded that the seeker needed to progress beyond them in order to attain spiritual maturity.²³³

What did remain central to the Millbrook experience, however, was the Orientalist confluence of the mystical East (e.g., Hinduism, Buddhism, Daoism, and the *I Ching*) and the scientific West (e.g., humanistic psychology). This is, for example, clearly evident in one of the most important texts of the period, *The Psychedelic Experience*. Following a suggestion from Huxley,²³⁴ it was written by Leary, Alpert, and Metzner and published in 1964. An excellent example of detraditionalization, it reinterpreted *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (*Bardo Thödol*) as a guide to the psychedelic experience. Not only did it depart somewhat from the original, but perhaps the most memorable, most influential, and arguably most helpful piece of advice it imparted to its readers was, “Whenever in doubt, turn off your mind, relax, float downstream.”²³⁵ This was, as Metzner says, the “basic advice repeated many times . . . [to] psychedelic voyagers.”²³⁶ Two years later, in 1966, The Beatles would disseminate that advice to Western youth culture in their Easternized psychedelic classic, “Tomorrow Never Knows.”²³⁷ Opening with those famous words, the song imparts the following pop wisdom to its listeners: “Lay down your thoughts, surrender to the void,” and “see the meaning of within.” Such statements are indicative of the ideas developed at Millbrook and articulated in *The Psychedelic Experience*, in that they represent an Orientalist forcing together of induced altered states, human-potential thought, and detraditionalized Eastern religion.

This confluence of ideas is not always recognized by scholars, many of whom simply understand Leary to be an Easternized hippie developing a form of psychedelic perennialism along the lines of Huxley’s work.²³⁸ Rather, *The Psychedelic Experience* is more accurately understood as a detraditionalized reading of the *Bardo Thödol* through the lens of psychological game

theory: "If the manual is read several times before a session is attempted . . . the consciousness will be freed from the games which comprise 'personality' and from positive-negative hallucinations which often accompany states of expanded awareness."²³⁹ The stages of death, the intermediate state, and rebirth are not simply transposed onto the psychedelic experience but are understood to be stages of detachment from "routine game reality" and from the "ego game." A psychedelic drug is a technology that can be used to liberate the mind from "all game involvements," from all the "behavioral sequences defined by roles, rules, rituals, goals, strategies, values, language, characteristic space-time locations and characteristic patterns of movement."²⁴⁰ While it is acknowledged that "the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* is ostensibly a book describing the experiences to be expected at the moment of death," Leary, Alpert, and Metzner are keen to point out that "the esoteric meaning, as it has been interpreted in this manual, is that it is death and rebirth of the ego that is described, not of the body."²⁴¹

Each *bardo* can be related to a stage of Leary's mantra, "Drop out, turn on, tune in." The first *bardo*—the *bardo* of the time of death, during which a person experiences "the realm of clear light"—is interpreted as "the period of ego-loss or non-game ecstasy." It describes the moment when the mind "drops out" or becomes detached from its culturally conditioned state. During the second *bardo*, "the period of hallucinations," the psychedelic voyager experiences visions. Interpreting the peaceful and wrathful deities of the second *bardo* in terms of the pleasurable and frightening hallucinations that the psychedelic voyager experiences, the reader is encouraged to accept these as part of the process of "turning on." It is in effect a moment of illumination: "Any and every shape—human, divine, diabolical, heroic, evil, animal, thing—which the human brain conjures up or the past life recalls, can present itself to consciousness . . . The underlying solution . . . is to recognize that your brain is producing the visions. They do not exist. Nothing exists except as your consciousness gives it life."²⁴² This is key, for the experiencer is now "standing on the threshold of recognizing the truth; there is no reality behind any of the phenomena of the ego-loss state, save illusions stored up in your own mind either as accretions from game (*Saṃsāric*) experience or as gifts from organic physical nature and its billion-year-old past history. Recognition of this is liberation."²⁴³ This fundamentally gnostic reading holds that we are responsible for the development of our own potential as human beings. Psychoactives are simply technologies of gnosis that are able to assist us in that process by, in effect, "cleansing the doors of perception." "The fact of the matter is that all apparent forms of matter and body are momentary clusters of energy . . .

This realization directly experienced can be delightful. You suddenly wake up from the delusion of separate form and hook up to the cosmic dance.”²⁴⁴ Finally, the third *bardo*, “the period of re-entry,” describes the process of tuning in—“the period in which the consciousness makes the transition from transcendent reality to the reality of ordinary waking life.”²⁴⁵ As Leary put it, “Start a new sequence of behavior based on your visions.”²⁴⁶ Because “for average persons who undertake the psychedelic voyage, the return to game reality is inevitable,” there is a need for the disciplined use of the manual and psychedelics in order to “remain at the stage of perfect illumination.”²⁴⁷ In effect, *The Psychedelic Experience* commends a hermeneutic circle of experience, reflection, and application.

In spring 1968, the League for Spiritual Discovery suffered a terminal blow when, following a period of harassment by the local police, once again Leary was shown the door. Not only did the persistent attention of the authorities and the frequent negative media coverage become too much for Hitchcock, but he seems to have struggled a little with its ethos: “I don’t get all this constant love, love, love stuff. I mean, maybe some people need to hear that all the time, but I [wasn’t] brought up that way.”²⁴⁸ Essentially, as far as Hitchcock was concerned, the open-door policy at Millbrook had left the door a little too wide open. As Kleps commented at the time, “One difficulty we’ve had is with people coming onto the place and feeling they had some sort of divine right to occupy whatever part they wished. People . . . would just move into the woods, camp out, and more or less refuse to leave.”²⁴⁹ In the spring of 1968, Hitchcock gave them a goodwill payment and formally asked them to vacate the property.²⁵⁰ Although Leary initially refused to go, the estate was raided by the local police, they were evicted, and he moved to California.²⁵¹ As well as the demise of the League for Spiritual Discovery, the eviction also led to the termination of Swami Abhayananda’s (Haines’s) experiments with psychedelic Orientalism and to a hiatus in the development of another Millbrook religion, the Neo-American Church.

The Neo-American Church

The Neo-American Church had actually been founded by Art Kleps prior to Leary’s League for Spiritual Discovery (and still continues to the present day). Following his eviction from Millbrook, Kleps continued working on his ideas and, in 1973, effectively reinstituted it as the Original Kleptonian Neo-American Church. But who was Kleps?

Having been awarded a master's degree from Syracuse University, Kleps initially worked as a school psychologist in New York State for ten years and also occasionally as a clinical psychologist at the Clinton Correctional Facility in Dannemora, New York. In 1960, having read Huxley's *Doors of Perception* and then Wasson's account of his own self-experimentation, he contacted the Delta Chemicals Company in New York to request 500 micrograms of mescaline sulfate. He planned to test Huxley's claims with a psychologist friend who lived in the same building. His friend, however, "chickened out at the last minute," so, with his first wife, Sally, "on call," he ingested the mescaline sulfate alone. The experience was profound. It was, he later recalled, literally "a flying start" into his new life.²⁵²

I alternated between eyes-open apprehension and eyes-closed astonishment. With eyelids shut I saw a succession of elaborate scenes each of which lasted a few seconds before being replaced by the next in line. Extraterrestrial civilizations. Jungles. Animated cartoons. Displays of lights in abstract patterns. Temples and palaces of a decidedly pre-Columbian American type, neither grim nor pretty, but beautifully delineated, textured, colored, and always in perfect perspective.²⁵³

He had experienced, he said, "a kind of language of the gods, the ultimate vocabulary of the mind, which was, naturally, much more than just a collection of nouns."²⁵⁴ However, although impressed by the religious texture of the experience, and although he was, as the eldest son of a Lutheran minister, "brought up in a professional religious household in which the history of religion was table talk,"²⁵⁵ Kleps was always much more concerned with the vocabulary of the mind than with the language of the gods. "As a psychologist, I was probably even more empirical than I had been before the trip. As the memory of the experience receded in time, it seemed more and more like an aberration."²⁵⁶ He began to think of the psychedelic experience with reference to David Hume's definition of the human mind in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739): "a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity and are in a perpetual flux and movement."²⁵⁷

As one current member of the Church pointed out to me, this should not be understood to imply that "the concept 'vocabulary of the mind' is less religious than the concept 'language of the gods.'" For Kleps, and subsequently for the Neo-American Church, this is a misleading distinction. Definitions of "religion" need not be tied to supernaturalistic constructions of reality.²⁵⁸

This helps to explain how, on the one hand, he experienced nothing that encouraged him “to believe in any occultist or supernaturalist system,” yet, on the other hand, he was struck by the cogency of monism: “Dualism of every variety was blown right out the window, never to return. I was now a monist, but what kind of monist?” Such visions of reality were, following Hume, “my images, my ideas.”²⁵⁹ Hence, it’s important to note that while certain religious concepts were detraditionalized within Kleps’s “solipsist-nihilist”²⁶⁰ interpretation of “religion,” this did not also mean that they were thereby emptied of “religious” significance—far from it.²⁶¹ As is made abundantly clear during psychedelic states, even the most mundane and absurd everyday events can be moments of profound, life-changing revelation: “When people throw up, they often do see ‘piles of jewels.’”²⁶²

Kleps’s relationship with Leary began when he came across an article in the *New York Times* on the psychedelic experiments conducted by former Harvard psychologists.

When I discovered that a group of purportedly respectable and learned psychologists were taking dose after dose of LSD and psilocybin and apparently functioning with great practical efficiency at the same time, indeed, having a ball, setting forth on great adventures and taking over mansions in Dutchess County, I concluded that I was just being chicken. These experts, I assumed, knew all kinds of things I didn’t know and had all kinds of contacts I didn’t have. Perhaps I could join them once I caught up to their level of specialized knowledge. If I could find a way to live without the income from it, to hell with clinical and school psychology, at least as it was routinely practiced. Plastering over the growing cracks in the public education system was not my idea of the best way to spend most of my waking hours anyway.²⁶³

He therefore sent a letter to Millbrook, which included a “Neo-Psychopathic Character Test” he had developed.²⁶⁴ “The point of view expressed in my ‘Neo-Psychopathic Character Test’ was something of a novelty then and it may have had some effect on Tim, confirming opinions he already held about the desperate condition of the old culture and the direction in which one ought to look for help.”²⁶⁵ Intrigued by Kleps’s maverick yet psychologically informed ideas, Leary invited him to Millbrook in 1963. Kleps visited for the first time in December that year. This was followed by a second visit during the Easter vacation in 1964. Although he had planned to have a session with Leary, this did not take place. He did, however, enjoy a personally

significant experience of clarity, which he subsequently referred to as “my Enlightenment.”²⁶⁶

Almost everyone who isn’t enlightened, my former self included, thinks of Enlightenment as an extension of dimensions with which they are familiar, an increase. They expect to become bigger, better, purer, stronger, wiser, holier or whatever. In fact, there is nothing additive about it. If a structural metaphor must be used, it ought to be subtractive. Enlightenment is the removal of self-imposed delusions which were never justified by evidence or logic (see Hume) in the first place. The experience can be associated with all kinds of glorious imagery or none at all. *Comme décor*, one might say.²⁶⁷

During spring 1965, Kleps’s growing and outspoken interest in drugs led to him being dismissed from his position as a psychologist by the school board. According to Leary, he had been fired for a “series of honest, rebellious, adolescent antics.”²⁶⁸ In fact, he used his position as a professional psychologist to respond, quite reasonably, to a change in the law regarding cannabis use:

This witch-hunt provoked me to write a “general report” . . . on marijuana. There wasn’t anything in this brief essay that wouldn’t be regarded as standard liberal opinion in future years: don’t become alarmed at a little experimentation; cannabis isn’t addicting; it may well have medical and psychological usefulness; the facts aren’t all in; the laws are much too harsh and ought to be moderated, etc. What the hell, I thought to myself. If a psychologist with my kind of experience couldn’t express a minority opinion on a matter such as this, of what use was the First Amendment to the Constitution? I was fired the next day.²⁶⁹

This was hardly an adolescent antic. Rather, as far as Kleps was concerned, it was an act of conscience and even a professional duty.

Although he subsequently became disillusioned, particularly with Leary, he remained convinced that initially “it was a high-class show . . .” As he later commented, “the memories I retain of Millbrook as it was then . . . are lit by a special and magical light, like the memories of the Christmases of childhood, or scenes intensely imagined in one’s most cherished works of fiction.”²⁷⁰ Leary was, he thought, “definitely my kind of guy.”²⁷¹ Eventually Kleps became a resident at Millbrook, but at the expense of his marriage: “Sally’s one and only

visit to Millbrook was not a success. She was terrified, not by the presence of acid and marijuana, but by the people and the setting, and she stayed in our room almost all of the day and evening. It was 'just too much.'²⁷² His second wife, Wendy Williams, who he met at Millbrook, was quite different, in that she seems to have been able to take life with a psychedelic evangelist in her stride. As an article on Kleps for *The New York Daily News* put it, she simply accepted "her husband's tireless proselytizing with good-humored forbearance."²⁷³ This is evident in a letter she wrote towards the end of their time at Millbrook: "Arthur hopes Billy Hitchcock will buy the Church a houseboat or an island, but we may not get anything. I don't know whether my baby and I will be floating down the Caribbean or sleeping in a corner of some hippy pad. But insecurity and uncertainty about the future must be taken for granted when you are married to the Chief Boo Hoo."²⁷⁴

While Kleps is an interesting if enigmatic character in the history of psychedelic thought, his most significant contribution was the founding of the Neo-American Church in April 1965. The Church was initially established at Morning Glory Lodge, Cranberry Lake, New York, but the development of his ideas took place earlier, at Millbrook. Indeed, there is little doubt that Leary was a formative influence. As Kleps declared in his statement to the Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency²⁷⁵ in May 1966, shortly after the founding of the Church, "The leader of the psychedelic religious movement in the United States is Dr. Timothy Leary. We regard him with the same special love and respect as was reserved by the early Christians for Jesus, by the Moslems for Mohammed, or the Buddhists for Gotama. I am merely the head of one of several psychedelic churches."²⁷⁶ "I very quickly recognized that Tim was my guru," he recalled in a 1967 interview, "for something very magical happened when I was with him."²⁷⁷

The rationale for the Church was, Kleps argued, less religious and more psychotherapeutic in orientation, in that he wanted it to "provide some kind of training program and accreditation service to psychedelic psychotherapists. One of our most important objectives should be to drive the crackpot fad-dists and simple-minded occultists out of the temple and replace them with intelligent, literate, professional psychologists who know the meaning and use of psychedelic experience."²⁷⁸ Another reflection of Leary's ideas was the Church's requirement that members subscribe to three principles: "Everyone has the right to expand his consciousness and stimulate visionary experience by whatever means he considers desirable and proper without interference from anyone"; "The psychedelic substances, such as LSD, are the true Host of the Church, not drugs. They are sacramental foods, manifestations of the

Grace of God, of the infinite imagination of the Self, and therefore belong to everyone”; and that those who are unprepared should not use psychedelics.²⁷⁹

Moreover, while the Church used religious terminology, it adopted an absurdist, fundamentally Dadaesque approach to religion. As with the Dada movement, this did not indicate a lack of seriousness: the Church “takes a light approach to institutional forms and avoids ‘churchianity.’ A church is an organizational vehicle for the defense and representation of a religion, consisting of doctrine and practices. Our comedic style reminds us not to take our church, as opposed to our religion, too seriously, *but we do not regard our religion, our church, or ourselves as a joke.*”²⁸⁰ The male clergy were referred to as “Boo Hoos” and the female clergy as “Bee Hees”; Kleps was “the Chief Boo Hoo”; psychedelic substances were holy sacraments; each new member received five peyote buttons with his or her membership card; the Church’s logo was a three-eyed toad; its motto was “Victory over Horseshit”; its hymns included “Puff the Magic Dragon” and “Row, Row, Row Your Boat” (which, while reflecting Leary’s call to “turn off your mind, relax, float downstream” as well as the Romantic notion that “life is but a dream,” should also, as a member of the Church pointed out to me, be interpreted “in terms of the philosophical tradition of dream skepticism, which Kleps called ‘the dream analogy’”);²⁸¹ and, when funds allowed, it produced a bulletin called *Divine Toad Sweat*. Its principal sacred text, *The Neo-American Church Catechism and Handbook*, which was written by Kleps at Millbrook and published locally in 1967, provided followers with “the dogmatic pronouncements of the Chief Boo Hoo” on “LSD, marijuana, sex, and revolutionary politics.” He also produced a typically idiosyncratic *History of the Psychedelic Movement Cartoon and Coloring Book*,²⁸² much of which was later incorporated into *The Boo Hoo Bible*, and great deal of which was, he noted, “irrelevant, frivolous and immaterial insofar as the actual history of the ‘psychedelic movement’ was concerned.”²⁸³

Despite his solipsist, parodic approach to religion—arguably, because of it—increasing numbers of young people sought membership in the Church. Although Kleps was prone to exaggerating its significance, it’s worth noting his reflection on that period:

The Neo-American Church, by this time, had at least a thousand active members. Most of the residents of the Big House [at Millbrook], both League and Ashram [Haines’s group], had signed up, although we had nothing to offer in those days except sporadic bulletins and a membership card and I rarely asked anyone to join. But the image was right.

They volunteered, in the most strict sense of the term, and almost always first heard of the Church by word of mouth. No doubt the absence of a philosophic doctrine and an exclusionary rule had a lot to do with it. All one accomplished by signing the application form in those days was to go on record as believing that the psychedelic experience was religious. What was meant by “religious” was pretty much left up in the air. Even so, I think the fact that so many and such various people . . . joined so early showed that the general, frivolous spirit of the thing was politically correct. I wasn’t the only Psychedelian around who thought it important to insist that one could be religious without conforming, in any way, to what the vast majority of our fellow citizens thought was meant by the term. So, we had a “fellowship,” even if it was a loose one. I had invented an institutional form that seemed right for the times. “Good for you, Kleps,” I thought to myself whenever a new proof of this came in. “Maybe you’re not so crazy after all.” But I knew that being right for the times is not what religion is about, and this awareness blunted my satisfaction considerably.²⁸⁴

Regardless of his parodic nods to religion, the whole notion of what religions *were* traditionally about and what they tended to become over time was a problem for Kleps. With obvious reference to Leary’s thought, he notes that the Church made use of the absurd because “we think it is very important not to take ourselves too seriously in terms of social structure, in terms of organizational life. We tend to view organizational life as sort of a game that people play.” This was why it was necessary to adopt appellations such as “Chief Boo Hoo,” in that they functioned as a “sort of a spoof . . . so people will not get beyond themselves too much.”²⁸⁵

As it expanded, so it began to require some level of formal organization. It certainly required committed members and funds. However, more problematic for Kleps was the apparent need for regulation and discipline. This initially became apparent when he appointed a dentist from Mount Eaton as “Patriarch of the West.” From the outset, William Shyne challenged the authority of Kleps and exploited the generous, non-creedal nature of the Neo-American Church: he “simply took my stuff, edited out whatever displeased him, replaced my name and address with his own, and kept all the records, initiation fees (\$5 at the time) and donations to himself. Thousands of kids on the West Coast joined under those circumstances, and got a distorted picture of the Church, to put it mildly.”²⁸⁶ As a consequence, “there are many, many people out west who consider themselves members of the

Neo-American Church who aren't."²⁸⁷ Shyne was, Kleps later discovered, "a raving, paranoid, speed freak who traveled with a submachine gun under the front seat of his car and by no means limited his dealing activities to the psychedelic sacraments."²⁸⁸ Kleps responded by writing to Shyne, who ignored his letters, and then by appealing to those who had paid their initiation fees: "Anyone who is in this situation should send me the membership card he received from Dr. Shine [*sic*] and I will, free of charge, send him a genuine one."²⁸⁹ Distressed, he consulted colleagues at Millbrook. Haines's advice was unequivocal: "Excommunicate the bastard!"²⁹⁰ He did. Shyne subsequently established his own psychedelic religion in San Jose, California, the Church of the Golden Rule. Problems such as this gradually persuaded Kleps of the need to make the Church, as one of its members put it to me, "a doctrinaire and hierarchical religious allegiance association."

In 1968, the Neo-American Church gained some notoriety when another member of its clergy, Judith H. Kuch, was indicted for "unlawfully obtaining and transferring marijuana and for the unlawful sale, delivery and possession of LSD." As an "ordained minister of the Neo-American Church" (the Bee Hee of Washington, D.C.), she advanced a religious-freedom defense on the basis that the substances were her sacraments. The judge concluded that, as there was little evidence of "a religious discipline, a ritual, or tenets to guide one's daily existence," the Church could not be considered a "religion" and that, regardless of any claims to psychedelic religious experience, "the coagulant of this organization and the reason for its existence" was simply to use and enjoy drugs.²⁹¹ Even if it could be determined that it was a genuine religion, the court concluded there was enough evidence to indicate that the state should restrict its activities. Kleps was incensed by the judgment, believing that the religious use of drugs was a right the Constitution conferred on all its citizens.²⁹² On Easter Day, April 6, 1969, he held an open-air psychedelic communion service in a park in Washington, D.C., the aim of which was to provoke mass arrests in order to test the constitutionality of the drug laws.²⁹³ The police refused to rise to the challenge and no arrests were made. Annoyed that the Church wasn't being taken seriously, the following day he protested in a public building. This time the police were unable to ignore his demands and he was arrested.²⁹⁴ Perhaps needless to say, no laws were changed as a result of his protest.

These, however, were not the only problems facing Kleps. By 1967, his relationship with Leary had become strained. On the one hand, Kleps recognized Leary's significance in the shaping of his thought; on the other, he sought independence as the leader of the Neo-American Church. As one member related

to me, "In the beginning, Kleps thought of Leary as a great spiritual leader, and himself as an organizational leader," which, she says, "is quite funny, given their respective talents." However, "the organizational history of the Church from 1965 to the early 1970s is largely the story of him gradually changing his mind about that." Reading through his writings, one gets the impression that he felt badly treated by a person he had revered: "Although I have a very primary, you might say spiritual allegiance to Tim, it does not extend to organizational affairs. The Neo-American Church is primarily my responsibility. . . . The Chief Boo Hoo is defined as divine and infallible, so, since I'm the Chief Boo Hoo, I can't really take direction from Tim. However, he is on the Board of Directors of the Church, as are Billy Hitchcock and William Haines."²⁹⁵ His claims to infallibility are tongue-in-cheek swipes at the Pope and a number of other religious figures, rather than genuine theological claims, but the underlying point is clear: he didn't want Leary interfering with his project, undermining his authority, or humiliating him. As Metzner has commented, Leary "had a sharp, mocking wit and he would use it."²⁹⁶ One only has to read Leary's "review" of the *Neo-American Church Catechism and Handbook* to understand Kleps's concerns. The article is less a review and more a character assassination. It is a little surprising, therefore, that Kleps published it in his *History of the Psychedelic Movement Cartoon and Coloring Book* and also later in his *The Boo Hoo Bible: The Neo-American Church Catechism*.²⁹⁷ His decision to do so seems to have followed a discussion with Haines.

It was pure, undiluted Leary, that was for sure. The questions and comments which followed concerned my sadistic attitude towards the lilies of the field, all those hallucinatory virgins, my alcoholic and paranoid inclinations, my insensibility to beauty, my squalid quarters, my slovenly attire and so forth. "Well, Kleps," Haines asked, after we had recovered our composure, "should we print this?" I surprised myself by not saying "No" right away. Hmmm. Tim probably figured I would demand deletions and amendments. He would play along with this, no doubt, and we would end up with . . . what? On the other hand, if we let it stand as recorded, Tim's ferocious animosity towards anything the public might think was admirable and original (*Sergeant Pepper* was a "vaudeville routine"?) would be exposed for all to see. Well, that was a good thing wasn't it? If the moronic hordes took it seriously, so what? If it kept the stupid bastards away from me, all the better. "Yeah, print it," I told Haines. "Let him have his fun. It may not say much about me, but it sure as hell says a lot about Timothy Leary."

As a matter of fact, it's the clearest example, in print, of the Freudian mechanism of projection I know about.²⁹⁸

Sad to say, Leary wasn't finished with Kleps. In *The Politics of Ecstasy*, Leary went a step further. He republished the review under the heading "The Mad Virgin of Psychedelia," but this time dropped Kleps's name altogether, referring to him only as "Lisa Lieberman, founder and Chief Boo Hoo of the Neo-Marxian Church."²⁹⁹ He changed the motto of the Church from "Victory over Horseshit" to "Victory over Sexuality" and described Kleps as "a pure-essence eccentric paranoid in the grand tradition of bullheaded, nutty women who stubbornly insist on being themselves and who are ready to fight at the drop of a cliché for the right of others to be themselves." Kleps/Lieberman is "a wandering guerilla nun in the psychedelic underground . . . throwing out an endless monologue of corny psychological-psychedelic paranoia, and making feeble but mesmeric passes at Castalia's soft-eyed marijuana goddesses whom she hallucinated to be thirteen-year-old virgins The wit and wisdom of this great psychedelic bovine is collected in a soft cover book, *The Neo-Marxian Church Catechism and Handbook*."³⁰⁰ This version hurt Kleps. It was, he later said (with ample justification), "bitter, calculated and nasty stuff."³⁰¹ Moreover, although Kleps was a prominent figure at Millbrook and certainly of some significance in the history of psychedelic thought, apart from this discussion it is difficult to find any reference to him anywhere in Leary's writings. He was redacted.

Of the psychedelic religious groups to emerge out of the counterculture in the 1960s, the League for Spiritual Discovery and the Neo-American Church—now the Original Kleptonian Neo-American Church—are arguably the most significant. Other organizations include the Church of the Awakening (which was founded in 1958 in Socorro, New Mexico, by John and Louisa Aiken),³⁰² the Psychedelic Venus Church, the Church of the Tree of Life, the Assembly of the Church of the Universe, and the Brotherhood of Eternal Love (which, having been founded as a psychedelic spiritual commune by John Griggs in 1969, turned to the manufacture of LSD and drug smuggling),³⁰³ as well as several that had their origins in the Neo-American Church, such as the Church of the Golden Rule, The Paleo-American Church, and the Shiva Fellowship.³⁰⁴ Also of some cultural significance was the Farm, an influential commune in Summertown, Tennessee, founded by Stephen Gaskin.³⁰⁵ Prior to moving to Summertown, Gaskin was living in San Francisco, where he established a "Monday Night Class," which became "the largest regularly occurring public meeting in the Bay area, attracting between

1000 and 1500 people each week.”³⁰⁶ Central to all the new drug religions was the notion of the “psychedelic sacrament.”

The Psychedelic Sacrament

The hallucinogenic sacrament was not novel in the history of religions. For example, even during the period discussed in this chapter, not only did the Native American Church use peyote sacramentally, but Rastafarians were using cannabis in the same way. For many Rastas, who are typically suspicious of institutional religion, spiritual “knowledge” or “overstanding” is personally verified by meditating and by communally “reasoning” at “groundings” (religious discussion sessions), which often involve the sacramental smoking of cannabis. As the Rasta poet and musician Yasus Afari has commented, cannabis is used as a sacrament because it is considered to be “a sacred herb, which is blessed with extensive medicinal, nutritional, pharmaceutical, industrial, biological, cosmetological, cosmological, spiritual, intellectual and therapeutic properties for the benefit and upliftment of all humanity. It is therefore known as ‘the herb for the healing of all the nations.’”³⁰⁷ There are some conspicuous similarities between Rastafarianism and the psychedelic esotericism that emerged during the 1960s, not least the focus on the self, in that one accesses truth by turning to the divine within.

During the 1960s, however, very little was known about Rastafarianism and its sacramental use of cannabis. Rather, discussion of a psychedelic sacrament was typically informed by Wasson’s work and particularly by the recent anthropological research of James Slotkin into the peyote rituals of the Native American Church.³⁰⁸ It was Huxley’s discussion of Slotkin’s work (the details of which were not at that time particularly well known outside anthropological circles) that contributed most significantly to the idea of the psychedelic sacrament. “In sacramentalizing the use of peyote,” Huxley argued, “the Indians of the Native American Church have done something which is at once psychologically sound and historically respectable.”³⁰⁹ Such statements were enormously appealing to those with countercultural sympathies, as was his comparative critique of Christian worship:

And what, we may ask, are these devout and well-behaved Peyotists experiencing? Not the mild sense of virtue which sustains the average Sunday churchgoer through ninety minutes of boredom. Not even those high feelings inspired by thoughts of the Creator and the Redeemer, the Judge and the Comforter, which animate the pious. For

these Native Americans, religious experience is something more direct and illuminating, more spontaneous, less the homemade product of the superficial, self-conscious mind.³¹⁰

It mattered little whether a person had read the *Doors of Perception* or not, for Huxley's (and Slotkin's) understanding of the Native American Church had entered psychedelic occulture. Consequently, many in the 1960s became fascinated by the idea of an indigenous psychedelic religion. While more recent studies of the Native American Church have deepened our knowledge of its history, rituals, and doctrines, this was the principal understanding during the 1960s.³¹¹ Moreover, that Slotkin and Huxley had emphasized the Church's syncretic relationship to Christianity was significant in establishing an explicit link between the Eucharist and the peyote ritual. Huxley argued that the Christian Church should abandon alcohol as a sacrament and adopt mescaline.³¹² It was precisely this detraditionalizing, countercultural approach to the sacrament that inspired many. Not only did it make good countercultural sense to simply replace one psychoactive substance (wine) with another (peyote), but also, by locating psychedelics within the Christian Eucharistic tradition, it invested the *act* of ingesting them with religious gravitas. As such, the psychedelic sacrament subverted hegemonic constructions of religious authority.

A good example of this detraditionalized approach to the Eucharist was published in 1968 by Robert Brown, with the assistance of "associates of the Neo-American Church, the League for Spiritual Discovery and the Ultimate Authority of the Clear Light."³¹³ Reprinted several times, *The Psychedelic Guide to the Preparation of the Eucharist in a Few of Its Many Guises* was explicitly "designed for persons who know how to use hallucinogens and who wish to use them for religious purposes such as the mystical Psychedelic Experience."³¹⁴ Bringing together mysticism, pharmacology, and psychology, the book moves seamlessly from a diagram illustrating the structural formula of mescaline to instructions for the preparation of psilocybin and to a discussion of the nature of transcendent states. Overall, though, the tenor of the book is broadly pharmacological and psychological: "We have seen how the mind continues to try to function even when the foundations have been dissolved. The foundation, or framework, is known as the ego, the dissolution of which is consequently known as ego-loss. If the mind has carefully been coached to accept ego-loss, it will continue to progress until it finally frees itself in its complete form. The result of this final inward look is a self-awareness and enlightenment which is devastating in impact and unbelievable to anyone who has never undergone the same experience."³¹⁵

Turning On and Turning East

Millbrook wasn't the only significant geographical reference point in the history of the psychedelic counterculture's search for transcendence. There were iconic and mythologized urban spaces such as the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco or Laurel Canyon in the Hollywood Hills West district of Los Angeles. Between the two, twelve miles beyond Big Sur on the Pacific coast and tucked away just off Highway 1, was (and still is) the Esalen Institute. Founded in 1962, it became central to the development of human potential thought and practice.³¹⁶ More particularly, it was an important venue for the exploration of the fusion of the spiritual ideas of the East with the scientific discoveries of the West. As such, it provided the ideal setting for psychedelic experimentation. Metzner has commented of psychedelic research that it was "parallel to and happened at the same time as the human potential movement that flourished in places like Esalen in California. A great deal of that movement was inspired by psychedelic experiences."³¹⁷ Certainly, both of Esalen's founders, Michael Murphy and Richard Price, had experimented with psychedelics, the former having first taken LSD in Mexico under the guidance of Laura Huxley on December 7, 1962.³¹⁸ This early interest would, as Jeffrey Kripal put it, "continue down through the decades. From Aldous Huxley and Humphry Osmond, to Stanislaw Grof . . . to the shamanistic mushroom explorer Terence McKenna, many of the major figures . . . have either given workshops at Esalen or have lived there for extended periods of time."³¹⁹ But Esalen was never a center for psychedelic research in the sense that Millbrook was—which is part of the reason it survived the sixties. While one of its earliest seminars was dedicated to "drug-induced mysticism," by the close of the 1960s it had become evident to the founders that it needed to distance itself from the psychedelic revolution. As Jon Perry Barlow put it, "The Beatles had dropped acid and the whole world had noticed, but not everyone was pleased. The Empire was about to strike back."³²⁰ Murphy could sense the coming storm. Not only were many Americans increasingly disturbed by sensationalized reports in the media and the rising numbers of drug casualties, but Esalen had itself witnessed several deaths.³²¹ Because, like Millbrook, it tended to attract those interested in psychedelic exploration, it became clear that if it was to prosper, it needed to demonstrate that consciousness expansion and personal growth could be achieved far more effectively without the use of chemicals. As Murphy explains, "The reason that our institute never went under—because there was a huge amount of drug use on the grounds—was, we prohibited any sale of drugs there or the use of any in

the workshops.”³²² Signs around Esalen made this policy clear to visitors, and it was enforced: “They kicked out anyone whom they caught selling drugs or using them in the seminars.”³²³ Nonetheless, it remained an important place for the psychedelic counterculture’s reception of the East. Regardless of its policy on drugs, it has always been far more faithful to Huxley’s vision than ever Millbrook was.

By the close of the 1960s, others had reached the same conclusion as Esalen. As Harvey Cox recalled of a visit to San Francisco in 1973, “I noticed a curious sign outside the Hare Krishna temple there. It read: STAY HIGH ALL THE TIME! CHANT TO KRISHNA! I remembered that sign when two young followers told me with enthusiasm that since they had ‘received the knowledge’ from one of the mahatmas, they no longer used drugs at all.”³²⁴ There were now new ways of accessing gnosis. A number of new esoteric groups in the 1960s also resisted the psychedelic route to wisdom. For example, Mary Ann MacLean, one of the founders of the Process Church of the Final Judgement (which had roots in Scientology) “absolutely forbade” drugs,³²⁵ as did the founder of the Church of Satan, Anton LaVey, who suggested “an alternative Black Mass that would not ridicule Christianity, but the god of the day, psychedelic drugs.”³²⁶ The Mass would include an inverted portrait of Leary and a ritual crushing of LSD underfoot. Hence, while drugs gave many people “a sense of religious possibility,” as Robert Aitken put it, over time they began to be exchanged for non-chemical techniques of transcendence.³²⁷ Even Alan Watts, who never successfully controlled his alcoholism, concluded in 1972, shortly before his death, that his “retrospective attitude to LSD is that when one has received the message, one hangs up the phone. I think I have learned from it as much as I can, and, for my own sake, would not be sorry if I could never use it again.” Moreover, he continued, “it is not, I believe, generally known that very many of those who had constructive experiences with LSD, or other psychedelics, have turned from drugs to spiritual disciplines—abandoning their water-wings and learning to swim.” Like Aitken, he concedes that “without the catalytic experience of the drug they might never have come to this point.”³²⁸

This raises another important issue about psychedelic culture: the extent to which it drove Easternization in the 1960s. As Cox found, a key issue that he had to face in his “study of neo-Oriental movements was the question of whether the tide of Eastern spirituality in the 1970s was the successor of the psychedelic upsurge of the 1960s.”³²⁹ Certainly the 1960s was, as Campbell has argued, the critical decade, but to what extent psychoactives were important is less clear.³³⁰ Murphy, for example, has argued that it is “a mistake to reduce

America's turn East to the use of psychedelics," in that to do so ignores a range of other postwar sociocultural factors.³³¹ While this is an important point, their catalytic significance is hard to ignore. For example, reflecting on his time in San Francisco in the 1960s, Richard Baker Roshi, the founder of the Dharma Sangha, recalled that "people who used LSD—and a large percentage of students did—got into [Zen] practice faster than other people."³³² The paucity of attention given to the significance of the psychedelic experience in Campbell's work on Easternization is a problem. As we have seen, not only was recreational drug use widespread, but it was religio-culturally important. Even those who did not take psychoactive substances were shaped by the culture informed by those drugs. As Surya Das (Jeffrey Miller), a Western Buddhist teacher, has commented, "I feel quite certain that the psychedelic experience has been a great gate to the dharma for many of our generation."³³³

As we have seen in previous chapters, it is difficult to ignore the connection between Romantic Idealism, drug-induced experiences, and Orientalism. First, opium and hashish were transported from, and therefore identified in the Western imagination with, the Orient. Often both the set and setting for the use of such drugs—for example, Le Club des Hachichins—were conspicuously Orientalist. Second, key thinkers in the 1950s, particularly Huxley and Heard, had begun to relate the psychedelic experience to a perennialist interpretation of Vedantic thought. Finally, this relationship was understood to be a natural one because, as we have discussed throughout the book, the psychedelic experience itself tended to lead to a vaguely monistic construction of reality. Although there is in fact a range of psychedelic experiences, some of which are broadly dualistic, the evidence suggests that the dominant perception is one of unity. As Leary and Metzner commented in 1962, their analysis and interpretation of the results of psychedelic research forced them "back on a language and point of view quite alien to us who are trained in the traditions of mechanistic objective psychology. We have had to return again and again to the nondualistic conceptions of Eastern philosophy, a theory of mind made more explicit and familiar in our Western world by Bergson, Aldous Huxley, and Alan Watts."³³⁴ Just as in the nineteenth century those emerging from drug-induced states turned to Romantic Idealism to make sense of their experiences, and just as Romantic Idealists found their ideas reflected in Oriental philosophy, so those in the counterculture who turned on turned East. Hence, the psychedelic revolution was Easternized, from incense sticks and sitar music to images of Krishna, the om symbol, and koftans. As with Coleridge, DeQuincey, and Huxley, there was a sense that the psychedelic experience could provide an opening into the Eastern mind and,

conversely, that Eastern thought enabled one to understand the new realities to which hallucinogens provided access. While psychoactives were not the sole reason for what Campbell refers to as “the shift from a worldview characterized by materialistic dualism to one centred on metaphysical monism,” they were important.³³⁵

A lovely example of this confluence of the Oriental and the psychedelic is provided by Watts in his essay “The New Alchemy.” Having taken some LSD, he found himself standing alone in a garden:

The garden was a lawn surrounded by shrubs and high trees—pine and eucalyptus—and floodlit from the house which enclosed it on one side. As I stood on the lawn I noticed that the rough patches where the grass was thin or mottled with weeds no longer seemed to be blemishes. Scattered at random as they were, they appeared to constitute an ordered design, giving the whole area the texture of velvet damask, the rough patches being the parts where the pile of the velvet is cut. In sheer delight I began to dance on this enchanted carpet, and through the thin soles of my moccasins I could feel the ground becoming alive under my feet, connecting me with the earth and the trees and the sky in such a way that I seemed to become one body with my whole surroundings.³³⁶

He moves easily from this perception of oneness to an explicitly Romantic Orientalist interpretation: “The garden acquired an atmosphere that was distinctly exotic, like the gardens of precious stones in the *Arabian Nights*, or like scenes in a Persian miniature.”³³⁷

A similar but more striking example of psychedelic Orientalism is provided by Fritjof Capra, who in the 1960s was a young physicist at the University of California, Berkeley. His book *The Tao of Physics: An Exploration of Parallels Between Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism* sought “to overcome the gap between rational, analytical thinking and the meditative experience of mystical truth.”³³⁸ Capra met with Watts before he had formulated any of his ideas about the relationship between science and Eastern thought, and it is clear that Watts’s work had a formative influence on the development of his ideas.³³⁹ Having “become very interested in Eastern mysticism,”³⁴⁰ Capra was subsequently “deeply affected by” Watts’s book *The Joyous Cosmology* and, of course, Huxley’s *Doors of Perception*.³⁴¹ It was these books that led him to experiment with “power plants.” His initial experiences showed him “how the mind can flow freely” and “how spiritual insights come on their own, without any effort,

emerging from the depth of consciousness.”³⁴² However, the catalytic psychedelic moment that set him on the path to *The Tao of Physics* came in 1969:

I was sitting by the ocean one late summer afternoon, watching the waves rolling in and feeling the rhythm of my breathing, when I suddenly became aware of my whole environment and being engaged in a gigantic cosmic dance. Being a physicist, I knew that the sand, rocks, water and air around me were made of vibrating molecules and atoms, and that these consisted of particles which interacted with one another by creating and destroying other particles. I knew also that the Earth's atmosphere was continually bombarded by showers of “cosmic rays,” particles of high energy undergoing multiple collisions as they penetrated the air. All this was familiar to me from my research in high-energy physics, but until that moment I had only experienced it through graphs, diagrams and mathematical theories. As I sat on that beach my former experiences came to life; I “saw” cascades coming down from outer space, in which particles of energy were created and destroyed in rhythmic pulses; I “saw” the atoms of the elements and those of my body participating in this cosmic dance of energy; I felt its rhythm and I “heard” its sound, and at that moment I *knew* that this was the Dance of Shiva, the Lord of the Dancers worshipped by the Hindus.³⁴³

Published a few years later, *The Tao of Physics* argued that “Eastern mysticism provides a consistent and beautiful philosophical framework which can accommodate our most advanced theories of the physical world.”³⁴⁴ In particular, Capra was keen to demonstrate that contemporary theories in physics were in accord with “the central aim of Eastern mysticism,” namely, “to experience all phenomena in the world as manifestations of the same ultimate reality,” which could be understood as

the essence of the universe, underlying and unifying the multitude of things and events we observe . . . This ultimate essence . . . cannot be separated from its multiple manifestations. It is central to its very nature to manifest itself in myriad forms which come into being and disintegrate, transforming themselves into one another without end. In its phenomenal aspect, the cosmic One is thus intrinsically dynamic, and the apprehension of its dynamic nature is basic to all schools of Eastern mysticism.³⁴⁵

Capra's insistence on the ontological priority of the One over the many provides a good illustration of the religio-cultural shift induced by psychedelics and articulated by many during the 1960s. Indeed, the bibliography in *The Tao of Physics* illustrates this perspective very clearly. Along with, as one might expect, a number of books of a scientific nature, there are far more that, together, betray a confluence of Romanticism, Orientalism, and psychedelic experience, including D. T. Suzuki's volumes on Buddhism, Watts's *The Way of Zen*, Eugen Herrigel's *Zen in the Art of Archery*, Aurobindo's *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Vivekananda's *Jnana Yoga*, Hume's *The Principal Upanishads*, Lama Anagarika Govinda's *Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism*, William Blake's *Complete Writings*, the *Tao Te Ching*, the *I Ching*, and Carlos Castaneda's books on psychedelic shamanism.

More than a decade before *The Tao of Physics*, Watts had explored the psychedelic borderlands of Western science and Eastern mysticism in *The Joyous Cosmology*. In this influential text, he bemoaned the "compartmentalization of religion and science as if they were two quite different and basically unrelated ways of seeing the world. I do not believe that this state of doublethink can last. It must eventually be replaced by a view of the world which is neither religious nor scientific but simply our view of the world." The problem, he claimed, was that "the traditional roads to spiritual experience seldom appeal to persons of a scientific or skeptical temperament, for the vehicles that ply them are rickety and piled with excess baggage. There is thus little opportunity for the alert and critical thinker to share at first hand in the modes of consciousness that seers and mystics are trying to express."³⁴⁶ Chemistry, however, had provided a way forward: "In the last few years modern chemists have prepared one or two substances for which it may be claimed that in some cases they induce states of mind remarkably similar to cosmic consciousness."³⁴⁷

Watts was one of the key figures informed by the Beat Generation to have a formative influence on the psychedelic counterculture. Even now, in my discussions with people (of a certain age) about their psychedelic experiences, one of the most frequently mentioned texts alongside Huxley's *The Doors of Perception* is *The Joyous Cosmology*. I was therefore not surprised to read Kripal's comment that these two books were "widely circulated at Esalen in the 1960s."³⁴⁸ Recommended in *The Psychedelic Experience*,³⁴⁹ and with a foreword by Leary and Alpert, Watts's book became a standard text.

His own introduction to psychedelics came in 1958. He had known Huxley for fifteen years, having first met him in New York while visiting a friend, Ruth Fuller Everett. He had read Huxley's *Ends and Means*, *Brave New World*, and *Grey Eminence* and it was, he recalls, "just after he had written the latter" that

he met him. He was “wholly enchanted by the breadth and intricacy of his interests. He was a marvellous conversationalist. Every time I met him I felt charged in some way, as if a whole new world of ideas had been opened up to me. He was an entrancing talker. I well remember the day when we were having lunch at the Tokyo Restaurant in San Francisco, and his conversation reduced everyone at the neighboring tables to silence because they wanted to listen in.”³⁵⁰ As the years passed he got to know Huxley well, referring to him as “my much-admired friend.”³⁵¹ However, although Watts certainly admired his efforts to articulate Vedantism to the West (along with those of his fellow Englishmen living on the West Coast, Heard and Isherwood), he found Huxley’s overall approach too “spiritual,” in that initially Huxley seemed to display a Manichaeic distrust of the material world: “At that time I felt that he was following a type of mystical philosophy that rejected the material universe as a degraded mode of consciousness.”³⁵² This exemplified the gnostic alienation from nature that Watts understood to be a fundamental problem in Western societies. Rather than denying the material, insisted Watts, “the harsh divisions of spirit and nature, mind and matter, subject and object” that dominated Western thinking needed to be challenged.³⁵³ However, when he met Huxley and Heard in 1958, following their psychedelic experiences, he noted “a marked change of spiritual attitude,” with both appearing to be more down-to-earth and less ascetic. “To put it briefly, they had ceased to be Manicheans. Their vision of the divine now included nature, and they had become more relaxed and humane, so that I found myself talking to men of my own persuasion.”³⁵⁴

Huxley was, however, now expounding yet another idea that Watts found problematic: “It struck me as highly improbable that a true spiritual experience could follow from ingesting a particular chemical.”³⁵⁵ A self-confessed hedonistic Bohemian by nature and, therefore, not one to let the chance of a novel experience pass by, he agreed to test the thesis. Huxley was in touch with Keith Ditman, a psychiatrist responsible for LSD research in the Department of Neuropsychiatry at the University of California, Los Angeles. Moreover, one of Watts’s former students, John Whittelsey, was working with him as a statistician. An experiment was soon arranged and he took 100 micrograms. This was followed by five further experiments, which also included mescaline and psilocybin.³⁵⁶ These led to his first psychedelic publication, “The New Alchemy.”³⁵⁷ This was quickly followed by *The Joyous Cosmology*, a wonderfully evocative, beautifully written book, in which his various experiences are gathered together into a single mystical vision, along with an interpretative prologue and epilogue. The emphasis throughout is the dissolution of dualism:

These remarkable medicines . . . temporarily dissolve our defenses and permit us to see what separative consciousness normally ignores—the world as an interrelated whole. This vision . . . wears a striking resemblance to the unfamiliar universe that physicists and biologists are trying to describe here and now. For the clear direction of their thought is toward the revelation of a unified cosmology, no longer sundered by the ancient irreconcilables of mind and matter, substances and attribute, thing and event, agent and act, stuff and energy.³⁵⁸

Unsurprisingly, therefore, apart from a vision of a face, which reminded him of “the Christos Pantocrator of Byzantine mosaics,” the religious ideas are all drawn from Daoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism.³⁵⁹ However, there is little development of any particular doctrines beyond cosmic oneness. *The Joyous Cosmology* is imprecise, occulturally eclectic, and designed to evoke an emotional response (encouraged by numerous evocative photographs of nature). As we have seen, such an approach is common within the Romantic Idealist currents of psychedelic thought. The urgency and imperative to express the experience of transcendence are not always matched by careful analysis, which would undermine the force of such textualized mysticism.

Key for Watts was the shift away from an understanding of the “soul” as something that needed to be saved: “Through Zen or other Eastern ways of liberation you come to recognize that the ‘self’ is an abstraction from memory, which like all abstractions cannot be ‘held’ or ‘saved’ in any way, and that the real ‘you,’ so to speak, is the ongoing processes of your living.” So “instead of being a block-like entity to be ‘saved’ from the rest of the universe, you become one of the processes in an infinite number of processes, all of them working together in harmony.”³⁶⁰

Another visitor to Esalen during the early years was Leary himself, who, with Alpert, would guide Murphy’s third psychedelic experience in 1964.³⁶¹ By this time, Leary was already immersed in Eastern occulture. While we have seen that his approach to religion was always playful and typically embedded within discourses of humanistic psychology, he was also a significant contributor to the Easternizing occulture of the 1960s. The key year for his turn East was 1962, a time when “an increasing number of priests and ministers and theologians kept coming around.” While this Christian religious interest in his work was generally welcome, in the spring of 1962, there “came the swing to the East.” Although he was already familiar with Eastern thought from his conversations with Huxley, Smith, Watts, Ginsberg, and others, he claimed that, for him, “it started with Fred Swain, a World War II air force major,

who became a Vedanta Hindu monk in 1948, and who lived in an ashram near Boston.” It was this ashram, run by Gayatri Devi, that was to become particularly significant.³⁶²

He started hanging out at the house and he told us about Hinduism and the psychedelic pantheon of gods and his guru and yoga. Fred had gone to Mexico the year before and had a far-out mushroom trip with Maria Sabina in the mountains of Oaxaca. I started visiting the Vedanta ashram. It was a surprise and delight to discover this group of holy, mature, sensible people who had renounced the world in pursuit of the visionary quest. The Hindu bibles read like psychedelic manuals. The Hindu myths were session reports. The ashram itself was a turn-on. A serene, rhythmic life of work and meditation all aimed at getting high. The reports of Fred Swain and Alan Watts and Aldous Huxley had impressed them with the yogic possibilities of psychedelic drugs. They were watching me too, testing me out.³⁶³

Leary was then asked to guide a psychedelic session at the ashram. “The Holy folk got high. I could see the LSD take over. In spite of their years of preparation they were shocked by the power and complexity of the LSD.” He continues:

The candles burned silently. The incense smoke rose, essence of Holy India, reek of Kalighat temple, Calcutta, holy scent of Ram Mandir Benares and Jaganath Puri and Konarak. I looked around the room. Ramakrishna’s statue breathed and his eyes twinkled the message. Vivekananda’s brown face beamed and winked The sacred kundalini serpent uncoiled up the bronzed candelabra to the thousand-petaled lotus blossom. This was the fulcrum moment of eternity God was present and spoke to us in silence. I was overcome with reverence. And gratitude . . . I was a Hindu from that moment on. No, that’s not the way to say it. I recognized that day in the temple that we are all Hindus in our essence. We are all Hindu Gods and Goddesses That day in the temple I discovered my Hindu-ness. Things were different after that session. There was a new dimension.³⁶⁴

Not only did he view himself differently, but he claimed that as a result of their psychedelic experiences, those at the ashram viewed him differently as well. This led to a reassessment of his significance: “The first intimations of

the prophetic role came after the session in the ashram. The monks and nuns treated me as a guru. To them it was obvious. I was not a Harvard psychologist with a staff of research assistants. Come off it, please. I was, like it or not, playing out the ancient role.”³⁶⁵ Leary, though, always considered himself more of a psychologist than a guru: “The profession of holy man is based, like everything else human, upon the laws of the nervous system and the laws of social interaction. It involves feedback, set, expectation, setting, social pressure, habit. If you are turned-on/tuned-in/dropped-out, then people will begin treating you as a spiritual teacher.” Still, it was a role he seems to have enjoyed, at least initially. As Nora Sayre commented following an encounter with him in 1966, “Leary didn’t actually say he was Christ, but parallels were permitted.”³⁶⁶ That said, he was aware of the dangers of narcissism and abuse—“the occupational hazard of a messiah” and getting “caught up in the guru game.”³⁶⁷

Finally, confluent with an emphasis on chemical technologies was an emphasis on sexual technique. “There is no question,” insisted Leary, “that LSD is the most powerful aphrodisiac ever discovered by man.” This is nonsense, as is his later claim in a *Playboy* interview that “in a carefully prepared, loving LSD session, a woman can have several hundred orgasms.”³⁶⁸ It is hardly surprising that he would also argue that some of the most rewarding psychedelic mystical states emerge out of an erotic experience: “The three inevitable goals of the LSD session are to discover and make love with God, to discover and make love with yourself, and to discover and make love with a woman.”³⁶⁹ This led to an interest in Tantrism, which, he discovered, has a quite different approach to sex than the Catholicism in which he was raised. Although Leary references the eucharistic words of Jesus, “*Hoc est corpus meum*,”³⁷⁰ he is being typically provocative, for his use of them is explicitly Tantric: “Your body is the universe. The ancient wisdom of gnostics, hermetics, sufis, Tantric gurus, yogis, occult healers. What is without is within. Your body is the mirror of the macrocosm. The kingdom of heaven is within you . . . The great psychedelic philosophies of the East—Tantra, Kundalini yoga—see the human body as the sacred temple, the seed center, the exquisitely architected shrine of all creation.”³⁷¹ Indeed, the psychedelic discourse at Millbrook was infused with Tantric references. Even the front of the building was adorned with Tantric-inspired art by Allen Atwell, a professor at Cornell University, who had spent time living and studying in India and southeast Asia and who later painted the “Psychedelic Temple”—an installation artwork in a Manhattan apartment, which included his mural “Mandala.”³⁷²

Leary's ideas about Tantra, while drawing liberally on the Orientalist, eroticized culture of the 1960s, were, again, informed by Huxley. Prior to his attendance at Swain's ashram, in February 1962 he consulted Huxley about Tantra. In his response, Huxley recommended a number of texts by Western scholars, including those of Mircea Eliade, Arthur Avalon (John Woodroffe), Edward Conze, and Heinrich Zimmer. In particular, *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*, compiled by Paul Reps and Nyogen Senzak, provided 112 exercises "extracted from a Tantril text," in which "the whole of 'Gestalt Therapy' is anticipated."³⁷³ Huxley responded warmly to Leary's interest. He was enthusiastic about the usefulness of Tantra's "strange mixture of superstition and magic with sublime philosophy and acute philosophical insights." Tantra, he said, "teaches a yoga of sex, a yoga of eating (even eating forbidden foods and drinking forbidden drinks)."³⁷⁴ In short, it taught "the sacramentalizing of the common life, so that every event may become a means whereby enlightenment can be realized . . . through constant awareness. This is the ultimate yoga—being aware, conscious even of the unconscious—on every level from the physiological to the spiritual." Moreover, "LSD and the mushrooms should be used, it seems to me, in the context of this basic Tantric idea of the yoga of total awareness, leading to enlightenment within the world of everyday experience."³⁷⁵ With Tantra, Leary had found a set of ideas he could develop: "The systematic, disciplined awareness of body function is the basic sacramental method of these religions. Tibetan and Indian Tantra train the student to become faithful to somatic experience, to pay attention to the energies and messages of the body. Breathing, control of circulation, control of involuntary muscles and reflexes, control of digestion, control of genital erection and ejaculation, awareness of the intricate language of hormone and humor, the psychopharmacology of the body, the cakras."³⁷⁶ (The transliteration "cakra," rather than the more common "chakra," had been used in earlier texts recommended to Leary by Huxley, such as Arthur Avalon's *The Serpent Power*.)³⁷⁷ The Tantric focus on "somatic energy (Kundalini) and cakra consciousness"³⁷⁸ was stressed in his "psychedelic prayers." In a section entitled "The Experience of the Chakras: Homage to the Internal Senses," he provides a series of meditations on individual chakras for the intoxicated mind to reflect upon. These consist of several questions, which begin with the refrain "Can you float through the universe of your body and not lose your way?"³⁷⁹ He concludes with a few statements that one is unlikely to find elsewhere in the history of prayer, including the advice to "feel each cell in your body communicating in serpent-coiled rainbow orgasm."³⁸⁰

Concluding Comments

The aim of this chapter and Chapter 6 has been to explore the principal spiritual currents of the twentieth century's psychedelic heyday. Without wanting to be cynical, much of what went on beyond the cloistered spaces of academia in the late 1950s and 1960s amounted to a valorization of recreational drug use in a culture shaped by a turn to the self. Unquestionably, many young people simply enjoyed taking drugs. Steve, a hippie interviewed in 1967, recalled that when he and his friends first took LSD, "we didn't drop it to see God or overthrow the government. We did it because we liked it."³⁸¹ Others, however, attached to their experiences a significance that gave them metaphysical weight. Allied to this was a desire to liberate themselves from the conservative political and religious values of the previous generation. These ideas are central to understanding the social and cultural significance of the psychedelic revolution of the 1960s.

Moreover, as with religious experiences generally, because psychedelic states were ineffable, their full significance could be properly appreciated only by other experiencers, which led to the creation of distinct subcultures of like-minded users. Psychedelic subcultural capital was accrued by users as they shared their experiences and, as in religious communities, interpreted them in ways that appealed to other users. These ideas were propagated, informed, and serviced by popular culture. Consequently, subcultures were bound together by an argot, a music scene, popular literature, urban legends, discourses of transcendence, and a shared occulture.

Some within the psychedelic counterculture worked with humanistic psychological theories and ideas emerging out of the human potential movement, much of which can be traced back to Huxley's interest in the development of "human potentialities."³⁸² Related to these currents and also indebted to Huxley were a range of detraditionalized religious ideas drawn from Eastern traditions. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that this was a period during which spiritual literature became enormously popular. Books such as the *Tao Te Ching*, *The Psychedelic Experience/Tibetan Book of the Dead*, Gurdjieff's *Meetings with Remarkable Men*, Hesse's *Siddhartha*, Watts's *Way of Zen*, Eugen Herrigel's *Zen in the Art of Archery*, and, of course, *The Doors of Perception* seemed to attain almost scriptural weight for some readers. The turn East, the turn within, and the turn to psychedelics were all part of the same postwar sociocultural shift.³⁸³

Psychedelics tended to be interpreted as gnostic technologies that were able to liberate the self from sociocultural conditioning.³⁸⁴ For example, in

his survey of American Buddhists, Douglas Osto found that “one commonly occurring theme . . . was the idea that psychedelics could act as a ‘door’ or ‘gateway.’ Many used the metaphor of psychedelics as ‘opening a door’ to such things as Buddhist truths, other realities or ‘places’ (spatial metaphors), or higher states of consciousness.”³⁸⁵ They were used to induce “ego-loss,” “ego death,” or “the melting away of the boundaries of the self,” which was understood to be a prerequisite for the visionary state.³⁸⁶ Having turned off the mind, relaxed and floated downstream, and passed through the “second bardo” of visionary experience, the individual properly trained in the “yoga of drugs”³⁸⁷ might finally experience a process of rebirth—redemption from the constraints of everyday existence, a phenomenon referred to variously as “illumination,” “ekavatam,” “nirvana,” and “satori.”³⁸⁸ However it was interpreted, users emerged from the psychedelic experience with a new understanding of the self, society, the divine, and, reality. Although it wasn’t expressed in these terms, there was a clear sense of psychedelic gnosis.

From a humanistic psychological perspective, some interpreted psychedelic transcendence in terms of what Maslow identified as “peak experiences”—which were identified with mystical experiences. Maslow himself was interested in psychedelic experience as “a new possibility for the scientific investigation of transcendence”:

In the last few years it has become quite clear that certain drugs called “psychedelic,” especially LSD and psilocybin, give us some possibility of control in this realm of peak-experiences. It looks as if these drugs often produce peak-experiences in the right people under the right circumstances, so that perhaps we needn’t wait for them to occur by good fortune. Perhaps we can actually produce a private personal peak-experience under observation and whenever we wish under religious or non-religious circumstances. We may then be able to study in its moment of birth the experience of illumination or revelation. Even more important, it may be that these drugs . . . could be used to produce a peak-experience, with core-religious revelation, in non-peakers, thus bridging the chasm between these two separated halves of mankind.³⁸⁹

Maslow thus identified some of the core ideas in modern psychedelic history. As technologies capable of inducing peak experiences, psychedelics had both democratized mysticism and opened it up to scientific scrutiny.

By the close of the 1960s, however, the effects of drug use were becoming a matter of some concern. At one end of the spectrum, the media and socially

conservative groups were stoking the fires of a moral panic: "Stories about users of LSD trying to fly off buildings, plunging to their deaths, standing in traffic and trying to stop cars, staring into the sun and going blind, were rife."³⁹⁰ As Charles Tart recorded in the 1972 edition of his *Altered States of Consciousness*, he had been unable to update the section on psychedelic drugs published in the 1969 edition due to the fact that "research came to a standstill because of public hysteria."³⁹¹ At the other end of the spectrum, some were beginning to doubt the efficacy of the psychedelic experience to produce meaningful or, indeed, healthy results. For example, Maslow became concerned that "it risks being reduced to the merely experiential":

Out of the joy and wonder of his ecstasies and peak-experiences he may be tempted to *seek* them, *ad hoc*, and to value them exclusively, as the only or at least the highest goods of life, giving up other criteria of right and wrong. . . . Impatience (especially the built-in impatience of youth) dictates shortcuts of all kinds. Drugs, which can be helpful when wisely used, become dangerous when foolishly used. The sudden insight becomes "all," and the patient and disciplined "working through" is postponed or devalued. Instead of being "surprised by joy," "turning on" is scheduled, promised, advertised, sold, hustled into being, and can get to be regarded as a commodity.³⁹²

Maslow's comments reflected the concerns of many at the end of the 1960s, particularly those concerned with spiritual progress. Even at Millbrook, as we have seen, there was a growing interest in non-chemical techniques of transcendence. While many appreciated the significance of psychedelics as visionary technologies, like Watts they came to view them as only an initial step. People began "to think that just taking a drug is in itself a spiritual practice," bemoaned Metzner. "And it isn't."³⁹³

In the final analysis, it would seem that for many, the psychedelic revolution confirmed the suspicion that there could be no shortcuts to a healthy spiritual life. That said, many of those concerned about drug use, such as Metzner, were not advocating abstinence. Rather, they believed it was important to learn from the excesses of the 1960s and use psychedelics more carefully and purposefully. In particular, they should be used in clinical or ritualized contexts, "the way shamans in the Amazon do with ayahuasca and the Native American Church folks do with peyote." Metzner's point is that "just taking a pill without that preparation and intention" has limited benefits. Psychedelics need to be combined "with a sacramental attitude." Unfortunately, during the

1960s, “none of us knew any better. We just winged it as best we could, with the limited knowledge and experience at our disposal.”³⁹⁴

Overall, it is difficult to overestimate the significance of the “psychedelic revolution.” Although we have seen that there is a history of personal and scholarly interest in non-ordinary states of consciousness, the 1950s and 1960s witnessed much important experimentation, which, while undoubtedly reckless at times, laid the foundations for contemporary research. Consequently, a number of thinkers, many of whom were at the forefront of developments in transpersonal psychology, such as Maslow and particularly Grof, found psychedelic research to be a promising field of enquiry. Indeed, transpersonal psychology, which has its roots in the thought of Huxley and the human potential movement, was closely related to the ideas emerging out of the psychedelic counterculture. It is unsurprising, therefore, that, as Harris Friedman has discussed, psychedelics are now believed to “offer great potential as tools for researching elusive areas within humanistic and transpersonal psychology, as well as powerful ways to facilitate humanistic and transpersonal growth.”³⁹⁵ As we’ll see in Chapter 8, of particular interest to many working in this area since the late 1960s has been the use of psychoactive substances within shamanism.

Psychedelic Shamanism

From the point of view of the psychedelic shaman, the world appears to be more in the nature of an utterance or a tale than in any way related to the leptons and baryons or charge and spin that our high priests, the physicists, speak of. For the shaman, the cosmos is a tale that becomes true as it is told and as it tells itself. This perspective implies that the imagination can seize the tiller of being in the world.

—TERENCE MCKENNA¹

SHAMANISM IS A scholarly construct, imposed on a number of beliefs and practices around the world and throughout history that have a relationship with those observed in Siberia. As a consequence, the word “shaman” has, in some respects, sloughed off its original connection to the Evenk people. While it typically retains some relationship to the Evenk word *šamán*, it has been encoded with new meanings taken from the various discourses and contexts within which it has become embedded, including the psychedelic occulture of late modernity.² As the intoxicated Romantic mind turned less to the Orient and more to an imagined archaic past and to its survivals within indigenous cultures, so it began to develop a shamanic hermeneutical framework.³ However, the lure of perennialism remained strong. Detached from the profanation of Western modernity, shamanism was understood to be continuous with a primal, universal wisdom to which psychoactive substances could provide access.

In this final chapter we turn to a number of post-1960s developments within high culture, focusing particularly on the ideas of two thinkers who were shaped in different ways by the psychedelic revolution, Carlos Castaneda and Terence McKenna. While they are neither the first nor the only theorists to influence psychedelic shamanism, they are arguably the most influential.

Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy

The principal understanding of shamanism within psychedelic occulture was informed by Mircea Eliade's seminal study, originally published in French in 1951, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*. It is difficult to overestimate the significance of this text, which discusses the shaman primarily as one who "specializes in a trance during which his soul is believed to leave his body."⁴ As discussed in Chapter 1, the term "ecstasy" is taken from the Greek *ἐκστασις* (*ekstasis*), meaning "to be located outside," to "transcend," or to be "displaced from" the embodied self, and such experiences (when they are not pathologized) tend to be invested with paranormal significance.⁵ McKenna, for example, was conspicuously influenced by Eliade, whom he considered to be "the foremost authority on shamanism in the context of comparative religion." Working with Eliade's ideas, McKenna articulated a form of psychedelic shamanism, central to which was the notion of an "archaic revival": "Of all the diverse religious institutions that humans have elaborated since before the beginning of recorded history, that of shamanism is one of the most singular and is probably one of the most archaic as well."⁶ This was directly related to his development of a psychedelic version of "core shamanism," another concept that was informed by Eliade's work and which was specifically articulated by Michael Harner: "Shamanic methods are strikingly similar the world over, even for peoples whose cultures are quite different in other respects, and who have been separated by oceans and continents for tens of thousands of years." There is, insists Harner, "a basic uniformity of shamanic methods."⁷ While there are undoubtedly culturally relative elements, there are also a number of core, universal, culturally non-contingent elements. Not only does McKenna agree that there is "a surprising internal coherency of practice and belief," but he says that the "most important" of these relate to what Eliade called "techniques of ecstasy": "The shaman has access to the superhuman plane, is a master of ecstasy, can travel in the spirit realm at will."⁸ Moreover, if shamanism constitutes a universal and archaic set of techniques, then such techniques can, with care and guidance, be "revived" in any cultural context. Psychedelic shamanism simply utilizes psychoactive technologies to induce "shamanic journeying"—altered states of consciousness that enable the self "to journey outside of time and space into . . . a parallel universe."⁹ "Shamanic plants allow the healer to journey into an invisible realm in which the causality of the ordinary world is replaced with the rationale of natural magic."¹⁰

While Eliade considered the use of psychoactive substances to be "a vulgar substitute for 'pure' trance," a "recent innovation" that "points to a decadence

in shamanic technique," this has not deterred those inspired by his work.¹¹ Indeed, Peter Furst has even claimed that Eliade himself, "in the last years of his productive life . . . discarded his view of the use of hallucinogenic plants as 'degeneration' of the shamanic techniques of ecstasy." This change of mind, Furst claims, was the result of "work done by ethnobotanists and ethnographers on the vast complex of shamanic uses of sacred plants in the Americas, the emerging philological evidence for widespread and very ancient use of the fly-agaric mushroom in Europe, and, finally, the new radiocarbon dates from the American Southwest." Shortly before his death, Eliade revealed to Furst that he had become convinced not only that the use of hallucinogens by shamans was an "archaic phenomenon" but also "that there was no phenomenological difference between the techniques of ecstasy whether 'spontaneous' or triggered by the chemistry of sacred plants."¹² Whether or not this is an accurate account of Eliade's final position on psychoactive substances, it does reflect a growing conviction during the 1960s that sacred plants provide an ancient and natural way of inducing states of transcendence.

As we have seen, a key experience in psychedelic occulture, which makes shamanism obvious as an explanatory framework, is that of journeying between worlds: the everyday world and what Castaneda referred to as "non-ordinary reality."¹³ During induced trance states, the inner world becomes the "otherworld"; the psychedelic experience becomes a "magic flight," a "journey to sacred realms."¹⁴ As we will see, this is why it is believed that, as Robert Graves put it, psychoactive plants were elevated to a position of "profound importance . . . in primitive religion."¹⁵ Whether this is true or not, the theory is powerfully evocative within psychedelic occulture.

This is fundamentally related to another underlying theme, namely, death and the postmortem state. As Eliade discussed, "Ceremonies celebrating the periodic return of the dead gave rise to complex and dramatic spectacles, which played a considerable role in many folk cultures." Particularly creative, he argued, were "the ecstatic experiences of the shamans, that is, their journeys to heaven or the world of the dead. Representing a momentary separation of the soul from the body, ecstasy was, and still is, considered to be an anticipation of death."¹⁶ In other words, altered states enable the conscious mind to access worlds normally hidden from living embodied beings. This is not a novel idea within the history of psychedelic thought. We have seen it articulated within early nineteenth-century Romanticism, then again toward the end of the century in Spiritualism, and in the 1960s in the use made of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* by Timothy Leary, Ralph Metzner, and Richard Alpert.

Unlike Leary, Metzner, and Alpert, who, we have seen, tended to understand psychedelic experiences as "your own thought-forms made visible and

audible,”¹⁷ psychedelic shamanism typically offered a rather different interpretation. Not only can the altered state be thought of as a “separate reality” to which one can travel, but it is also an objective world with which one can engage in much the same way that one engages with quotidian reality.¹⁸ That is to say, nonordinary reality is, as Castaneda insisted, “only slightly different from the ordinary reality of everyday life.”¹⁹ While there are differences between the two realities, there is also an important sense in which, for all its weirdness and apparent ephemerality, nonordinary reality is stable. For example, as discussed in Chapter 1, reflecting on his own psychedelic experiences, Castaneda claimed that “the component elements of nonordinary reality were similar to the component elements of ordinary reality, for they neither shifted nor disappeared, as would the component elements of ordinary dreams. It seemed as if every detail that made up a component element of nonordinary reality had a concreteness of its own, a concreteness I perceived as being extraordinarily stable.”²⁰ For Castaneda, this means that, while drug-induced altered states are “nonordinary,” they cannot therefore be dismissed as “hallucinations”—in the commonly accepted sense of that term—for they are not ephemeral dream states, but rather “concrete . . . aspects of the reality of everyday life.”²¹ They should, in other words, be treated *as if* they are real. We may not be able to comprehend fully everything we experience during a visit to a “separate reality,” but it is a concrete reality that can be known, rather than a fleeting, subjective state of mind.²² This was exactly the point that Louis-Alphonse Cahagnet insisted upon in the late nineteenth century: “I regard it as a reality, not as a dream. Dreaming belongs solely to this world.”²³

Finally, we will also see that the shaman’s principal roles of healing and divination are often understood to be enabled by spirit entities within the plants. There is an anthropomorphizing of the psychedelic experience itself. For example, as Andrew Dawson comments regarding Brazilian ayahuasca religions, the “consumption of ayahuasca is orchestrated by specialists claiming the spirits of certain plants (*vegetales*) as their teachers (*profesores*).” That is to say, psychoactives are used “to invoke the presence of or facilitate interaction with the spirits of plants, animals and other supernatural forces,”²⁴ which are then consulted concerning specific problems or tasks.

The Long Trip and the Origin of Religion

Reflecting on the state of Western culture in 1971, the anthropologist I. M. Lewis noted that “we live in an age of marginal mystical recrudescence Our vocabulary has been enriched, or at least added to, by a host of popular mystical expressions We know what ‘freak outs’ are, what ‘trips’ are, and anyone who

wants to can readily participate in psychedelic happenings in dance halls with evocative names like 'Middle Earth.'” He continued, “The Eskimo and Tungus shamans . . . would find a ready welcome in that most successfully publicized sector of our contemporary society, the pop scene. With its pronounced magical aura, and shamanic superstars like Jimi Hendrix and The Beatles, in this clamorously assertive subculture, far from being dismissed as excessive crudities of questionable religious value, the trance and possession experiences of exotic peoples are seriously considered, and often deliberately appropriated as exciting novel routes to ecstasy.”²⁵ While Lewis was somewhat critical of this attempt to recover shamanic perspectives, many others were not. Even the work of those who had little time for the excesses of psychedelic culture, such as the New York banker and amateur mycologist Gordon Wasson,²⁶ developed theories that encouraged the idea that it might be considered part of the latest phase in what the popular author Paul Devereux has referred to as “the long trip”—a history of high cultures stretching back to the Neolithic period.²⁷ The construction of the long trip imagines a close relationship between human culture and psychoactive substances, the suppression of which in contemporary Western societies is aberrant: “Our modern culture stands out in the long record of human history because of its difficulty in accepting in an orderly and integrated way the role of natural substances, primarily from the plant kingdom, have played in aiding mind expansion.”²⁸ Likewise, Richard Rudgley insists that not only have “most communities . . . used psychoactive substances in both secular and sacred contexts,” but “our own usage, which is almost exclusively secular, makes our culture in certain important respects the exception rather than the rule.”²⁹ Hallucinogens, so the argument goes, are woven into human evolution and account for many important cultural developments, including the emergence of religion. At a certain point in the evolutionary development of the brain, the consumption of psychoactive plants led to a sense of “awe and reverence.” It was at this point, argued Wasson, that “Religion was born, Religion pure and simple, free of Theology, free of Dogmatics, expressing itself in awe and reverence and in lowered voices, mostly at night, when people would gather together to consume the sacred Element . . . This was the beginning of the Age of Entheogens, long, long ago.”³⁰

Speculation about the long trip was stimulated in the twentieth century by a number of early anthropological expeditions that linked the use of hallucinogens to shamanism, which, in turn, tended to be understood in terms of the continuation of a primitive culture. A good early example of this approach was that of the Norwegian explorer and ethnographer Carl Sofus Lumholtz, who, in his two-volume work *Unknown Mexico* (1902), described his search

for indigenous antiquities amongst the Tarahumara and Huichol “Indians.” Not only was he fascinated by the powerful, ancient techniques of the “shamans” he met, but he also noted that they were “nearly all the time under the influence of their native stimulants.”³¹ Moreover, he recorded that the “great quantity of stimulants taken by shamans in the course of their career causes them to go through a state of excitement, which . . . gradually gives these men, who frequently are endowed with animal magnetism, a supernatural appearance.”³² While, as we have seen, the concept of “animal magnetism” became popular in late nineteenth-century Spiritualism, Lumholtz understood the term rather differently. Although it is difficult to think that Mesmer’s theory was not at the back of his mind, Lumholtz makes no reference to his work. Nevertheless, he does describe “animal magnetism” as an energy “inherent in every individual to varying degrees,” which can be manipulated to induce “a feeling of restfulness and a quieting of [the] nerves.”³³ It is also significant that he posits a relationship between psychedelics, animal magnetism, and the ethereal appearance of the shaman—though he never fully explains it.

Such Romantic speculation was, we have seen, part of a growing interest during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the use of psychoactive substances within indigenous religious contexts (see Chapter 5). As well as the pharmacological interest in peyote stimulated by the work of Louis Lewin and Arthur Heffter in particular, there was a growing fascination with its use in Native American rituals. Following a number of reports about some of these rituals during the late 1880s, in 1891 the Smithsonian ethnographer James Mooney published an account of a Kiowa “mescal ceremony” in which he had participated earlier in the year. This was followed by a number of influential articles about his peyote experiences during the 1890s.³⁴ Accounts such as Mooney’s stimulated curiosity, including that of Havelock Ellis, who viewed “the mescal rite” as “the chief religion of all the tribes of the Southern plains of the United States.”³⁵ In January 1936, the French writer, actor, and theater director Antonin Artaud traveled to Mexico bewitched by the conviction that he was leaving the profane and spiritually barren societies of Europe for the sacred culture of the Tarahumara, who practiced a form of psychedelic shamanism using peyote. The result was a number of vivid accounts of peyote intoxication in which he slips between mysticism and madness.³⁶

The point is, it was this type of speculation that fed into subsequent ethnographic discussions about the relationship between “shamanism” and “power plants” later in the twentieth century, by which time there was a tradition of European scholarship that ascribed the performance of Siberian shamans to psychedelic states. For example, the Swedish scholar of religion

Åke Joel Ohlmarks, in a 1939 study of shamanism, identified *Amanita muscaria* (a red mushroom with white flecks, commonly known as the fly-agaric) as ritually important.³⁷ His theory of a relationship between shamanism and the fly-agaric was subsequently developed by the Hungarian scholar János Balázs, who suggested that it had probably been used throughout northern Siberia.³⁸ Regardless of the veracity of such claims, during the twentieth century there emerged both scholarly and popular fascination with the relationship between hallucinogenic fungi and shamanism.

Following Lumholtz, a particular area of interest has been the use of psychoactive mushrooms in Mexico.³⁹ Early in the twentieth century, a series of articles by the botanist William Edwin Safford drew attention to the ancient use of psychoactive plants in the Americas: "The use of narcotic plants and stimulants was widely spread in both North and South America long before their discovery, not only for the purpose of exhilaration and intoxication, but also in connection with the practice of necromancy and in religious rituals and ceremonies."⁴⁰ He noted, for example, that, "from the accounts of early writers, it appears that the ancient Mexicans attributed to all plants a spirit not unlike that of animals or even of man himself." Of particular note was their deification of "the narcotic *aloliuhqui*," "the sacred *nanacatl*," and "the *peyotl*."⁴¹ In 1915 he published an article in which he identified *teonanacatl* (typically translated as "the flesh of the gods" and widely understood to have been venerated by the Aztecs) as the dried tops of the peyote cactus, rather than a mushroom.⁴² While he was mistaken—not least, as Richard Evans Schultes has commented, because it would take an extraordinarily dull mind to confuse the two⁴³—his article proved to be a catalytic moment in the search for "the flesh of the gods." It served to direct the gaze of mycological scholarship toward Mexico. The first scholar to challenge Safford's thesis was Blas Pablo Reko, followed by the Austrian American engineer turned anthropologist Robert Weitlaner—widely considered to be the first Western scholar "in modern times to obtain or even see the sacred mushrooms"⁴⁴—and then, in 1938, by Schultes. All sought to provide compelling evidence that not only did hallucinogenic mushrooms exist in Mexico, but they were still being used in rituals. However, despite their considerable efforts, the academic community proved resistant to abandoning the conclusions of such an eminent botanist as Safford. Eventually, in 1938, a group of young American anthropologists, led by Jean Bassett Johnson and including Weitlaner's daughter (Johnson's fiancée), were invited to observe a nocturnal mushroom ceremony in Huautla de Jiménez, Oaxaca.⁴⁵ Although their subsequent research was interrupted by the Second World War, in which Johnson was killed, they had provided conclusive evidence that Safford was

wrong. The matter probably would have ended there had it not been for the banker from New York and his Russian wife, Valentina.⁴⁶

Interested in the relationship between psychoactive fungi and the development of human cultures, Wasson was delighted to hear that the Aztec *teonanacatl* was not only a mushroom but still used in rituals.⁴⁷ His curiosity was further stimulated when, about the same time, he learned of the existence of “mushroom stones” in Latin America—enigmatic mushroom-shaped stone carvings that seem to depict figures under the cap of a mushroom. It wasn’t long before he was planning a trip to Huautla de Jiménez. He began by writing a letter to the aging Reko, who serendipitously forwarded it to Eunice Pike, a Christian missionary working in the region with Wycliffe Bible Translators. Very familiar with Mazatec culture, but deeply suspicious of the profane, syncretistic rituals she had witnessed, Pike confirmed that hallucinogenic mushrooms were indeed being used and, moreover, that they were understood to have personalities and to be able to communicate through intoxicated *curanderos*. Like some Latin American ayahuasca religions, such as Santo Daime, they articulated a hybrid of popular Catholicism and indigenous beliefs and practices.⁴⁸ For example, the mushrooms were believed to sprout from ground that had been moistened by Christ’s blood or saliva.⁴⁹ Some understood Christ himself to speak during the “bemushroomed” state.⁵⁰ Regardless of these later developments, Watson was now convinced that he had found a survival of one of the primitive mushroom cults he had speculated about:

There survives to this day in Mexico, within a few hours’ flight of New York, the living cult of a sacred mushroom, a mushroom to which is attributed the power of bestowing on the eater extraordinary faculties. We know that this cult was flourishing when the Spaniards conquered Mexico and we believe there is evidence indicating that it was then millenniums old. For three centuries this cult lay forgotten . . . while Indians in remote corners of Mexico continued to believe in the mushroom and practice the cult. Only in the last twenty years has the cult come to light again, and even today its existence is known only to a few. After we had examined the available evidence old and new, we found ourselves succumbing to the spell of the mysterious mushroom with its strange powers and uncertain identity.⁵¹

With his wife and daughter, Wasson made the first of ten trips to the region in 1953. Although he had an interesting experience with a *curandero*, which galvanized his interest in the use of hallucinogenic mushrooms in the region,

it was his third trip, in 1955, that was to have the most significant impact on his thought and, subsequently, on psychedelic occulture. Indeed, since the publication of his widely read article in *Life* magazine in May 1957, "Seeking the Magic Mushroom," which recounts the details of that trip, the region has become sacralized as the "land of the magic mushrooms," the home of the psychedelic shaman.⁵² The event he described in that article was "a celebration of 'holy communion' where 'divine' mushrooms were first adored and then consumed." The rite, he told his intrigued readers, "was led by two women, mother and daughter, both of them *curanderas* or shamans."⁵³ The mother was María Sabina, a charismatic, locally respected healer who agreed to introduce Wasson and his photographer, Allan Richardson, to "the saint children" (as she referred to the mushrooms).⁵⁴ "No anthropologists had ever described the scene we witnessed."⁵⁵ At around ten-thirty on the evening of June 29, 1955, in Huautla de Jiménez, Sabina and her daughter

took their positions before the small table that served for an altar. On it were two holy pictures, on the left the child Jesus and on the right the Baptism in Jordan, with a bouquet in front of them, a crucifix hidden in the flowers, three lighted candles of virgin beeswax, and a lighted wick in a glass of wax. There were also two pottery bowls and some cups Into each of the two bowls she put 13 pair of mushrooms; one bowl was for her and the other for her daughter. Into each cup she put four pair, or five, or six, and then handed the cups to the grown-ups that were to take them Following the Senora's example, we began to chew and swallow our mushrooms The Senora had asked us to take care not to invade the corner of the room on the left of the altar table, for down that corner would descend the Holy Ghost.⁵⁶

The saint children began to communicate. They introduced Wasson to soul flight, to vivid, colorful patterns, and—unsurprisingly, bearing in mind the Christian setting—to exotic Orientalist visions with a biblical apocalyptic hue.

There was no inclination to sleep. At all times we were alert both to our subjective hallucinations and to the goings-on around us in the dark There is no better way to describe the sensation than to say that it was as though his very soul had been scooped out of his body and translated to a point floating in space, leaving behind the husk of clay, his body Our bodies lay there while our souls soared At first we saw geometric patterns, angular not circular, in richest colors, such as

might adorn textiles or carpets. Then the patterns grew into architectural structures, with colonnades and architraves, patios of regal splendor, the stone-work all in brilliant colors, gold and onyx and ebony, all most harmoniously and ingeniously contrived, in richest magnificence extending beyond the reach of sight, in vistas measureless to man. For some reason these architectural visions seemed oriental . . . They seemed to belong . . . to the imaginary architecture described by the visionaries of the Bible. In the aesthetics of this discovered world attic simplicity had no place: everything was resplendently rich.⁵⁷

Enraptured, Wasson was finally convinced that the powers ascribed to hallucinogenic fungi were real. Something metaphysically significant had taken place. There had indeed been an experience of *gnosis*. He believed that while intoxicated he was “seeing plain, whereas ordinary vision gives us an imperfect view; I was seeing the archetypes, the Platonic ideas, that underlie the imperfect images of everyday life.” He continued, “The thought crossed my mind: could the divine mushrooms be the secret that lay behind the ancient Mysteries? Could the miraculous mobility that I was now enjoying be the explanation for the flying witches that played so important a part in the folklore and fairy-tales of northern Europe?”⁵⁸

Thanks to Wasson’s vivid account, it wasn’t long before Sabina became a psychedelic shamanic celebrity. Not only did Wasson return with Hofmann in 1962, but so did numerous travelers throughout the 1960s seeking illumination.⁵⁹ Sabina was even celebrated in popular culture and, in 1967, the Nobel laureate Camilo José Cela wrote a fantastical opera about her.⁶⁰ She did not welcome the attention, for it had led to a shift in her spiritual universe: “The little mushrooms won’t work anymore. There is no helping it.”⁶¹ Her account of those visiting her at the end of the 1960s is a sad one: “These young people, blonde and dark-skinned, didn’t respect our customs. Never, as far as I remember, were the *saint children* eaten with such a lack of respect . . . The improper use that the young people made of the *little things* was scandalous.”⁶² Wasson was, as he later acknowledged, responsible for this: “These words make me wince . . . I, Gordon Wasson, am held responsible for the end of a religious practice in Mesoamerica that goes back . . . millennia . . . A practice carried on in secret for centuries has now been aerated and aeration spells the end.”⁶³

Shortly after his experiences with Sabina in 1955, Wasson began in earnest to search for evidence in the history of religions of his earlier theory of the long trip.

I do not recall which of us, my wife or I, first dared to put into words, back in the '40's, the surmise that our own remote ancestors, perhaps 4,000 years ago, worshipped a divine mushroom. It seemed to us that this might explain the phenomenon of mycophilia vs. mycophobia, for which we found an abundance of supporting evidence in philology and folklore. Nor am I sure whether our conjecture was before or after we had learned of the role of *Amanita muscaria* in the religion of several remote tribes of Siberia. Our bold surmise seems less bold now than it did then.⁶⁴

For his first major project he turned to the R̥gveda (c. 1200–900 BCE), an ancient collection of 1,028 Sanskrit hymns, 120 of which are devoted to Soma. This was of interest to Wasson because not only was Soma the name of a deity, but it also referred to a psychoactive plant.⁶⁵ After it was pressed in wooden bowls, its juice filtered through woolen gauze, then mixed with water and milk and ritually consumed, it “produced hallucinations of the kind made familiar by modern experiments with a variety of drugs and herbs.”⁶⁶ The Indologist Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty (who assisted Wasson in the translation and interpretation of the hymns) has noted that while Soma seems to have been a dangerous hallucinogen, the effects “are usually admired, or at least sought after: a sense of immense personal power . . . the assurance of immortality . . . and the hallucinations of trance.”⁶⁷ As one of the hymns declares, “We have drunk the Soma; we have become immortal; we have gone to the light; we have found the gods . . . The glorious drops I have drunk set me free in wide space” (8.48.3). While the identity of Soma has been a matter of some debate, Wasson became convinced that he had “identified the plant-god of the Aryans as *Amanita muscaria*.”⁶⁸ There were a number of lines of enquiry that led him to this conclusion, including the fact that the R̥gveda doesn’t indicate that the plant had leaves, branches, blossoms, seeds, or roots. Having said that, by this point Wasson’s conviction regarding the veracity of his mycological theory of religion was such that he found it difficult to resist the conclusion that wherever there were psychoactive fungi, they had contributed to the construction of religious cosmologies. (That the presence of psychoactive plants should be taken into account when considering the emergence of religion in the same geographical area has become a common foundational presupposition since Wasson—principally by those who have themselves been awed by the psychedelic experience.)⁶⁹ Indeed, he was convinced that the fly-agaric/Soma could be identified as “the plant that the Maya worshipped in antiquity . . . the plant that the Nahua worshipped, and

also the Algonkians in North America, the ancient Paleo-Siberian tribesmen in Siberia, the Ob-Ugrian and Samoyed, and some of the Finnic peoples, the Lapps too and probably many other peoples whose traditions and languages we have lacked the opportunity to examine. In fact, among the entheogens, Soma seems to have been in prehistory the focus for the awe and reverence of our ancestors for countless millennia.⁷⁰

While we need not unpack Wasson's rather elliptical analysis of the use of Soma, it is worth noting one of his central arguments: that there were two ways of ingesting it. It could be "taken directly . . . by eating the raw mushroom, or by drinking its juice squeezed out and taken neat, or mixed with water, or with water and milk or curds," as well as perhaps, a number of other ingredients, such as barley and honey.⁷¹ Or, because the fly-agaric is unusual in that it is able to resist metabolization in the body, the urine of a human or other mammal that has ingested it can be consumed.⁷² Since there are two passages in the *R̥gveda* referring to the urination of Soma—for example, "the swollen men piss the flowing [Soma]" (9:74.4)—there could be little doubt, concluded Wasson, that what was being referred to was the fly-agaric.⁷³

Although many were persuaded by Wasson's thesis, including Robert Graves, Roger Heim, Richard Schultes, Weston La Barre, Albert Hofmann, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Joseph Needham, others, including a number of Vedic scholars such as John Brough and Doniger O'Flaherty, were not.⁷⁴ One of the principal problems with Wasson's thesis is that it rested on his commitment to the existence of a widespread primitive fly-agaric cult throughout Eurasia. Indeed, a large part of his book on Soma is devoted to the study of fly-agaric consumption in Siberia, which includes a discussion of the consumption of urine. "The northern forest and tundra folk live in an intimacy with the reindeer that is hard for us to imagine, an intimacy that amounts almost to a symbiotic relationship." This is important because reindeer "manifest two addictions, two passions, one to urine, especially human urine, and the other to mushrooms, including the fly-agaric." His point is that humans learned from this twofold addiction. "In the give and take of the human species and the reindeer, may not the human race have learned from the reindeer to esteem urine and the inebriating qualities of the fly-agaric also, and finally the combination of the two?" Then, with reference to the fly-agaric cult, he suggests continuities with the *R̥gveda*: "We are beginning to perceive the extent of the trade relations that always existed across those vast land expanses of Siberia. In that heyday of the fly-agaric cult may not the Indo-Europeans have mastered techniques that encouraged cows to eat the resplendent heavenly mushroom?"⁷⁵ Was it not possible, therefore, that they drank psychoactive cattle

urine? Brough's response was, unequivocally, negative.⁷⁶ Separated by thousands of miles and without any evidence to the contrary, it is very unlikely that there was much cross-cultural communication between Siberian shamanism and the religion of the R̥gveda. With no evidence that the R̥gveda was the product of an Indo-Iranian manifestation of the fly-agaric cult (which was itself a tenuous thesis), much of the non-Indo-Iranian material discussed by Wasson remained "in the strictest sense, irrelevant. Even if the proposed identification of Soma seems probable, but is not proved on the basis of internal evidence, extraneous facts are not additional evidence."⁷⁷ Furthermore,

if the Soma-plant had been a mushroom, it would be strange that the elaborate Vedic process of pounding out and filtering the juice should have been necessary. Why should the plant simply not have been eaten? There is no particular sanctity in liquid as such: "cakes" . . . are among the sacrificial offerings most frequently mentioned in the ritual texts. Even although dried specimens of the mushroom may have been somewhat tough, even after soaking in water, nowhere in Wasson's "Exhibits" is there any mention of the Siberian tribes pounding the fly-agaric to extract juice. On the contrary, in Siberia the plant is regularly eaten or swallowed whole.⁷⁸

Finally, while there is a reference to urination in the R̥gveda, there is no indication that the priests actually drank the urine they passed.⁷⁹ Indeed, there is "no need to see 'Soma urine' in Wasson's sense," argued Brough, for the evidence suggests "only the *soma*-juice itself flowing into the sacrificial vessels, poetically conceived as the pouring down of fertilizing rain from heaven."⁸⁰ Wasson's speculation was unduly influenced by his theory of a Siberian fly-agaric cult, rather than being informed by careful textual analysis or, indeed, any local archeological research.

If Soma was not *Amanita muscaria*, what was it? As Doniger O'Flaherty discusses, there is a history in Vedic studies of the search for Soma.⁸¹ A number of other substances and plants have been posited, including alcohol, rhubarb, cannabis, *Ephedra*, *Periploca*, *Sarcostemma*, and the psychoactive shrub harmel or wild rue (*Peganum harmala*).⁸² It has also been suggested that harmel might have been mixed with psilocybin mushrooms to produce effects similar to those induced by the hallucinogenic brew *ayahuasca* (which, translated from the Quechua language, means "vine of the dead" or "soul vine").⁸³ However, in the final analysis, as Doniger O'Flaherty has commented, "although the effort to identify the Soma plant has produced one of the most spirited and imaginative

chapters in Vedic studies, it has also resulted in considerably more confusion than clarification.”⁸⁴ Brough’s conclusion was simply that “the problem is insoluble.”⁸⁵

Regardless of the weaknesses in Wasson’s thesis, he was the principal among a number of scholars and amateur enthusiasts to argue that the religious impulse can be traced back to the apocalyptic effects of psychoactive plants, effects that are ritually experienced in certain contemporary indigenous religions and which, under the right conditions, can be induced in almost any human brain.⁸⁶ As La Barre claimed, “All our knowledge of the supernatural derives *de facto* from the statements made by religious visionaries or ecstasies . . . and that the nature of the shamanic ecstasy may be illuminated by attention to ancient hallucinogens.”⁸⁷ Although McKenna rejected Wasson’s arguments connecting the fly-agaric to the R̥gveda—largely on the basis of his own experiences of nausea and stomach cramps while under its influence—he accepted Wasson’s general thesis regarding the role of psychoactive plants (particularly psilocybin and DMT) in religious history: “*Amanita muscaria* is doubtless an effective shamanic vehicle in the floristically limited Arctic environment But the rapturous visionary ecstasy that inspired the Vedas and was the central mystery of the Indo-European peoples as they moved across the Iranian plateau could not possibly have been caused by *Amanita muscaria*.”⁸⁸ Such visions were “a result of the synergies between human beings and the various plants with which they interacted and evolved.”⁸⁹

This thesis is supported by another concerning the ritual use of psychoactives in ancient Greece. For example, in his discussion of theurgy in Neoplatonism, Georg Luck makes the point that “again and again the descriptions emphasize the surpassing beauty of the visions and the inadequacy of language to do justice to them It is true that no specific drugs are ever named, but the powers of herbs, stone, aromatic essences, and the like, are emphasized many times.”⁹⁰ In particular, much attention has been directed to a ritual that took place at Eleusis in Greece, which focused on the myth of the goddess Demeter and her daughter Persephone. Established around 1500 BCE and celebrated for almost two thousand years, the cult, which initially had little significance beyond Eleusis, eventually, it has been argued, became central to Athenian citizenship and, by the time of the Roman Empire, had become embedded in Greek culture. For example, Hofmann claims that, “Its character as a pan-Hellenic institution was signaled in 760 BCE, at the time of the fifth Olympiad, when the Oracle of Delphi called on the Greeks to make a communal sacrifice in honor of Demeter of Eleusis in order to banish

a famine which was then affecting Greece.”⁹¹ However, interesting though the history of the Eleusinian Mysteries is, the aim here is simply to indicate the significance of the ritual for contemporary reflection on hallucinogens.⁹² Wasson was important here as well, in that he was, as Ruck recalls, “looking for a mycological role in Greek religion as a parallel and confirmation of his theory of Soma. The most obvious was in the religion of Dionysos [*sic*], with the fungal nature of the wine that is that god’s sacrament.”⁹³ But wine didn’t quite fit the psychedelic bill. The cult at Eleusis, on the other hand, provided something altogether more promising.

According to the myth around which the cult was organized, Persephone had been abducted by Hades, the brother of Zeus, and taken to the underworld to be his wife. Demeter (the goddess of the earth, of agriculture, of fertility, and of the cycles of life and death), unaware of the kidnapping or that her husband, Zeus, had been party to it, went in search of their daughter. Consumed with grief and unable to focus on her role as a goddess, the cycle of the seasons stopped, vegetation ceased to grow, the earth became desolate, and humanity came close to extinction. Fearing the loss of worshipers and the offerings they sacrificed to the gods, Zeus intervened and sent Hermes, his messenger, to the underworld to order his brother to release Persephone. Hades agreed to release her if she had eaten nothing while in his realm. However, he tricked her into eating a small number of pomegranate seeds, which meant, according to the terms of their agreement, that he could require her to spend four months of every year in the underworld. The myth thereby explained the cycle of the seasons, for during those months when Persephone was absent, winter would reign and the crops would die; when she returned, so did spring. During her search for Persephone, Demeter took the form of an old, simple woman and arrived at the palace of Keleus, the king of Eleusis in Attica. She requested refuge and he kindly took her in, giving her the task of nursing his sons Demophon and Triptolemus. Later, when she revealed her true nature, as a reward for his kindness she founded a temple at Eleusis and taught Triptolemus the secrets of agriculture. He, in turn, traveled the world teaching people how to plant, grow and harvest grain. She also taught him how to perform rites in the temple, insisting that they were sacred secrets, “Mysteries,” which could never be revealed to anyone beyond the cult. As the “Homeric Hymn to Demeter” declares, “No one may transgress or pry into, or utter, for an overwhelming reverence for the gods stops his voice.”⁹⁴ This was always strictly observed. Consequently, as with the identity of Soma, the rites of Eleusis have been shrouded in secrecy. But this did not stop Wasson and a number of other scholars from speculating.

The English classicist Robert Graves, with whom Wasson was in close correspondence, became convinced that the rites were psychedelic.⁹⁵ He posited the following theory:

The secret which Demeter sent around the world from Eleusis in charge of her protégé Triptolemus is said to have been the art of sowing and harvesting corn: he drove around revealing the secret from country to country in a chariot drawn by serpents. Something is wrong here. Triptolemus belongs to the late second millennium BC; and corn, we now know, had been cultivated at Jericho and elsewhere since around 7000 BC. So Triptolemus's news would have been no news. *He was in fact, I believe, announcing a discovery and a consequent change of ritual.*⁹⁶

As to the nature of this discovery that occasioned the change of ritual, the answer, suggested Graves, is to be found in the use of hallucinogenic mushrooms: "My guess is that the priesthood at Eleusis had discovered an alternative hallucinogenic mushroom easier to handle than the *Amanita muscaria*; one that could be baked in sacrificial cakes, shaped like pigs or *phalloi*, without losing its hallucinogenic powers, and one that did not produce a long hangover."⁹⁷

Since Graves's hypothesis, similar theories have been developed to account for the powerful visions that appear to have been induced at Eleusis, visions in which cult members were transported *into* the myth of Demeter. The prevailing thesis is that it was probably a type of beer brewed with an infusion of the ergot fungus, *Claviceps purpurea*. "One day in July 1975," recalled Wasson, "I asked my house guest, Albert Hofmann . . . whether early man in ancient Greece could have derived an entheogen from the ergot that would have given him an experience comparable to LSD or psilocybin." He thought about it, returned home, and a couple of years later, in 1977, agreed that the ancient Greeks "could have worked out a potion with the desired effect from the ergot of wheat or barley cultivated on the famous Rarian plain adjacent to Eleusis."⁹⁸ At some point during the celebration, s were required to consume "an LSD-like consciousness-altering drug."⁹⁹ This was most likely taken in the form of *kykeon* (κυκεών), a drink used in a number of contexts in ancient Greece and known to be made from a variety of ingredients, including water, barley, wine, and pennyroyal. The mythic set and setting having been prepared during the fast, the consumption of psychedelic *kykeon* enabled the initiate to journey beyond this world, "through the narrow Entrance of Plouton's Cave, down into the subterranean labyrinth, across the aquifer, perhaps in

Charon's boat, to regroup, as in the myth of Er, on the plains of Elysion."¹⁰⁰ It is argued, therefore, that participation in the Mysteries was a psychedelic experience "which could not be described by its external appearance; rather it evoked transformations in the very soul of the initiate. . . The initiates evidently experienced in vision the congruity of beginning and end, birth and death, the totality of being and its eternal, generative basis. It must have been an encounter with the ineffable, describable only by metaphor, an encounter with the divine."¹⁰¹

This thesis, which has since been unpacked in a number of occulturally important books and essays, particularly *The Road to Eleusis* (1978) by Wasson, Ruck, and Hofmann, significantly contributed to the Romantic construction of the long trip. While more sober discussions acknowledge that "the origin of man's use of visionary, mind-changing plants and preparations is lost in the obscurities of pre-recorded history," the core theory, developed by Wasson in the 1950s, that our early ancestors did indeed use psychedelics and that their use was significant for the future cultural and, perhaps, biological evolution of the species, became a major occultural narrative. "Psychedelics, probably mushrooms," argues Dennis McKenna, "accidentally or deliberately ingested by early primates, triggered synesthetic experiences that formed the critical foundations of human language and cognition, the association of inherently meaningless sounds or images with inherently meaningful symbols and ideas."¹⁰² This was, as Jeffrey Kripal has commented, "unquestionably one of the major narratives of the American counterculture, providing one of its most important and lasting mythological structures. By the founding of Esalen in 1962, Wasson's historical and chemical hypotheses, catalyzed by Huxley's *The Doors of Perception* (1954), had begun to pass over into the realm of religious revelation."¹⁰³ As we have seen, this narrative was embedded within an emerging discourse about primitive shamanism. "Perhaps some Neolithic shaman, sampling new specimens for his herbal pharmacopeia, stumbled across and ingested an innocuous-looking weed," suggested Metzner. "In a short time, he found himself in the company of the tribal ancestors, spirits of water, thunder, rock and earth, trembling with stark awe and terror at the mysterious energies flashing through his eyes and ears, marveling at the intricacies of the relationships between man and animal, man and man, struggling with the subtle entrapments of his own fantastic concepts and visions." He continues, "The shaman's visionary brew may provide the beginnings of insight and interchange between the waking ego and the inhabitants of inner, mythic dimensions, totems, animal spirits, gods and devils—a dialogue which modern man has relegated to the 'unconscious' realm of dreams and fantasy at the

cost of his psychic well-being.”¹⁰⁴ Likewise, Schultes simply asserts that “for thousands of years, primitive societies the world over have used psychotomimetic plants for purposes of religious ritual, divination or magic.”¹⁰⁵ Indeed, following Leary’s reading of Wasson’s article in *Life* magazine and then his *Mushrooms, Russia, and History*, which he believed contained “probably the most poetically moving and philosophically convincing accounts of drug-induced experiences ever published,” he concluded that “drugs are the origin of religion and philosophy,” a conclusion that did much to promote the idea in psychedelic occulture.¹⁰⁶

Finally, a number of important and not so important studies followed in the wake of Wasson’s research. Three worth mentioning are Andrija Puharich’s *The Sacred Mushroom*, published in 1959, John Allegro’s *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross*, published in 1970, and Dan Merkur’s *The Mystery of Manna*, published in 2000. They are all odd books written by learned men. Puharich was a graduate of Northwestern University’s Medical School who devoted his life to the study of parapsychology. Much of this research was conducted at his Round Table Laboratory in Glen Cove, Maine, to which he invited a number of interested thinkers, including Wasson and Huxley.¹⁰⁷ As Huxley recalled in 1955, “Whatever may be said against Puharich, he is certainly very intelligent, extremely well-read and highly enterprising. His aim is to reproduce by modern pharmacological, electronic and physical methods the conditions used by the shamans for getting into a state of travelling clairvoyance and, if he succeeds, to send people to explore systematically ‘the Other World.’”¹⁰⁸ This interest in shamanic states of ecstasy was undoubtedly influenced by Wasson’s research into *Amanita muscaria*.¹⁰⁹ However, he approached the subject quite differently than Wasson. He began experimenting with the medium Harry Stone, who had been channeling an ancient Egyptian priest, Ra Ho Tep, who, it would appear, had used hallucinogenic mushrooms in rituals: “I felt that the Harry Stone trances, with their Ra Ho Tep personality and the knowledge delivered therefrom about the sacred mushroom, demanded serious investigation.”¹¹⁰ On one notable occasion, while Stone was in one of his trances during a demonstration for Huxley, Puharich gave him a specimen of the mushroom.

On August 7, 1955, Harry was giving a demonstration of telepathy for Aldous Huxley. In the middle of the demonstration Harry spontaneously slipped into a deep trance. At the moment I felt that he had ruined my neat little laboratory demonstration. But in the presence of Aldous and myself, he entered into a dramatic sign-language

demonstration whose meaning this time was quite clear. The Ra Ho Tep personality insisted on having the golden mushroom brought to him. I could not escape the urgency of this appeal. I had to go and get one of my precious golden mushrooms. I brought it back to the laboratory and placed it in front of the deeply entranced Harry. The Ra Ho Tep personality became ecstatic over it. Then for the first time I saw the secret details of how the mushroom was to be used. Harry applied the mushroom himself on the tongue, and on the top of his head, in ritualistic fashion. Five minutes after he had completed this remarkable demonstration he woke up Then he looked straight ahead and said that he felt he could see through the wall of the laboratory. He said that everything seemed so clear on the other side of the wall. I asked him what he saw, and he gave me an accurate description.¹¹¹

According to Puharich, this was evidence not only that the mushroom had been used ritually in ancient Egypt but also that it was capable of increasing a person's psychic ability.

Unlike Puharich's work, Allegro's scholarship was widely respected within academic circles. However, his ascendant trajectory within academia was very quickly reversed when he published a bizarre revisionist history of Christianity. Allegro was an interesting English scholar. Although he had begun on the path toward ordination in the Methodist Church, he transferred to a degree in Oriental studies at the University of Manchester. It tells us something of his scholarly reputation that in 1953 he was invited to become the first British representative on the team working on the recently discovered Dead Sea scrolls in Jordan. This was followed in 1954 by a lectureship in comparative Semitic philology at Manchester and, in 1961, by his appointment as honorary adviser on the Dead Sea scrolls to the Jordanian government. However, this all came to an abrupt end in 1970 when he was forced to resign from his post at Manchester following the publication of *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross*.

Intrigued by references in the Dead Sea scrolls to medicinal plants, as well as related traditions concerning pharmacological lore, the book suggested the rather convoluted thesis that the roots of religion were to be found in psychedelic fertility cults. In particular, he argued that the New Testament could be understood as a coded record of a secret cult that used psychoactive mushrooms. He also argued, based on philological research, that a comparative study of ancient Sumerian and biblical languages had enabled him to decode the New Testament: "Most secret names of the mushroom go back to

ancient Sumerian, the oldest written language known to us.”¹¹² He concluded that Jesus had not actually existed as a historical individual but rather was a literary device used to “spread occult knowledge to the faithful.” The biblical Jesus was invested “with the power and names of the magic drug.”¹¹³ He made the point that “the worshippers of Dionysus headed their cultic processions with an erect penis, while those of Jesus symbolized their faith with a fish and a cross, but essentially all represent the common theme of fertility and the creative power of the god.”¹¹⁴ While this idiosyncratic speculation is now almost forgotten in scholarly circles, it periodically surfaces in occulture as part of a cumulative argument for the psychedelic origins of religion.¹¹⁵

While less scholarly, Merkur’s *The Mystery of Manna* is similar to Allegro’s work in some respects, in that it claims to provide evidence for a biblical psychedelic mystery tradition. For Merkur, this tradition can be traced back to a substance that was “administered by Moses to the Israelites during the historical event that was remembered in legend as the miraculous provision of both manna and water in the wilderness.”¹¹⁶ “Then said the Lord to Moses: ‘Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day’s portion every day . . .’ And when the dew had gone, a fine, flake-like thing, fine as the hoarfrost on the ground” (Exodus 16:4, 14). This account, claims Merkur, is actually a secret way of referring to the ritual use of a psychoactive “flaky pastry or biscuit” containing ergot.¹¹⁷ Dismissing Allegro’s rather more cogent claim that the passage might refer to mushrooms that grew overnight and appeared with the morning dew,¹¹⁸ he argues that the bread, which he discusses in relation to the cultic use of “the bread of the Presence,” was “ingested by priestly diviners of the premonarchic Gibeonite-Josephite tradition.”¹¹⁹ Although the use of psychoactive bread was eventually rejected as profane, knowledge of it was secretly preserved within esoteric traditions and the legends of the Holy Grail well into the medieval period.

In a little book published the following year, *The Psychedelic Sacrament*, he develops the argument in a more focused discussion of Philo of Alexandria, Bernard of Clairvaux, Moses Maimonides and Obadyah Maimonides, all of whom, he claims, mention substances that can be understood to refer to “manna.” And “since the four authors definitely knew of manna, there is no reason to doubt that their meditations were consistent with their use of manna.”¹²⁰ As with Allegro’s work, his thesis is highly speculative and, ultimately, unconvincing. Nevertheless, it does provide an original and interesting attempt to read the history of Jewish and Christian religious thought through a psychedelic lens.

The Sorcerer's Apprentice?

During the 1970s, while still in my teenage years, I came across a book that immediately captured my imagination, *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge* (1968). Although I didn't know it at the time—being intrigued more by Wilson McLean's evocative cover art than by anything more profound—it was written by one of the most important architects of contemporary Western shamanism. Not only has the book since been identified as “the foundational document of modern Western Shamanism,”¹²¹ but Castaneda himself has been sacralized by many as “one of the great avatars—and one of the great enigmas—of the psychedelic age . . . Like Herman Hesse's *Steppenwolf* and Aldous Huxley's *The Doors of Perception*, *The Teachings of Don Juan* and its sequels became essential reading for a legion of seekers after truth—guidebooks into a fantastic and exotic world beyond the dull grind of materialism.”¹²² When I read the book (and reread it), like many at the time, I simply accepted it at face value, as an objective report of participant observation. This was part of the reason Castaneda was so popular. It was not just that his work had caught the occultural *Zeitgeist*, but also that it was presented as serious scholarship. Indeed, it was supported by members of the Department of Anthropology at the University of California, Los Angeles, and his third book, *Journey to Ixtlan: Lessons from Don Juan* (1973), as well as making him very wealthy, was successfully submitted as his doctoral dissertation. Fantastic and barely believable though the accounts of his experiences are, they are reported as fact, not fiction. That his books were carefully tuned in to occulture further strengthened their appeal, in that they were academic accounts that actually encouraged understandings of reality that many of his readers wanted to believe—for they had independently arrived at those understandings themselves through the use of psychedelics. Although Charlotte Hardman is quite right to draw attention to his peculiar “charismatic authority,” which involved a level of “skillful rhetoric” that was “able to make believable the sorcery apprenticeship he described,” in fact, little rhetorical skill was needed: like worshipers before a preacher, his readers simply wanted verification of beliefs they already held.¹²³

It wasn't long, however, before some scholars and journalists began asking questions about certain aspects of his accounts.¹²⁴ Indeed, there were even questions about the author himself.¹²⁵ For example, while Castaneda claimed to have been born on December 25, 1935, in São Paulo, Brazil, journalists at *Time* magazine discovered American immigration records indicating that he was born ten years earlier, in 1925, in Cajamarca, Peru.¹²⁶ He also, rather

oddly, frequently referred to himself as “a European.”¹²⁷ While he said that he had been raised by his father, a professor of literature, following the death of his mother when he was seven, it was discovered that his father was a goldsmith and that his mother had died when he was twenty-four. He claimed to have studied sculpture in Milan, but actually studied at the National Fine Art School in Peru. While these are not serious discrepancies, they do add to the enigma of the Castaneda phenomenon.

The concerns about his work are more serious, however. First, not only is don Juan’s identity unknown, but there is some doubt as to his existence. Castaneda always acknowledged that “don Juan” was a pseudonym in order to preserve his source’s anonymity, which is entirely understandable and, of course, good ethnographic practice. Certainly, if he did exist, thanks to Castaneda’s obscuration of his identity he avoided the problems that Sabina experienced as a result of Wasson’s work.¹²⁸ However, there were other issues. It was noted by some that the Yaqui are not known for their use of *Datura* and that hallucinogenic mushrooms do not grow in the Sonoran Desert, where Castaneda claimed he took them. While Castaneda may have been able to answer these questions satisfactorily, he adopted a decidedly evasive strategy, refusing to allow any scrutiny of his original field notes. This significantly raised the level of suspicion. For example, although Wasson declared that *The Teachings of Don Juan* should “have a place in the library of everyone interested in the role played by *brujos* in Amerindian cultures and by their use of hallucinogens,” he was concerned, as a number of anthropologists were, that Castaneda had departed somewhat from the scientific rigor expected of him.¹²⁹ He had denied access to “so much information that we need. Who is Don Juan? Clearly he is not a pure Yaqui type. He must have learned about mushrooms from Oaxaca, but from whom? The hallucinogenic mushrooms that Castaneda gathers cannot be *Psilocybe mexicana* as he suggests. We need to know precisely where they grow; we need specimens. Don Juan smokes the dried mushroom shreds; this is the first time such a practice has been reported.”¹³⁰

Frustrated, Wasson entered into correspondence with Castaneda, who eventually responded with twelve reworked pages of notes—not the original field notes—which Wasson concluded were “satisfying.”¹³¹ Wasson subsequently met with Castaneda on a couple of occasions and found him to be “obviously an honest and serious young man.”¹³² However, he advised him to be more forthcoming with his evidence in any subsequent work. Was the advice heeded? Castaneda’s second book, *A Separate Reality* (1971), made it clear that it had not been. Wasson was now convinced that he had “smelled

a hoax” and that Castaneda was a fantasist—“occasionally there is a faint trace of authenticity in these pages, submerged in a welter of science fiction badly written.”¹³³ However, by the time of Castaneda’s third book, *Journey to Ixtlan*, Wasson was still skeptical regarding the anthropological method but was persuaded again that, for all his flaws and secrecy, he had provided valuable insights into the training of shamans. “If I am right about this, perhaps we owe a debt to Carlos Castaneda,” he concluded, for having “pointed out the way where, I hope, others will follow. There is no time to lose.”¹³⁴ Indeed, four years later, Wasson declared that *Tales of Power* (1974), the final book of Castaneda’s he reviewed, was “the best . . . The meaning of the four is now clear and powerful.”¹³⁵ While it was clearly not a scientific study, Wasson nevertheless sensed the ring of truth. He was, for example, impressed that Castaneda had recorded some of the same terminology that he had heard Sabina use. “The shaman was ‘one-who-knows,’ as they say in the Mazatec language, and as Castaneda says in his books. In *Tales of Power* Castaneda carries his readers along the road to ‘knowledge,’ to the brink of a precipice and beyond . . . The incidents are fast moving and beautifully told. Some readers, flatly incredulous, may be alienated by what they will call ‘science fiction,’” but Wasson urged them to persevere. While it was of course Wasson himself who had dismissed Castaneda’s work as “submerged in a welter of science fiction badly written,” by 1977 he no longer felt alienated by it:

Castaneda leads us gently into a world different from any we have known, difficult but not impossible for us to grasp at least intellectually and for some of us emotionally . . . Those plants, which he took repeatedly, opened him to another world, a “separate reality,” a world of miracles shot through with wonder and awe and reverence and terror, where his five senses, commingling harmoniously, stepped up their sensitivity to unimagined heights. That world of another reality bears for him who enters it, strangely, the seal of Eternal Truth.¹³⁶

Like many at the time, Wasson wanted to believe that Castaneda’s accounts were true, but he was troubled by the conspicuous anomalies. By the time *Tales of Power* was published, however, his desire to believe had eroded his underlying skepticism.

For many, of course, it didn’t matter whether the books were fabricated or not. Castaneda had provided “powerful parables about the search for personal enlightenment.”¹³⁷ As one reader put it, “Don Juan is the most important model for man since Jesus. If he is imaginary, then Carlos Castaneda is the

principal psychological, spiritual, and literary genius of recent generations.”¹³⁸ More recently, the spiritual organization Cleargreen, for which Castaneda’s work has been formative, is adamant that the account is factual: “Don Juan Matus . . . was the heir to a lineage of seers or shamans that began in Mexico of ancient times, and whose goal was what he called ‘freedom of perception.’”¹³⁹ Castaneda’s influence was always most significant beyond the academic community—although his work did contribute to the emergence of the anthropology of consciousness.¹⁴⁰ Such was this cultural significance that he was the subject of cover stories in *Time* magazine (March 5, 1973) and *Psychology Today* (December 1972). His books became popular as New Age spiritual guides, rather than anthropological studies. Indeed, as well as being sensitive to cultural trends, they also reflected a sensitivity to social pressure, particularly the growing unease about drugs following the 1960s and, as discussed in Chapter 7, the consequent shift in some quarters toward non-chemical meditation.¹⁴¹ *Journey to Ixtlan* deemphasized the importance of psychoactive plants, claiming that they were merely technologies that could be discarded by the more advanced practitioner.

My perception of the world through the effects of those psychotropics had been so bizarre and impressive that I was forced to assume that such states were the only avenue to communicating and learning what don Juan was attempting to teach me. That assumption was erroneous . . . In reviewing the totality of my field notes I became aware that don Juan had given me the bulk of the new description at the very beginning of our association in what he called “techniques for stopping the world.” I had discarded those parts of my field notes in earlier works because they did not pertain to the use of psychotropic plants. I have now rightfully reinstated them in the total scope of don Juan’s teachings.¹⁴²

Consequently, it is primarily his first two books that contributed to the construction of psychedelic shamanism.

Where did it all begin? Castaneda tells us that he first encountered the sixty-nine-year-old¹⁴³ Juan Matús in 1960 at an Arizona bus station near the Mexican border.¹⁴⁴ A student at UCLA, he was carrying out anthropological research into the indigenous use of medicinal plants: “I was waiting in a border town for a Greyhound bus talking with a friend who had been my guide and helper in the survey. Suddenly, he leaned towards me and whispered that the man, a white-haired old Indian, who was sitting in front of the

window was very learned about plants, especially peyote . . . I told him my name and he said that he was called Juan and that he was at my service.”¹⁴⁵ After a period of about six months, Castaneda returned to Arizona, and on December 17, 1960, “after making long and taxing enquiries,” he visited don Juan at his home.¹⁴⁶ Their friendship deepened, and six months later, in June 1961, he became don Juan’s apprentice.¹⁴⁷ Although he twice abandoned his apprenticeship, first in 1965 and then again in 1970, disturbed and exhausted by his experiences, in 1971 he eventually graduated as a sorcerer. His first four books—*The Teachings of Don Juan*, *A Separate Reality*, *Journey to Ixtlan*, and *Tales of Power*—trace this apprenticeship. Many agree with Harner that they “performed the valuable service of introducing many Westerners to the adventure and excitement of shamanism.”¹⁴⁸ He described a world in which one is able to morph into animal forms, to leap great distances, to converse with disembodied spirits, to meet Mescalito (the spirit of peyote), to experience moments of profound revelation, to pass between realities, and “to fathom hell [and] soar angelic.”¹⁴⁹ More particularly, Janet Siskind has argued that in *The Teachings of Don Juan* “he shows us that the organization of drug-induced visual experience is structured through learning.” That is to say, “through don Juan’s careful instruction in the powers and use of several hallucinogenic plants, Castaneda begins to find his way in the ‘non-ordinary reality’ of visions. Perhaps under no other conditions is it possible for an adult to so fully re-enter the enculturation situation, where experience is intense and chaotic and, with learning, slowly becomes structured and communicable.”¹⁵⁰ As Walter Goldschmidt, a professor of anthropology at UCLA, put it in his foreword to *The Teachings of Don Juan*,

Carlos Castaneda, under the tutelage of don Juan, takes us through that moment of twilight, through that crack in the universe between daylight and dark into a world not merely other than our own, but of an entirely different order of reality. To reach it, he had the aid of *mescalito*, *yerba del Diablo*, and *humito*—peyote, *Datura*, and mushrooms. But this is no mere recounting of hallucinatory experiences, for don Juan’s subtle manipulations have guided the traveller while his interpretations give meaning to the events that we, through the sorcerer’s apprentice, have the opportunity to experience . . . Don Juan has shown us glimpses of the world of the Yaqui sorcerer.¹⁵¹

This is significant, argued Goldschmidt, because “the central importance of entering into worlds other than our own—and hence of anthropology

itself—lies in the fact that the experience leads us to understand that our own world is also a cultural construct.”¹⁵² Castaneda had, he said, introduced him to “another way of coding reality.”¹⁵³ This brings us, again, to one of the core gnostic themes in psychedelic esotericism. Psychoactive substances are able to open up new ways of understanding the world and thus subvert the technologies of domination that shape our lives.¹⁵⁴ We have seen this expressed in a number of ways throughout the previous chapters.

Central to his construction of psychedelic shamanism and woven through the narrative of his books is the fundamentally gnostic notion of two forms of knowledge. This presented a problem for the apprentice: “To any beginner, Indian or non-Indian, the knowledge of sorcery was rendered incomprehensible by the outlandish characteristics of the phenomena he had experienced. Personally, as a Western man, I found these characteristics so bizarre that it was virtually impossible to explain them in terms of my own everyday life, and I was forced to the conclusion that any attempt to classify my field data in my own terms would be futile.”¹⁵⁵ His training as a “man of knowledge” fundamentally challenged his epistemological presuppositions.¹⁵⁶ This, he frequently noted, was frustrating: “My inability to arrive at an understanding seems to have been traceable to the fact that, after four years of apprenticeship, I was still a beginner.”¹⁵⁷ “‘You’re chained!’ don Juan exclaimed. ‘You’re chained to your reason.’”¹⁵⁸

He needed help to loosen those chains. This help could only be provided by an “ally.” Because “the man of knowledge has an ally,” he is “different from ordinary men.”¹⁵⁹ The ally was essentially a form of energy—often spoken of anthropomorphically in terms of a personalized spiritual power—that could be found in psychoactive plants, particularly *Datura* (jimsonweed, the devil’s weed) and mushrooms. It was not simply another name for the psychoactive agent in power plants, but rather referred to an objective, “formless” spirit entity with the ability to “transport a man beyond the boundaries of himself.” The ally was, moreover, “perceived only as a quality of the senses; that is to say, since an ally was formless its presence was noticed only by its effects on the sorcerer.”¹⁶⁰ This theologizing of psychoactives is not unusual in religious contexts, being particularly common in the *vegetalista* practices of the upper Amazon and in the ayahuasca rituals of new religions such as Santo Daime, União do Vegetal, and A Barquinha.¹⁶¹ As Chris Kilham has commented, “Many of us who have partaken of ayahuasca many times have had the experience of not simply drinking a potent and admittedly rough-tasting potion, but also of encountering a staggeringly powerful entity, a vast consciousness with multidimensional activity.”¹⁶² Indeed, one of the principal functions of

the ally was to enable the sorcerer “to transcend the realm of ordinary reality.”¹⁶³ This brings us to another central idea posited by Castaneda, namely, the existence of two spheres of reality, the “ordinary” and the “non-ordinary.”

Following a number of encounters with his ally, Castaneda began to understand that these two realities were, in effect, “a continuum of reality.” Indeed, “non-ordinary reality . . . was only slightly different from the ordinary reality of everyday life.”¹⁶⁴ This was significant, because, he argued, “non-ordinary reality was utilizable Don Juan explained time and time again that the encompassing concern of his knowledge was the pursuit of practical results, and that such a pursuit was pertinent in ordinary as well as non-ordinary reality. He maintained that in his knowledge there were the means of putting non-ordinary reality into service, in the same way as ordinary reality.”¹⁶⁵ The altered states induced by psychoactives were “elicited with the deliberate intention of being used.”¹⁶⁶ They were specifically not to be used recreationally, but rather were to be treated as sacred technologies. Indeed, Castaneda was dismissive of 1960s high culture: “They were children indulging in incoherent revelations. A sorcerer takes hallucinogens for a different reason than the heads do, and after he has gotten where he wants to go, he stops taking them.”¹⁶⁷

Furthermore, “the total picture of non-ordinary reality was made up of elements that appeared to possess qualities both of the elements of ordinary reality and of the components of an ordinary dream, although they were not on a par with either one.”¹⁶⁸ These elements had three unique characteristics: stability, singularity, and lack of ordinary consensus. That is to say, non-ordinary reality had a consistency, concreteness, and rationality that made it appear very similar to ordinary reality. The shaman does not enter a fluid and unstable dreamscape. Indeed, the stability of non-ordinary reality “was so pronounced that it allowed me to establish the criterion that . . . one always possessed the power to come to a halt in order to examine any of the component elements for what appeared to be an indefinite length of time.” These elements were singular, in that “it seemed as if each detail was isolated from the others, or as if details appeared one at a time.”¹⁶⁹ However, they lacked ordinary consensus because of the solitude of the observer. During a psychedelic state there is only the experiencing self. In this respect, therefore, “non-ordinary reality was closer to a state of dreaming than to ordinary reality.”¹⁷⁰ But it was not a dream.

This understanding of reality is developed in his post-psychedelic book *Tales of Power*, which draws on Mesoamerican indigenous terminology. There are “two inherent realms of all creation,” the realm of the *tonal* (the everyday

world of material objects) and the realm of the *nagual* (the non-material world).¹⁷¹ “The *tonal* begins at birth and ends at death, but the *nagual* never ends. The *nagual* has no limit.”¹⁷² We have seen that, as is often the case in gnostic discourses, there is an emphasis on ineffability rooted in a broadly dualistic conception of reality: “Whenever you are in the world of the *tonal* you should be an impeccable *tonal*; no time for irrational crap. But whenever you are in the world of the *nagual*, you should also be impeccable; no time for rational crap. For the warrior, intent is the gate between. It closes completely behind him when he goes either way.”¹⁷³ However, as noted above, by the time Castaneda wrote *Tales of Power*, he had moved away from his focus on power plants—Mescalito, peyote, and the devil’s weed aren’t even mentioned. This was a problem for some of his readers. As both Daniel Noel and David Krantz found, some people’s interest in his work began to recede following *Journey to Ixtlan* and his disengagement from psychedelics.¹⁷⁴ Art Kleps is a good example: “Castaneda’s first book wasn’t bad: I wouldn’t be surprised if most of it was true. The second struck me as labored. I found the third an unmitigated disaster.” With reference to his increased focus on self-spirituality and the development techniques of ecstasy, Kleps insists that this “is just about the way the quality of psychedelic experience deteriorates when occultist ‘power,’ rather than enlightenment, is the objective. A bad trip. From Leary to Castaneda is a precipitous descent, but so it has always been.”¹⁷⁵

In 2006 Krantz carried out qualitative research that identified four common themes central to the initial positive reception of Castaneda’s work: (1) an engaging narrative, (2) the psychedelic experience, (3) the discussion of an alternative reality, and (4) the articulation of a philosophy for living. First, not only are the books “page-turners,” but central to their appeal at the time was the explicit continuity with 1960s occulture: “Carlos is portrayed as a naïve, adventuresome seeker of ‘truth,’ in the same mold as Siddhartha, another significant figure of 1960s literature. The reader likely could readily identify with Carlos as an actual person and/or as an embodiment of their aspirations.”¹⁷⁶ As one respondent commented, Castaneda’s first two books portrayed the psychedelic experience as “mysteriously powerful and full of esoteric promise. At that time I was also very interested in world religions, mysticism and meditation.”¹⁷⁷ Second, the psychedelic experience was “the most important source of his books’ appeal. The significance of Castaneda’s drug involvement becomes clearer against the backdrop of his readers’ own exploration of drugs, particularly LSD.”¹⁷⁸ As Noel argued in 1976, “It is undeniable that the initial sales appeal of the books can largely be attributed to this emphasis. Many a drug-oriented reader was ‘hooked’ by it.”¹⁷⁹ They

interpreted his accounts as “a warrant for their own involvement and a way of understanding the powerful experiences the psychedelics produced.”¹⁸⁰ One of Krantz’s respondents commented that she began reading his first book around the time she “started smoking pot and hash daily and occasionally taking LSD.” She continues, “I definitely felt that these experiences were good for my head. I was able to break out of conventional ways of thinking. I was able to intuitively understand things that were too nonlogical for me to hold in my mind without drugs—for instance, the nature of matter. I had read that physics proved that matter is not solid but I couldn’t grasp that idea. LSD gave me the experience.”¹⁸¹ Castaneda’s discussions provided an enchanted psychedelic framework within which such ideas could be explored.

Whether or not psychedelics were employed, a central gnostic theme running through all of Castaneda’s books is the importance of exploring new ways of “coding reality.”¹⁸² “The concept of alternative reality,” noted Krantz, “offered Castaneda’s readers the possibility of something other than the world they inhabited and questioned. The shape of what his readers were seeking was often vaguely described as ‘spirituality,’ a world rooted in intuition, feeling, and experiencing.”¹⁸³ Although, as we have seen, the experience of non-ordinary reality was counterintuitive, Castaneda assured his readers that the disciplined use of power plants would eventually lead to understanding. That is to say, readers shouldn’t doubt that their profound psychedelic experiences constituted an actual engagement with reality. If those experiences seem irrational, it is simply because the mind, shaped by “consensus reality,” has not been trained to think differently.

The tension with which Castaneda constantly struggles in his early accounts is the tension that many of his readers were struggling with. Were their experiences simply hallucinations or were they empirically objective experiences in the world? For example, the following was recorded after an experience of flight induced by the application of a paste made of the devil’s weed (which, it would seem, was a practice originally suggested to him by Harner):¹⁸⁴

“Did I really fly, don Juan?”

“That is what you told me. Didn’t you?”

“I know, don Juan, I mean, did my body fly? Did I take off like a bird?”

“You always ask me questions I cannot answer. You flew. That is what the second portion of the devil’s weed is for. As you take more of it, you will learn to fly perfectly. It is not a simple matter . . . Birds fly like birds and a man who has taken the devil’s weed flies as such.”

“As birds do?”

"No, he flies as a man who has taken the weed."

"Then, I didn't really fly, don Juan. I flew in my imagination, in my mind alone. Where was my body?"

"... The trouble with you is that you understand things only in one way. You don't think a man flies ..."

"But what I mean, don Juan, is that if you and I look at a bird and see it fly, we agree that it is flying. But if two of my friends had seen me flying as I did last night, would they have agreed that I was flying?"

"Well, they might have."¹⁸⁵

Castaneda asks about Mescalito, "a spirit similar to an ally," associated with the peyote cactus:¹⁸⁶

"What do you see when Mescalito takes you with him, don Juan?"

"Such things are not for ordinary conversation. I can't tell you that ..."

"Is Mescalito God—the only God? Or is he one of the gods?"

"He is just a protector and a teacher. He is a power."

"Is he a power within ourselves?"

"No. Mescalito has nothing to do with ourselves. He is outside us."

"Then everyone who takes Mescalito must see him in the same form."

"No, not at all. He is not the same for everybody."¹⁸⁷

These dialogues are typical of the ambiguity in Castaneda's work. Essentially, don Juan refused to accept what Castaneda could not reject, namely, the ontological priority of the Cartesian distinction between the objective and subjective. As Theodore Roszak commented, "the dispute between the two men leads us back to Plato's cave, where all significant philosophical controversy must return sooner or later. Which reality is the substance and which the shadow? The old sorcerer is at the same disadvantage as the sun-stunned philosopher who must explain daylight to those who have lived all their life in darkness."¹⁸⁸ Although Roszak was no psychedelic enthusiast, he welcomed Castaneda's discussion as a Romantic challenge to scientific rationalism: "My controversy is with those (and there are many in the behavioral as well as the natural sciences) who contend that *only* science is a valid way of 'knowing' the nature of things If nature invites a compassionate visionary response from us, the only intellectually honest thing to do is to give it, and to trust the experience to carry us where it will. To do otherwise is to lie."¹⁸⁹ (Roszak even included a selection from *The Teachings of Don Juan* in his *Sources: An Anthology of Contemporary Materials Useful for Preserving Personal Sanity*

While Braving the Great Technological Wilderness.)¹⁹⁰ This Romantic approach led him to discuss Castaneda's discussion of flight.¹⁹¹ "For don Juan, the real experience of flying belongs to an old and formidable tradition. He brings us back to the shamanic vision-flight, one of those supreme symbols of human culture which has been elaborated into thousands of religious and artistic expressions, embedded in the foundations of language, driven like a taproot into the bottommost stratum of our consciousness."¹⁹² But what is it a symbol of? It is a symbol of the primal experience of self-transcendence. It is unsurprising, therefore, that flight is so often experienced during ecstatic states and that the link between deity and the sky is so common in the history of religions.

While Roszak's argument isn't entirely convincing, his overall point is that "the symbol is as close as we can come to expressing its reality The symbol *means* the experience. The experience is the non-verbal bedrock; no words can impose themselves between the bedrock and the symbol without distorting meaning. We can only work away from experience and symbol by way of abstraction or metaphorical extension." In particular, he argues that "experience and symbol taken together are what we might call a *root meaning*: an irreducible sense of significance, a foundation the mind rests and builds upon."¹⁹³ We are, of course, again approaching the mystical ineffability discussed by William James: the mystical experience is difficult to articulate in ways that make sense to those who have not themselves had the experience. For Roszak, however, this is because, in the West, most of us have become detached from root meanings. This was Castaneda's problem. "When don Juan takes him back to the source, he fails to recognize it for what it is and asks, 'Did I *really* fly?' When we become so estranged from the meaning of symbols, language loses touch with experience and goes into business on its own, becoming a collection of perplexing abstractions."¹⁹⁴ The question about whether or not he actually flew misses the point, for flight is simply a symbol of the experience of transcendence—which is itself a *reality*.¹⁹⁵ The issue at the heart of the above dialogues between the sorcerer and his apprentice, which is frequently expressed in mystical literature, is the difficulty of communicating root meanings to those whose thought is limited by the constraints of everyday constructions of reality in modern rationalist technocracies.

Alien Dreamtime

Another graduate of the University of California who had a formative influence on the construction of psychedelic shamanism was Terence McKenna.

Born in 1946 in Paonia, Colorado, in 1965 he began a degree in art history at the University of California, Berkeley. Interested in countercultural thought from an early age, he quickly became involved in student politics and psychedelic experimentation.¹⁹⁶ As his brother Dennis recalls, “There were many drugs around . . . but the one that emerged as significant for us was DMT. It was rare even then, but for some reason it crossed our paths and we agreed it was the quintessential psychedelic. It only lasts maybe twenty minutes but it’s a full-on psychedelic experience, very intense, and really like a completely different reality.”¹⁹⁷ Such experiences were catalytic for McKenna. Also, as with so many of his contemporaries, his exposure to Asian religion and culture helped him to make sense of these experiences. Following his involvement in the 1968 student-led strike at San Francisco State University—the longest campus strike in United States history—his activities, including his interest in psychedelics, came under the scrutiny of the police. Consequently, in 1969, he decided to travel to Nepal to research traditional Buddhist paintings (*thangkas*). Because they were used as aids in meditational practice, his aim was—as it had been for the Beats and particularly Leary, Metzner, and Alpert in their *Manual Based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead*¹⁹⁸—“to integrate the psychedelic experience into a Buddhist model.”¹⁹⁹ However, his gaze soon shifted to the indigenous pre-Buddhist religion of Tibet, which he understood to be “a kind of shamanism closely related to the motifs and cosmology of classical shamanism of Siberia. Tibetan folk shamanism, called Bön, continues to be practiced today in the mountainous area of Nepal that borders Tibet.”²⁰⁰ He was fascinated by the idea that in the *thangkas*, “the most fantastic, extravagant, and ferocious images are drawn from the pre-Buddhist substratum of folk imagery.”²⁰¹ Informed by the emerging discourse around shamanism inspired by Wasson’s work, he understood *thangkas* to be the product of psychedelic states. Although initially he was typically Orientalist in his approach to Asia, religion, and drugs, his focus gradually settled on the significance of shamanism as the expression of a primal and perennial religious experience.

On returning to California, he transferred to the Tussman Experimental College to pursue his new interest. The Experimental College was ideal for students such as McKenna, in that tutors encouraged them to pursue their own interests. Established by Joseph Tussman and lasting only four years, it was an educational project at the University of California that focused on the primary texts of key historical thinkers. The program was unusual in that it didn’t include examinations or, indeed, award grades, the aim simply being to stimulate thought by encouraging students to engage with big ideas.²⁰² This

served McKenna well, enabling him to graduate with “a self-organized major in shamanism.”²⁰³ The trajectory of his thought was now set.

Reading through McKenna’s work is not always easy. His thinking is eclectic and convoluted and, it has to be said, often leaves one with the impression of style over substance, in that it appears to be little more than idiosyncratic gobbledygook sprinkled with philosophical, occult, and scientific references, the implications of which are rarely developed and sometimes contradictory. He is one of the clearest examples in modern history of a psychedelic gnostic. When reading his work, it is as if one has fallen down the rabbit hole into a Wonderland in which everyday logic is challenged and one shifts from bizarre thought experiment to bizarre thought experiment through a series of what Will Self has called “T-shirt syllogisms.”²⁰⁴

Having said that, McKenna, like Leary and Castaneda, was significant less because of the metaphysical profundity of what he had to say and more because of the impact he had on subcultures organized around psychedelic self-spirituality. Thus he was quite right to attribute the significant increase in his popularity during the 1990s to “better public relations,”²⁰⁵ since this was a period during which he worked with several electronic music producers and outfits, most notably Zuvuya on *Dream Matrix Telemetry* (1993) and *Shamania* (1994),²⁰⁶ the Shamen on their single “Re: Evolution” (1993),²⁰⁷ and Space Time Continuum, who collaborated with him to produce the live multimedia event “Alien Dreamtime” at the Transmission Theater, San Francisco, on February 26–27, 1993.²⁰⁸ By the time of his death from brain cancer on April 3, 2000, he had become widely recognized as “an active guru,”²⁰⁹ hailed as “the intellectual voice of rave culture,”²¹⁰ and lauded as “the Timothy Leary of the 1990s.”²¹¹ His ideas had become occultural spores scattered across the countercultural landscape.

Although he traced his interest in psychedelics back to reading Huxley’s *The Doors of Perception* at the age of fourteen,²¹² it is difficult to believe that the enormous impact of Castaneda’s work on the occulture of psychedelic shamanism did not have some formative influence on his thought. That said, whether it did or not, he rarely mentions Castaneda, and when he does, he appears critical of his work, calling it a source for “the fad in ‘shamanic awareness.’”²¹³ If mordant, obscurantist, highly eclectic weirdness is evidence of authentic shamanism, then he does need to be distinguished from Castaneda as a reliable interpreter. As Dennis McKenna has commented, “Mushrooms have an ability to facilitate language, verbal expression, poetry and ideas. Funny ideas just flow out of you.”²¹⁴ The funny ideas that flowed out of McKenna were often verbal examples of psychedelic ineffability in a way that

Castaneda's engaging narratives were not. From an appreciation of shamanism to UFOs, from contemporary physics to "machine elves," and from the ideas of Marshall McLuhan to reflections on the *I Ching*, his published thought is a confluence of numerous intellectual and occultural tributaries. The subtitle of his 1991 book *The Archaic Revival* gives the reader an indication (but only an indication) of what to expect: *Speculations on Psychedelic Mushrooms, the Amazon, Virtual Reality, UFOs, Evolution, Shamanism, the Rebirth of the Goddess, and the End of History*.

Clearly a comprehensive account of McKenna's thought would take us too far beyond what is required here. That said, although scholarly studies are beginning to appear, a good critical introduction is still needed.²¹⁵ Perhaps he has something of substance to offer; perhaps not. But more attention does need to be given to his work, so occulturally significant has it been. What follows simply picks out a few salient themes related to his understanding of shamanism that have been influential in psychedelic occulture.

McKenna traveled to the Amazon Basin in 1970 in search of hallucinogens: "For reasons that are not well understood, the South American tropics have a virtual monopoly on the plants that produce hallucinogenic indoles."²¹⁶ In 1971, inspired by an article of Schultes's that discussed shamanic encounters with "little people" following the ingestion of *oo-koo-hé* (a psychoactive substance extracted from *Virola theiodora* trees), he returned with his younger brother, Dennis.²¹⁷ While various snuffs that contained DMT had been identified in the Amazon, *oo-koo-hé* was significant because it could be ingested orally. That is to say, it was metabolized more slowly than smoked synthetic DMT and consequently induced a less extreme and more extended experience. As Dennis put it, "One of the problems with smoking synthetic DMT is that the experience is so short and overwhelming that it's hard to come back with much other than a sense of awe and the notion that something very profound, very transformative and miraculous just happened. So Terence and I started looking into various shamanic traditions, and found this paper published by the famous ethnobotanist R. E. Schultes called 'Virola as an Orally Active Hallucinogen.' We knew from other ethnobotanical reading that Virola is a genus of trees in the nutmeg family that contains DMT in high amounts."²¹⁸ As Terence recalled, "We were fascinated by his description of the use of the resin . . . as an orally active DMT drug . . . Schultes was an inspiring voice when he wrote of the hallucinogen *oo-koo-hé*."²¹⁹ Their reasoning was that the intense visions they had experienced in Berkeley could be made "more accessible via the DMT plant combinations that the shamans of the Amazon had developed."²²⁰

McKenna was convinced that the “little men” that Schultes had been told about constituted a “bridge between the motifs of alien contact and the more traditional strange doings of woodland elves and fairies” that he had read about in *The Fairy Faith in Celtic Countries* (1911) by Walter Evans-Wentz. He perhaps first encountered this book in Jacques Vallée’s *Passport to Magonia: On UFOs, Folklore, and Parallel Worlds* (1969).²²¹ Indeed, although there are a few scattered references to Vallée in McKenna’s work, it is difficult to believe that he was not an important influence. It was, for example, Vallée who had suggested that anomalous accounts of encounters with UFOs might be explained with reference to similar visitation narratives in fairy lore, which are related to “the apparent magical qualities of the human consciousness.”²²² I suspect it is this thesis that, perhaps unwittingly, established the connection with Schultes’s article. As McKenna recalled, “the mention of little men rang a bell.”²²³

Generally speaking, however, McKenna makes too little of the set and setting of psychedelic experiences. A good example of the importance of occulture is his vision of a UFO, which, he tells us, was very similar to “an infamous photo by George Adamski.” While he accepts that Adamski’s photograph was probably a hoax, nevertheless he “saw this same object in the sky above La Chorrera” while he was hallucinating.²²⁴ McKenna simply failed to understand the importance of sociocultural contexts in the construction of ideas, because he was keen to isolate the psychedelic experience as a moment of revelation that had broken into history from beyond: “Organized enteleanchies presented themselves in the psychedelic experience with information that seemed *not to be drawn* from personal history of the individual or even from the collective human experience.”²²⁵ He argued that Schultes’s mention of little people rang a bell because he stood firmly within that history of revelation in which the Other communicates with sensitive minds. Psychoactives enable us to have encounters with the Other—receive messages from alien entities, machine elves, the Overmind. “Psilocybin ‘speaks.’” All we need in order to hear it is a spirit of openness:

The speaking voice of psilocybin is absolutely extraordinary. DMT combines the speaking voice and the seeing eye—the most extraordinary thing about the DMT experience is that you see entities. You encounter beings whom I’ve described as self-transforming machine elves. They are the denizens of this other dimension. They are trying to teach something. Well, if I’m not completely mad, then it’s big news. Straight people—skeptical people—if given DMT will be conveyed to what is essentially the hall of the Mountain King with gnome revelry in progress. We’re not prepared for this. We expect everything to fall into

the rational maps that science has given us, and science doesn't describe a hyperdimensional universe teeming with alien intelligences that can be contacted within a moment if you have recourse to a certain chemical compound. Science is hard-pressed to admit that light-years away, there might be beings living on planets in orbit around another star.²²⁶

The seminal psychedelic, occultural event associated with McKenna, an event that had a formative impact on his thought, was the "experiment at La Chorrera," an account of which was initially published in 1975 in a book co-authored with his brother, *The Invisible Landscape: Mind, Hallucinogens, and the I Ching*.²²⁷ (That said, as his brother has commented, because "it wasn't an experiment in any conventional scientific sense," it should probably be referred to as "the ritual at La Chorrera.")²²⁸

Soon after their arrival in the Amazon, the focus of the McKenna brothers quickly shifted from *oo-koo-hé* to the apparently more communicative psilocybin: "Little did I imagine that soon after our arrival at La Chorrera the search for *oo-koo-hé* would be all but forgotten." It became "totally eclipsed by the discovery of psilocybin mushrooms growing abundantly there and by the strange power that seemed to swirl around the fog-bound emerald pastures in which they were found."²²⁹ Less poetically, they discovered the mushrooms (*Psilocybe cubensis*) growing in cow manure, which was scattered across the "fog-bound emerald pastures." As Dennis recalled, "every cow pie had a big cluster of mushrooms growing out of it. You couldn't walk through the pasture without literally kicking these things over."²³⁰

For McKenna, the mushroom was a key to "a transdimensional doorway which sly fairies have left slightly ajar for anyone to enter into."²³¹ With McLuhan in mind, he understood it in terms of a "vegetable television."²³² (Similarly, several years later, an *ayahuasquero* commented to Jeremy Narby that "ayahuasca is the television of the forest.")²³³ McLuhan famously understood technologies to be "extensions of our physical and nervous systems to increase power and speed,"²³⁴ and McKenna understood the operation of psychedelics in a similar way.²³⁵ Indeed, although he wasn't aware of McLuhan's 1969 *Playboy* interview, in which he comments on LSD—McKenna thought McLuhan had "never discussed psychedelics"²³⁶—that interview is worth quoting here. While only "an observer in these matters, not a participant," McLuhan argued that hallucinogens are

a natural means of smoothing cultural transitions, and also a short cut into the electric vortex. The upsurge in drug taking is intimately related to the impact of the electric media. Look at the metaphor for getting

high: turning on. One turns on his consciousness through drugs just as he opens up all his senses to a total depth involvement by turning on the TV dial. Drug taking is stimulated by today's pervasive environment of instant information, with its feedback mechanism of the inner trip. The inner trip is not the sole prerogative of the LSD traveler; it's the universal experience of TV watchers. LSD is a way of miming the invisible electronic world; it releases a person from acquired verbal and visual habits and reactions, and gives the potential of instant and total involvement, both all-at-onceness and all-at-oneness, which are the basic needs of people translated by electric extensions of their central nervous systems out of the old rational, sequential value system. The attraction to hallucinogenic drugs is a means of achieving empathy with our penetrating electric environment, an environment that in itself is a drugless inner trip.²³⁷

McKenna was convinced that, had McLuhan "lived into the era of VR [virtual reality], psilocybin, HDTV [high-definition television], and implants," he would have understood that humanity is "reaching back to a shamanic, feeling-toned kind of thing."²³⁸ These comments help us to see that McKenna was not particularly interested in the everyday culture of Amazonian people. His interest was always primarily in their high culture, in their technologies of transcendence. For McKenna, the true revelators, prophets, and teachers of alien gnosis were to be found not amongst the human population but in a cow's excrement. Here were the gnostic media communicating messages that McKenna wanted to understand.

Although McKenna was driven by the Romantic, utopian eco-idealism of "getting back to the garden," as Joni Mitchell put it in her hippie anthem "Woodstock" (1970),²³⁹ he was no Luddite: "We cannot turn away from our science and our technology—we must purify ourselves so that we can magically and intuitively apply these things for the force of Good."²⁴⁰ Indeed, he combined such ideas as McLuhan's, as well as some taken from science fiction, with core esoteric themes. As Erik Davis has commented in his discussion of McKenna's early unpublished text "Crypto-Rap," that work "carries on an extensive and reasonably well-informed engagement with the 'uncorrupted and unfragmented tradition of gnosis' contained in the Tantra Shastras, which he read through Herbert Guenther, Arthur Avalon, Lama Govinda and Evans-Wentz."²⁴¹ And as Wouter Hanegraaff has discussed,²⁴² he also demonstrated a knowledge of "the traditions of hermetic gnosis, Neoplatonism, Renaissance magic, and alchemy."²⁴³ That

said, how detailed that knowledge was is difficult to ascertain, for his work was, as Graham St John put it, something of a “dog’s breakfast of high esoterica: *ayahuasca* analoguing, telepathy, telekinesis, channeling, and a presumed transdimensional alteration whereby one of them was to be transformed in ‘a DNA radio transmitting the collective knowledge of all earthly life, all the time.’”²⁴⁴

This brings us directly to the experiment/ritual—“part mythology, part psychology, part applied physics.”²⁴⁵ Dennis McKenna, whose own auditory experiences provided the impetus, explained its origins as follows:

It goes back to an earlier phenomenon that we had experienced with synthetic DMT. When you take DMT in the smokable form you can hear something. It’s very hard to characterize it. Some people say it’s like tinkling bells, some people say it’s like crumpling cellophane, some people say it’s more of an electronic buzz inside your head; but you can definitely hear something. We found that if you listen, you can actually imitate the sound with your voice. At a certain stage you find you lock onto this tone and it starts pouring out of you. It’s like you can’t stop really, like your mouth goes wider than it should be able to and your tongue sticks out and this ululating howl comes out.²⁴⁶

The same phenomenon happened using high doses of psilocybin. “You could elicit this spontaneous vocalization which seemed to be projecting sound energy into the environment and making it visible Terence and I were both steeped in Jungian psychology and alchemy, and we fancied ourselves biophysicists as well. A lot of metaphors about alchemy seemed to make sense.”²⁴⁷ “From the inside,” McKenna recalled, Dennis “felt as if he had acquired a shamanic power of some sort.”²⁴⁸ Consequently, Dennis quickly became his brother’s guinea pig and the experiment at La Chorrera began to take shape.

Of particular significance was an influential article by Harner published in *Natural History*,²⁴⁹ in which he described Jívaroan shamans hearing “the sound of rushing water”²⁵⁰ and recounted a procedure whereby, following the ingestion of the hallucinogenic *natemä* drink, they regurgitated “what appears to be—to those who have taken *natemä*—a brilliant substance in which the spirit helpers are contained.”²⁵¹ This account intrigued McKenna because, he claimed, it had helped to make sense of a bizarre psychedelic sexual experience in Asia. Having smoked some DMT with a female friend in Boudanath, a small village a few miles east of Kathmandu, he “heard a high-pitched whine

and the sound of cellophane ripping”²⁵²—the “sound of rushing water”? The evening progressed and then

we made love. Or rather we had an experience that vaguely related to making love but was a thing unto itself. We were both howling and singing in the glossolalia of DMT, rolling over the ground with everything awash in crawling, geometric hallucinations . . . Reality was shattered. This kind of fucking occurs at the very limit of what is possible. Everything had been transformed into orgasm and visible, chattering oceans of elf language. Then I saw that where our bodies were glued together there was flowing, out of her, over me, over the floor of the roof, flowing everywhere, some sort of obsidian liquid, something dark and glittering, with color and lights within it. After the DMT flash, after the seizures of orgasms, after all that, this new thing shocked me to the core. What was this fluid and what was going on? I looked at it. I looked right into it, and it was the surface of my own mind reflected in front of me. Was it translinguistic matter, the living opalescent excrescence of the alchemical abyss of hyperspace, something generated by the sex act performed under such crazy conditions? I looked into it again and now saw in it the lama who taught me Tibetan, who would have been asleep a mile away. In the fluid I saw him, in the company of a monk I had never seen; they were looking into a mirrored plate. Then I realized that they were watching me! I could not understand it. I looked away from the fluid and away from my companion, so intense was her aura of strangeness.²⁵³

At La Chorrera, McKenna he began to realize the significance of the relationship between shamanism, the sense of transcendence, the auditory experience, and what we might think of as psychedelic ectoplasm—“a violet psychofluid.”²⁵⁴ Testing this relationship was essentially the purpose of the experiment/ritual.

As Dennis later recalled, “We thought, ‘Well maybe there’s something biophysical going on here.’” There’s certainly a notion that you can induce some kind of process that enables you to produce a substance that has these transdimensional properties.”²⁵⁵ There is a sense in which the psyche can be projected into matter. They understood this substance in terms of *lapis philosophorum*, the philosopher’s stone.²⁵⁶ That is to say, it was an alchemical material capable of effecting transformation. Drawing on Jung, they insisted that “it’s not about making gold out of lead, it’s about transforming yourself.”²⁵⁷ This alchemical

process was directly related to the auditory phenomenon. With heads full of occultism, science fiction, and hallucinogens, they imagined “a biophysical experiment” that would produce the philosopher’s stone from their own DNA.²⁵⁸ The theory, as Dennis later described it, was as follows: “Certain tones would activate the tryptamines and the betacarbolines, and cause them to intercalate into our DNA and at the same time intercalate into the DNA of a mushroom which we were . . . singing to, and that it would induce a superconducting standing waveform or hologram where the molecules would intercalate into DNA. The ultimate idea was that we were going to create an artifact that was a visible exteriorization of our own consciousness that we could see, that could be controlled by thought and would basically be able to do anything.”²⁵⁹ This was the psychedelic ectoplasm that McKenna had experienced in Nepal, which he now understood to be “a fourth-dimensional representation of the trip.” That is to say, while mushrooms were understood to be crucial alchemical technologies, it was their relationship to the self that mattered. “There’s a tendency,” argued Dennis, “for people to think that the trip is in the drug; that the drug does this thing.” (This is not unreasonable, bearing in mind many of Terence’s statements.) But “no, the trip is in your head, the drug is simply a trigger. It’s not very interesting as long as it sits on the shelf and nothing happens to it, but when you ingest it, then it starts being metabolized and going through its cycles, and interesting things start happening”²⁶⁰—one of which was the ectoplasm, the *lapis philosophorum*, “translinguistic matter, a matter that had actual meaning and significance, but that you apprehended visually, and that you could talk to and that you could control with thought and sound.”²⁶¹

During the night of March 4, 1971, they prepared for their experiment by eating mushrooms, brewing *ayahuasca*, and selecting a single mushroom on which they would focus for the purposes of alchemical transformation.

Following the storm we had rebuilt our fire and boiled off several litres of water from our infusion of *Banisteriopsis caapi*, so that it was much stronger than it had been before. We then added crushed leaves, which Dennis had gathered that day near the *chorro* and which we were using as DMT admixture plants. It was the admixture plants that we hoped would provide the DMT necessary to drive the intense hallucinations for which the brew is famous . . . We finished boiling the *ayahuasca*. I ground the admixture of plants and added them to the cooling brew. I moved the *ayahuasca* into the hut, then the mushroom. With those things in place, we were ready to begin.²⁶²

As Dennis recalls, “we set up a ritual situation, in which we do certain things, we take a lot of mushrooms, mix it with ayahuasca, we wait to hear the sound and then we imitate the sound and we project it at this mushroom, which we brought in from the pasture.” The expectation was that the vocalized sounds produced would “excite these different molecular circuits and this object [would] appear in the mushroom, and eventually [would] manifest.”²⁶³

Significantly, at that point, they believed they would witness the eschaton: “We were completely transformed by the expectation that we might witness the outbreak of the millennium.”²⁶⁴ In the event, they didn’t, nor did any psychedelic ectoplasm manifest. However, both McKenna brothers had a catalytic experience of nonordinary reality, the core components of which, such as spatiotemporal distortion and a monistic Idealistic sense of unity, both pregnant with meaning, are standard. “What happened was that we essentially underwent a simultaneous shamanic initiation. We crossed this threshold into this place, and what we had predicted didn’t happen, but . . . I became . . . spread across spacetime.”²⁶⁵ It was, said Dennis, “like having your consciousness co-contiguous with the boundaries of spacetime. Like having your consciousness smeared across the universe completely . . . I mean, it was like the cosmic oneness everybody talks about, like being one with the universe. I was out there cruising the cosmos not even cruising, because that implies that there was a ‘me.’ There was no ‘me’ anymore, there was just Cosmic Mind, you know, and I was IT.”²⁶⁶

They may have miscalculated the eschaton, but McKenna was still convinced of the imminence and cosmic significance of the event. He was “running numbers back from March 4, and the *I Ching* became very influential in his thinking. It was some multiple of 64 . . . but if you ran it back from March 4 it fell on October 25, 1970, which was the date that our mother died.” This was obviously important for them both. “When he ran it forward in the same amount from that date, it turns out it was his birthday, November 16, 1971.”²⁶⁷ This “synchronicity,” Jung’s articulation of which greatly interested McKenna,²⁶⁸ was too much for him to ignore: “Here we are, and this date for this transformation is midway between the date of our mother’s death and my upcoming birthday.” Like all conspiracy theorists, he concluded that he’d stumbled upon a meaningful pattern: “Maybe there’s a message coming through.”²⁶⁹ He eventually concluded that the *I Ching* could be understood as a way of interpreting time. “The brilliant idea that my brother came up with was that you can build a mathematical construct based on the sequence of hexagrams in the *I Ching*. There are various sequences, various ways to establish which is number one, which is number two, and so on, in this sequence

of sixty-four. The most ancient sequence is the King Wen sequence.”²⁷⁰ While this is not the place to discuss his “timewave” theory²⁷¹—which holds that all reality, including time itself, is the result of interactions between the Dionysian and the Apollonian—he did devise an ultimately unconvincing mathematical model that (following the process philosopher Alfred North Whitehead) mapped the ebbs and flows of creative “novel” events throughout human history.²⁷² These ebbs and flows included revolutions, famines, natural disasters, and technological advances. He concluded that time was not simply a way of measuring our progress from the past into the future but rather, like space, it was structured, and the authors of the *I Ching* had effectively worked out time’s basic structure.²⁷³ This led to an obsession with calculating the moment of the eschaton. Dennis notes that “the earliest prediction that came out of all this was that it was going to appear on his birthday, November 16, because that was the other end of this wave which we were in the middle of.”²⁷⁴ He has since conceded that his brother claimed too much for his system in stating that it could be used to predict the future. “Because it was a fractal, because it was a spiral that was getting smaller and smaller as you move through history, there was an end point postulated”—a novelty spike, the eschaton. “That will be the end point, that will end time as we know it and we will transit beyond history, into whatever happens after history . . . Over the years different end dates were postulated, and eventually after looking at the different ways to lay the wave against history he settled on 2012.”²⁷⁵

Turning to another of McKenna’s core theories, we shift focus from the future to the past. (That said, such categories are always a little misleading and elusive in his work.)

Shamanism is the practice of the Upper Paleolithic tradition of healing, divination, and theatrical performance based on natural magic developed ten to fifty thousand years ago. Mircea Eliade . . . the foremost authority on shamanism . . . has shown that in all times and places shamanism maintains a surprising internal coherency of practice and belief. Whether the shaman is an Arctic-dwelling Inuit or a Witoto of the upper Amazon, certain techniques and expectations remain the same. Most important of these invariants is ecstasy.²⁷⁶

Regardless of his other interests and the wider occultural significance of his millenarian focus on 2012,²⁷⁷ it is this archaic orientation that is most conspicuous in McKenna’s work: “The search for liberation, a paradisiacal state of freedom that mythology insists is the ahistorical root of the historical process,

has always been the *raison d'être* of the human species' conscious pilgrimage through time."²⁷⁸ Troubled by the closing of the modern mind, the erosion of freedom, and the crises of our time, not least our estrangement from the natural world, he sought "to follow the 'nostalgia for paradise' through a survey of the ideas associated with shamanism and pharmacology, with frequent forays into apparently distant fields."²⁷⁹ While these forays tended to obfuscate rather than clarify, his thought was rooted in the tradition of scholarship (discussed above) for which the confluence of shamanism and pharmacology goes a considerable way toward explaining the origins of religion. Indeed, for McKenna, the very evolution of human consciousness began with a psychedelic experience.

In one of his "forays into apparently distant fields," he articulated an idiosyncratic interpretation of panspermia theory, which suggested that mushroom spores traveled to earth through the freezing vastness of space. "Space is a vast ocean to those hardy life forms that have the ability to reproduce from spores, for spores are covered with the hardest organic substance known. Across the aeons of time and space drift many spore-forming life forms in suspended animation for millions of years until contact is made with a suitable environment."²⁸⁰ One such suitable environment was cattle manure. Consequently, powerful little alien mushrooms began to sprout near communities of curious humans. He even argued that each spore is "an artifact of an alien intelligence." Why? First, "the informational content of the trip" induced by ingesting mushrooms suggested to him that information might have been deliberately encoded into the fungi. Second, there is "the fact that psilocybin is one of the few four-phosphoralated indoles known to occur in nature. Out of thousands and thousands of compounds and organisms, only a few four-phosphoralated compounds are known. This suggests that such compounds are artificial, or at least highly unusual."²⁸¹ Regardless of whether one accepts this argument—and one cannot help feeling that its level of cogency is directly proportional to the amount of mushrooms one ingests—his principal thesis was that humans have a symbiotic relationship with mushrooms. We are self-reflective beings because our early ancestors ate hallucinogenic mushrooms, and we are thereby also "spiritual" beings. Hallucinogens are the principal motivating factors behind the development of the religious consciousness in the human race; powerful, induced visionary experiences caused humanity to look beyond the physical world to a metaphysical interpretation of existence. As humans evolved, hallucinogens functioned as catalysts in the development of imagination, language, and spirituality. Organic psychedelics are thus "the real missing link" in human evolution. Working on the basis of the principle "you are what you eat," McKenna argued that because "the strategy of the early hominid omnivores was to eat everything that seemed

food-like and to vomit whatever was unpalatable,”²⁸² their diet must have included hallucinogens of various sorts, which, in turn, contributed to their evolution. The relationship was symbiotic, because “as plants influenced the development of humans and other animals, so were the plants themselves affected in turn.”²⁸³ The first encounters between hominids and psilocybin mushrooms, he opined, “may have predated the domestication of cattle in Africa by a million years or more. And during this million-year period, the mushrooms were not only gathered and eaten but probably also achieved the status of a cult.” Here, of course, we see the influence of Wasson’s thesis regarding the significance of a primitive fly-agaric cult. As noted above, whether or not we think of spores as being from space, the “domestication of wild cattle” was important for McKenna. It was, he argued, “a great step in human cultural evolution,” because in “bringing humans into greater proximity with cattle, it entailed increased contact with the mushrooms, because these mushrooms grow only in the dung of cattle. As a result, the human-mushroom interspecies codependency was enhanced and deepened. It was at this time that religious ritual, calendar making, and natural magic came into their own.”²⁸⁴ Drawing on the work of Charles Lumsden and Edward Wilson, who argued that the early tripling of human brain size was “perhaps the fastest advance recorded for any complex organ in the whole history of life,”²⁸⁵ he suggested that the answer to this mysterious growth can be found in the effect hallucinogenic plants had on the brain.

My contention is that mutation-causing, psychoactive chemical compounds in the early human diet directly influenced the rapid reorganization of the brain’s information-processing capacities. Alkaloids in plants, specifically the hallucinogenic compounds such as psilocybin, dimethyltryptamine (DMT), and harmaline, could be chemical factors in the protohuman diet that catalysed the emergence of human self-reflection. The action of hallucinogens present in many common plants enhanced our information-processing activity, or environmental sensitivity, and thus contributed to the sudden expansion of human brain size.²⁸⁶

This is very similar to a number of theories that became prominent in the early 1960s, such as that posited in Mary Barnard’s widely read essay “The God in the Flowerpot”:

When we consider the origin of the mythologies and cults related to drug plants, we should surely ask ourselves which, after all, was the

more likely to happen first: the spontaneously generated idea of the afterlife in which the disembodied soul, liberated from the restrictions of time and space, experiences eternal bliss, or the accidental discovery of hallucinogenic plants that give a sense of euphoria, dislocate the centre of consciousness, and distort time a space, making them balloon outwardly in greatly expanded vistas Perhaps the old theories are right, but we have to remember that the drug plants were there, waiting to give men a new idea based on a new experience. The experience might have had, I should think, an almost explosive effect on the largely dormant minds of men causing them to think of things they had never thought of before. This, if you like, is divine revelation.²⁸⁷

Whether we find this line of argument cogent or not, it has become a popular one in recent psychedelic occulture. McKenna's theory of an archaic revival has significantly contributed to that popularity. The modern mind is unwittingly "nostalgic for the paradise that once existed on the mushroom dotted planes of Africa where the plant-human symbiosis occurred that pulled us out of the animal body and into the tool-using, culture-making, imagination-exploring creature that we are."²⁸⁸ The revival of the "archaic," that "preindustrial and preliterate attitude toward community, substance use, and nature," is "an attitude that served our nomadic, prehistoric ancestors long and well, before the rise of the current cultural style we call 'Western' . . . The Archaic was a time of nomadic pastoralism and partnership, a culture based on cattle-raising, shamanism, and Goddess worship."²⁸⁹ Many have found the argument persuasive. Leary commented near the end of his life, "Terence McKenna, among others, has speculated that the evolution from prehuman to human was the result of the synergy of mind-altering plants and the human mind. It seems like a good guess."²⁹⁰

For McKenna, the modern "suppression of shamanic gnosis, with its reliance and insistence on ecstatic dissolution of the ego, has robbed us of life's meaning and made us enemies of the planet, of ourselves, and our grandchildren."²⁹¹ And authentic shamanism, of course, is psychedelic: "It is the presence of a hallucinogen in a shamanic culture that indicates its shamanism is authentic and alive. It is the late and decadent phase of shamanism that is characterized by elaborate rituals, ordeals, and reliance on pathological personalities."²⁹² More broadly, when cultures lose touch with their psychedelic roots, when they cease to be high cultures, they develop exclusivist, institutional religions, a priesthood, and destructive ritualized behaviors. This essentially Romantic perspective argues that any steps toward organized religion

are retrogressive, not progressive. Hence his insistence on the necessity of an archaic revival for the future of religion and culture. "What the archaic revival means is shamanism, ecstasy, orgiastic sexuality, and the defeat of the three enemies of the people, and the three enemies of the people are monotheism, monogamy, and monotony."²⁹³

For McKenna, at the heart of many of our problems in the West lies the fact that we are "the products of societies that have gone longer without psychedelics than any other culture in the world." That is why "no reconstruction of society can be done without psychedelics," for psychoactive substances, particularly psilocybin and DMT, communicate the gnosis necessary for progress.²⁹⁴ "What was amazing about the mushroom, and it continues to be amazing," said McKenna, "is that it is *animate*, that there's someone *talking* to you. This was actually a voice in the head, making sense, speaking English, and addressing the concerns that were most important to me personally."²⁹⁵ In his published work at least, he displayed little of Castaneda's reticence in understanding this to have been not simply his internal voice amplified by hallucinogens, but rather the voice of an alien intelligence beyond the self: "I recognized that the information was not something I could have come up with. That was the proof of the otherness of the voice."²⁹⁶ That said, as noted above, although psychedelics are integral to the process, they are not communicating "allies" per se, but rather, following Huxley's notion of "Mind-at-Large," they function as doorways to a larger intelligent environment. The psychedelic experience establishes a connection with the "Overmind"—"a globally conscious, ecologically sensitive, balanced, human, caring kind of consciousness."²⁹⁷ The Overmind or "Oversoul" is a "much larger, much wiser organising force that we all carry around inside ourselves."²⁹⁸

This is a conspicuous if highly idiosyncratic example of psychedelic gnosis: "Psychedelics address the unseen side of reality, the utterly Other, the transcendently alien Because if you look at classical descriptions of God, whether you're talking about the Kabbalah or Christian mysticism or Sufi mysticism, what you're always talking about is the unspeakable. And psychedelics propel you through your local language and into this unimaginable realm."²⁹⁹ Indeed, influenced partly by Jung's theory of "flying saucers,"³⁰⁰ he goes on to develop what amounts to a theology of revelation, in which the Overmind "breaks through" our presuppositions and cultural constraints in order to communicate ideas directly to the mind. It is in this sense that he understands UFO visitation. "The UFO represents an instance of crisis between the individual and the Overmind, where the Overmind breaks through the oppressive screen thrown around it and comes to meet the individual."³⁰¹ He argued

that “the shamanically sanctioned tryptamine compounds elicit an experience that is extremely peculiar and that has more relationship with the UFO experience than with classical, mystical experience . . . and that social attitudes and other factors have conspired to keep this under wraps.”³⁰² Essentially, the UFO is the revelation of alien gnosis from beyond—a revelation that can be induced by certain psychedelics. Hence his declaration to the bemused attendees at a Swiss UFO conference: “If you heard there’s a twenty percent chance you’ll see UFOs if you fly right now to New Zealand, I bet quite a few of you would drop everything and just go . . . What I’m saying is, give me 15 minutes of your life and I’ll give you a 20 percent chance of meeting aliens—and the odds go up to maybe 40 percent if you increase the dose!”³⁰³ As we have seen others do before him, he criticizes all spiritual paths that try everything *but* psychedelics to achieve “self-realization.” If you go to the grave without having had a psychedelic experience, he declared, “you never figured out what it is all about.”³⁰⁴

In the final analysis, it is difficult to know what to make of McKenna. On the one hand, he was a creative psychedelic thinker who based his eclectic ideas on a breadth of scientific, anthropological, and esoteric scholarship. On the other hand, the following comment by his brother is revealing—and many similar comments could have been chosen from a range of sources, including those of McKenna himself:

Terence is so persuasive and he is such a good talker and, he says . . . he could say complete nonsense in the most lovely way that most people never questioned it at all. He didn’t actually like me to come to his seminars or his lectures because I was the only one who ever argued with him. Everyone else was sort of sitting there taking it all in, “Oh wow man isn’t this cool.” . . . I would actually stand up and say, “Well now, wait a minute. What you said makes no sense. It’s a total crock of shit and not only that but it contradicts what you said twenty minutes ago that also didn’t make any sense.”³⁰⁵

Does this matter? Probably not. Like mushrooms and science fiction, the value of his work is perhaps best gauged by its subversive ability to introduce new ways of thinking about and responding to the world.

Concluding Comments

Psychedelic mysticism is an interesting example of the search for transcendence in societies in which the individual consciousness has, as Danièle

Hervieu-Léger put it, freed itself “from the hold of dominant codes of religious meaning which gave traditional societies their symbolic armature in the form of accepted norms and shared values.”³⁰⁶ It is a conspicuous example of the “subjective turn of modern culture.”³⁰⁷ Hallucinogens are utilized as prosthetic technologies that extend the reach of the experiencing self along “inner paths to outer space.”³⁰⁸ Indeed, as indicated in Chapter 1, in transporting a person to inner space, psychedelics induce experiences with a detraditionalizing bias. Whether we think of Christianity, Tantric ideas, Buddhist thought, Vedantism, Spiritualism, or any other system of belief, the core concepts when viewed through a psychedelic lens focus on the experiencing self. Psychedelic shamanism, for example, typically includes references to ancient and indigenous beliefs and techniques that are free-floating, detached from their original interpretive frameworks, and reinterpreted according to a range of other subjectively determined occultural memes. This is not, however, to argue that they are any less significant because they are predominantly late modern individualized constructions. We should resist the conservative imposition of normative categories of religion and religious experience. Just as Sabina’s commitment to folk Catholicism did not make her any less “authentic” as a Mazatec shaman, so constructions of belief and practice informed by psychedelic experiences do not make them any less “shamanic” (however that rather slippery term is understood). That “indigenous knowledge, when transplanted and commoditized, comes to take on the fragmentary nature of the society by which it is appropriated” should be expected.³⁰⁹

That there are differences between, say, Evén shamanism and modern Western psychedelic shamanism is evident in their distinct approaches to healing and divination. As Vladimir Basilov notes of the Evén shaman, “As well as protecting his fellow-tribesmen while they were alive, he accompanied their souls to the other world. It was also his business to diagnose the causes of disease and to treat them. He could learn from the spirits what would happen in the future, and the location of lost people, animals, and things.”³¹⁰ In other words, divination and healing tend to be understood centrifugally (the focus of sacred labor is directed outward toward others and the community) rather than centripetally (the focus of sacred labor is directed inward toward the self). For example, Sabina was principally understood as a community *curandera* (healer). Hallucinogens were taken, spirits were consulted, and soul flight was embarked upon as part of her ritual labor for others. “The Wise One,” she insisted, “is born to cure.”³¹¹ Likewise, “the *saint children* cure.”³¹² Because the self-oriented, experience-seeking young people who visited her did not respect the centrifugal nature of her vocation, she felt that the “saint children” had been abused and, as a result, had abandoned

her.³¹³ The mushrooms ceased to work once they had been exploited by those interested only in their instrumental value as esoteric technologies in the service of the experiencing self. Although there is an emphasis on healing within contemporary psychedelic shamanism, it does tend to be detraditionalized, being primarily informed by the discourses of self-spirituality and the holistic milieu.³¹⁴ For example, although DeKorne notes that “shamanic contexts” are “healing contexts,” “medicinal rather than escapist,”³¹⁵ the focus is typically centripetal, concerned with psychological well-being and spiritual illumination, rather than centrifugal:

After about thirty minutes L started to rock, chant and repeat: “I remember, I remember.” She went into a healing crisis and began purging [e.g., vomiting] a lot. Later she said she journeyed back through her DNA and accessed encoded memories all the way back to the primal ocean She was in a healing crisis for almost a whole week afterwards.³¹⁶

DeKorne continues:

Taking it in a group setting with people one knows and trusts facilitates a shamanic, healing experience while enhancing interpersonal bonds and connections. One individual often goes into a healing crisis, and many of the rest of the group then begin shamanic work. At some point this is resolved, and then everyone tends to enter deeper physical and mental space with each other. The resulting energetic connections seem to be part of the healing process. The fine light vibrations of the experience often last a week. I feel better physically after mushrooms—strengthened rather than with that wiped out feeling.³¹⁷

Bearing this centripetal, detraditionalized perspective in mind, the following comment by McKenna is revealing:

While we can discover and even to some degree penetrate rural systems of psychedelic healing, we shall find it very hard to find people who look beyond the curing power to ask what is its basis and what is the meaning of the hallucinogen-induced visions generally. The *ayahuasca* takers observe other worlds in space and time in their visions, but they feel a different sort of involvement in understanding what this may mean or in testing to validate what they believe. At the edge of

things where the really intense DMT-caused visions occur, it is hard for the shaman's personality not to be dissolved in a more primitive reaction of fear and unthinking awe. The curing shaman will not seek experiences in such titanic landscapes, and the researching shamanic explorer must step lightly, testing epistemological equipment at every step I am left to conclude that we must remain our own guides into those still-elusive dimensions, more unexplored than we had previously imagined.³¹⁸

The emphasis is on the subjective nature of the psychedelic experience: "The narcotic experience and the shamanic experience are . . . one and the same."³¹⁹ This is how we need to understand statements such as "the presence of psychoactive substances is a primary requirement for all true shamanism."³²⁰ The same is largely true of Castaneda in his first two books. Robert Fuller is quite right when he argues that "Castaneda's accounts sever Native American use of botanical substances from the tribal and ritual contexts that structured them and imbued them with meaning." As he says, "An important purpose of Native American ceremonies is to reinforce group loyalty and rekindle commitment to tribal mores. A shaman's prestige is a direct function of his ability to use his extraordinary states of consciousness for the benefit of the group."³²¹

"Healing," however, is a key term within the holistic milieu. As Wade Clark Roof has commented, "The body is central to healing experiences Whatever the type of healing, all such experiences are grounded in an embodied self that is in a continuous process of development and idealization."³²² Roof goes on to say: "'Health' is an idealization of a kind of self, and 'healing' is part of the process by which growth toward the ideal is achieved."³²³ Within psychedelic shamanism, this is often informed by a Romantic sacralization of nature, which explains the preference for "natural" psychoactives. Some users I spoke to were keen to stress, in a tone that indicated an ascetic commitment to their chosen path, that they did not use artificial psychoactives such as LSD or ketamine, but only those substances that could be foraged from nature. Healing is dependent upon reconciliation with nature—what Roszak referred to as "the Old Gnosis"—"the ancient and original nature philosophy of our species."³²⁴ Alex Gearin discovered a similar discourse among Australian ayahuasca drinkers: "They 'found their medicine' and now only consume ayahuasca. In some instances, ayahuasca drinkers make distinctions between organic and inorganic chemistry—such as between ayahuasca and LSD—and hierarchize ayahuasca to levels of sanctity, power, and purity beyond synthetic or 'man-made' chemicals."³²⁵ Informed by Romantic

currents, the relationship between nature and the self is sacralized, over and against the profane dislocation occasioned by the Industrial Revolution. "Healing," therefore, refers, not simply to the well-being of the mind-body-spirit but also to the self's relationship with the natural world. Personal, social, and environmental well-being are inextricably related. As Gearin comments, this worldview reflects "core aspects of its etiological system whereby healing pivots upon distinctions between nature and society and, fundamentally, the socialized individual overcoming a form of psychic alienation from 'Gaia' or the spirit of the natural world."³²⁶

Though the above discussion has stressed the centripetal nature of psychedelic shamanic gnosis, it should be noted that this is sometimes attenuated by centrifugal relational and ethical perspectives. For example, Australian ayahuasca drinkers "describe receiving insights or perspectives on how they 'ought' to live with regard to issues internal to domains of family, friend, and workplace relations, and these insights are understood as 'healing insights.'"³²⁷ Indeed, Gearin challenges the portrayal of indigenous approaches as relational and Western approaches as individualistic: "A neat analytical Othering and bifurcation of modern and pre-modern along the lines of individualistic and relational does not appear sufficient in light of the evidence of indigenous individualisms."³²⁸ He is surely correct. Normative constructions lead to a Procrustean simplification of complex social systems. Nevertheless, it is difficult to ignore the significance of the subjective turn in the modern world, which is, we have seen, amplified by the psychedelic experience.

With the above comments in mind, it is worth noting what Mary Douglas referred to as "the myth of primitive piety." In an article written in 1970 (the timing is significant) and illustrated with well-known countercultural images, such as the covers of the *International Times* and *The Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers* (which is also significant), Douglas observed that "in the 19th century the heathen was thought to be sunk in darkness. Now there is a widespread idea that primitive peoples are and always have been religious. Sometimes the religious form is thought to be highly magical. Sometimes it is supposed to be ecstatic. But, it seems to be an important premise of popular thinking about us, the civilised, and them, the primitives, that we are secular, skeptical and frankly tending more and more away from religious belief, and that they are religious."³²⁹ In his criticism of Adolf von Harnack's construction of the historical Jesus, George Tyrell famously commented that "the Christ that Harnack sees, looking back through nineteen centuries of Catholic darkness, is only the reflection of a Liberal Protestant face, seen at the bottom of a deep

well.”³³⁰ I often recall this comment when I need a reminder that we tend to tailor the past to serve our own needs and wants. Much psychedelic shamanism, central to which is often an account of “the long trip,” is conspicuously guilty of this. Its articulation of the “myth of primitive piety” encourages devotees to look down the deep well of history to discover the epitome of the “healed human”—the Romantic “noble savage” uncorrupted by the modern world and in tune with nature and its elemental forces. The face looking back at them, of course, is none other than their own reflection, a late modern construction of the ideal human, the archetypal shamanic being. This is evident in McKenna’s work. For McKenna, the shaman is able to function as “a doctor of the soul,” because s/he is “a real and living exemplar of the primordial, mythical human condition, and in being so maintains the reality and the immediacy of the sacred.”³³¹

Another example of a psychedelic explorer who peered down the well of history only to gaze upon his own reflection was Antonin Artaud. As we have seen, he traveled to Mexico in 1936 after reading about the revolution, the aim of which, he believed, was to restore an early pre-Columbian civilization (he was wrong about that). He was also inspired by Henri Bergson’s vitalism to believe that the peyote rituals of the Tarahumara would provide direct access to a “sense of sacredness,” engendered by primal, natural forces, the connection with which had been severed by the materialistic, rationalist culture of Europe.³³² An existential breakthrough into a state of healing and transformation would, he was convinced, occur only when the connection had been re-established during his immersion in the peyote rituals of the Tarahumara. As Uri Hertz has commented, his aim was “the harnessing of shamanistic forces of pre-Columbian sorcery to subvert European ideology and heal what he perceived to be a plague threatening the collective body and psyche.”³³³

Concerning the content of the psychedelic experience, what Artaud identified as the “shamanistic forces of pre-Columbian sorcery” was sometimes experienced as what we might call “the personal Other”—McKenna’s “machine elves” and Castaneda’s “allies.” As in the history of mysticism, it would appear that the discourse of the personal Other articulates certain core aspects of the psychedelic experience (particularly during DMT intoxication).³³⁴ In other words, regardless of the idiosyncratic terms in which it is expressed, along with the monistic bias of the psychedelic experience, there is a perception of an “I-thou” encounter. As noted in the first chapter, Rick Strassman’s psychedelic research revealed that “at least half” of his volunteers reported encounters with manifestations of the personal Other. They “used

expressions like 'entities,' 'beings,' 'aliens,' 'guides,' and 'helpers' to describe them . . . It is still startling to see my written records of comments like, 'there were these beings,' 'I was being led' . . ."³³⁵ Likewise, in his later work on the psychedelic experience, Metzner argued that hallucinogens induce a "perception of nonmaterial, normally invisible, spirit beings or entities," which are "recognized as being associated with particular animals (e.g., serpent, jaguar), certain plants, trees or fungi, certain places (e.g., river, rain forest), deceased ancestors, and other nonordinary entities (e.g., extraterrestrials, elves)."³³⁶ From a slightly different perspective, the theologian Harvey Cox recorded the following mescaline-induced experience: "What I felt was an Other moving towards me with a power of affirmation beyond anything I had ever imagined could exist. I was glad and grateful. No theory that what happened to me was 'artificially induced' or psychotic or hallucinatory can erase its mark."³³⁷ We have seen that Thomas De Quincey encountered an enigmatic entity he called "the Dark Interpreter"³³⁸ who helped him to understand the meaning of his visions and that Humphry Davy spoke of his encounters with "the Genius" and "the Unknown." Such experiences of the personal Other raise an important and obvious ontological issue. De Quincey, for example, was aware that the Interpreter was not an exogenous being with an independent existence, but rather "a mere reflex of my inner nature."³³⁹ Even so, there were times when he seemed convinced that the entity was actually in possession of an independent will: "The Interpreter sometimes swerves out of my orbit, and mixes a little with alien natures. I do not always know him in these cases as my own parhelion."³⁴⁰ This ambiguity is conspicuous in psychedelic occulture, with many experiencers accepting the existence of entities within the imaginal realm without thereby dismissing them as hallucinations. For example, David Luke concludes that the elves of psychedelic experience "are not actually outside, but then inside is the wrong term as well."³⁴¹ For others, because they are complex, socially significant, personal agents that have an impact on the everyday lives of experiencers—"actions in alternate reality can affect ordinary reality"³⁴²—they need to be understood as having some form of independent existence. Indeed, for some, the psychedelic experience could be framed as an exercise in "Tulpamancy." As Samuel Veissière discusses, "Tulpas (a term borrowed from Tibetan Buddhism) are imaginary companions who are said to have achieved full sentience after being conjured through 'thoughtform' mediative practice."³⁴³

Finally, we have seen that, as Harner discusses, "one of the most interesting things about shamanism is that it is very democratic. All have the potential to get spiritual revelation directly from the highest possible (and nonordinary)

sources if they have the methods. It is not necessary to get much second-hand information from ordinary-reality teachers. The human mind, heart, and spirit are lying dormant, waiting . . . to come alive.”³⁴⁴ This makes good sense within Western high culture. With access to the right psychoactive substances, gnosis can be experienced, mystical states enjoyed, and nonordinary reality added to anyone’s itinerary of places to visit.

Notes

INTRODUCTION

1. Nietzsche's comment in *The Gay Science* (§86) regarding culture and addiction is commonly translated "higher culture." For obvious reasons, I have used this translation, taken from Avital Ronell's study of addiction, which takes Nietzsche's remark as its point of departure: *Crack Wars: Literature, Addiction, Mania* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004 [1992]), 3. The comment also inspired the title of a collection of studies on addiction edited by Anna Alexander and Mark Roberts, *High Culture: Reflections on Addiction and Modernity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003). Unlike their work and Ronell's discussion, this book is not a study of addiction and, therefore, strictly speaking, departs a little from what Nietzsche had in mind. Nevertheless, qualified by Huxley's comment, it does make sense here.
2. Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception; Heaven and Hell* (London: Flamingo, 1994), 42, 46. The reference is, of course, to Charles Baudelaire's *Artificial Paradises* (1860), discussed in Chapter 4.
3. Allen Ginsberg, "Foreword," in Timothy Leary, *High Priest* (Berkeley: Ronin Publishing, 1995), xvii.
4. Huxley, *Doors of Perception*, 42.
5. Leslie Iversen, *Drugs: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 11, 73.
6. David Nutt, *Drugs Without the Hot Air* (Cambridge: UIT Cambridge, 2012), 271.
7. For cultural analyses of addiction, beyond the usual profanation of it as socially and psychologically deviant in some respect, see Anna Alexander and Mark Roberts, eds., *High Culture: Reflections on Addiction and Modernity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003).
8. Stanislav Grof, *Beyond the Brain: Birth, Death, and Transcendence in Psychotherapy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 268.

9. Ibid.
10. Robert Masters and Jean Houston, *The Varieties of Psychedelic Experience* (London: Turnstone Books, 1973 [1966]), 266.
11. Peter Berger, *A Rumour of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), 14. Berger, it should be noted, was not discussing psychedelic states.
12. James, *Varieties*, 519.
13. Louis Roy, *Transcendent Experiences: Phenomenology and Critique* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), xi.
14. Christopher Partridge, "Occulture and Everyday Enchantment," in J. R. Lewis and I. B. Tøllefsen, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 2:315–332; "Occulture Is Ordinary," in K. Granholm and E. Asprem, eds., *Contemporary Esotericism* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2013), 113–133; "Haunted Culture: The Persistence of Belief in the Paranormal," in Olu Jenzen and Sally Munt, eds., *Research Companion to Paranormal Cultures* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 39–50.
15. Howard S. Becker, *Becoming a Marihuana User* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015). Originally written in 1953, it is one of the earliest sociological analyses of drug use. See also Howard S. Becker, *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance* (New York: Free Press, 1991), 41–78.
16. Becker, *Becoming a Marihuana User*, 3.
17. Ibid., xv.
18. Ibid., xviii–xix.
19. Humphry Osmond, "A Review of the Clinical Effects of Psychotomimetic Agents," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 66 (March 1957): 429.
20. Terence McKenna, *Food of the Gods: A Radical History of Plants, Drugs, and Human Evolution* (New York: Bantam Books, 1992), 112.
21. Wouter Hanegraaf, "Entheogenic Esotericism," in Kennet Granholm and Egil Asprem, eds., *Contemporary Esotericism* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2013), 392–393.
22. Ibid., 392.
23. Carl Ruck, Jeremy Bigwood, Danny Staples, Jonathon Ott, and R. Gordon Wasson, "Entheogens," *Journal of Psychedelic Drugs* 11, nos. 1–2 (1979): 145.
24. Ibid., 145–146.
25. Gordon Wasson, *The Wondrous Mushroom: Mycolatry in Mesoamerica* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1980), xiv.
26. Ruck et al., "Entheogens," 145.
27. Ibid., 146.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. Entheogenic, *Spontaneous Illumination* (C.O.R.N. Recordings, 2003) and *Golden Cap* (Chillcode Music, 2006). See also Bloodlet, *Entheogen* (Victory Records, 1996); Alio Die, *Password for Entheogenic Experience* (Hic Sunt Leones, 1998); Sika Redem, *Entheogen* (Undergroove, 2006); Redgloam, *Aliens and Entheogens*

- (USC, 2012); Nihil Nocturne, *Entheogen* (End All Life Production, 2008); Corpse Garden, *Entheogen* (Satanath Records, 2015); Swine Overlord, *Entheogenesis* (Gore House Productions, 2016).
31. See Rick Doblin and Brad Burge, eds., *Manifesting Minds: A Review of Psychedelics in Science, Medicine, Sex, and Spirituality* (Berkeley: Evolver Editions, 2014); Marlene Dobkin de Rios and Oscar Janiger, *LSD, Spirituality and the Creative Process* (Rochester: Park Street Press, 2003).
 32. Irvine Welsh, *Trainspotting* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1993).
 33. Richard Davenport-Hines, *The Pursuit of Oblivion: A Social History of Drugs* (London: Phoenix Press, 2002), xi.
 34. "Global Drug Survey": <https://www.globaldrugsurvey.com> (accessed January 23, 2016); European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA): <http://www.emcdda.europa.eu> (accessed January 23, 2016)
 35. Book-length studies (not all of which are specifically by scholars of religion) include: Robert C. Fuller, *Stairways to Heaven: Drugs in American Religious History* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000); Andy Letcher, *Shroom: A Cultural History of the Magic Mushroom* (New York: Ecco, 2007); Huston Smith, *Cleansing the Doors of Perception: The Religious Significance of Entheogenic Plants and Chemicals* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, 2000); Morgan Shipley, *Psychedelic Mysticism: Transforming Consciousness, Religious Experiences, and Voluntary Peasants in Postwar America* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015); Graham St John, *Mystery School in Hyperspace: A Cultural History of DMT* (Berkeley: Evolver Editions, 2015); W. David Watts, *The Psychedelic Experience: A Sociological Study* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1971).
 36. See Christopher Partridge, *Dub in Babylon: Understanding the Evolution and Significance of Dub Reggae in Jamaica and Britain from King Tubby to Post-Punk* (London: Equinox, 2010), 2–41; Christopher Partridge, "Babylon's Burning: Reggae, Rastafari and Millenarianism," in John Walliss and Kenneth Newport, eds., *The End All Around Us: Apocalyptic Texts and Popular Culture* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2009), 43–70; Christopher Partridge, "Schism in Babylon: Colonialism, Afro-Christianity and Rastafari," in James Lewis and Sarah Lewis, eds., *Sacred Schisms: How Religions Divide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 306–31; Christopher Partridge, "Rastafarianism," in Christopher Partridge, ed., *New Religions: A Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 62–64.
 37. Sadie Plant, *Writing on Drugs* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999); Marcus Boon, *The Road of Excess: A History of Writing on Drugs* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

CHAPTER 1

1. Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, trans. Lesley Anne Boldt (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 120.

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3. Michel de Certeau, "History and Mysticism," in Jacques Revel and Lynn Avery Hunt, eds., *Histories: French Constructions of the Past*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: New Press, 1996), 437–447; "Mysticism," *Diacritics* 22, no. 2 (1992): 11–25.
4. Certeau, "Mysticism," 14.
5. *Ibid.*, 12.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Raúl Fornet-Batancourt, Helmut Becker, Alfredo Gomez-Müller, and J. D. Gauthier, "The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom: An Interview with Michel Foucault on January 20, 1984," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 12 (1987): 127.
8. *Ibid.*, 112.
9. Michel Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," in Luther Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick Hutton, eds., *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 17.
10. *Ibid.*, 18.
11. Fornet-Batancourt et al., "Ethic of Care," 122.
12. Michel Foucault, "What Is Enlightening?," in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (London: Penguin Books, 1984), 50.
13. Aldous Huxley, "Culture and the Individual (1963)," in Michael Horowitz and Cynthia Palmer, eds., *Moksha: Aldous Huxley's Classic Writings on Psychedelics and the Visionary Experience* (Rochester: Park Street Press, 1999), 255.
14. See Robert de Ropp, *The Master Game* (London: Picador, 1974 [1968]).
15. Foucault, "Technologies," 16–49.
16. Michel Foucault, *Death and the Labyrinth*, trans. Charles Raus (London: Continuum, 1986), 185.
17. James Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault* (New York: Anchor Books, 1995), 245.
18. David Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 339.
19. Michel Foucault, quoted in *ibid.*, 110.
20. Sadie Plant, *Writing on Drugs* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999), 172–173.
21. *Ibid.*
22. Allen Ginsberg, "Foreword," in Timothy Leary, *High Priest* (Berkeley: Ronin Publishing, 1995), xvii. See also Christopher Partridge, "Modern Psychedelic Gnosis," in Gary Trompf, Jay Johnston, and Gunner Mikkelsen, eds., *The Gnostic World* (London: Routledge, forthcoming).
23. For good discussions of Gnosticism in modernity, see Kirsten Grimstad, *The Modern Revival of Gnosticism and Thomas Mann's Doktor Faustus* (Rochester: Camden House, 2002), 35–91; Robert Segal, ed., *The Allure of Gnosticism* (Chicago: Open Court, 1995); Roelof van den Broek and Wouter Hanegraaff, eds., *Gnosis and*

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 26. Timothy Leary, *The Politics of Ecstasy* (London: Paladin, 1970), 112 (emphasis added).
 27. Timothy Leary, "Mushrooms for Lunch," in Michael Horowitz and Cynthia Palmer, eds., *Moksha: Aldous Huxley's Classic Writings on Psychedelics and the Visionary Experience* (Rochester: Park Street Press, 1999), 180 (emphasis added).
 28. Leary, *Politics of Ecstasy*, 13 (emphasis added).
 29. *Ibid.*, 57.
 30. Aldous Huxley, "Culture and the Individual (1963)," in Michael Horowitz and Cynthia Palmer, eds., *Moksha: Aldous Huxley's Classic Writings on Psychedelics and the Visionary Experience* (Rochester: Park Street Press, 1999), 255.
 31. Partridge, "Modern Psychedelic Gnosis."
 32. See Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise on the Sociology of Knowledge* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971); Peter Berger, *The Social Reality of Religion* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), 54–57.
 33. See Berger and Luckmann, *Social Construction*, 33–42.
 34. Berger, *Social Reality*, 55.
 35. Hanegraaff, "Entheogenic Esotericism," 408.
 36. James, *Varieties*, 380. See also Jens Brockmeier, "Ineffable Experience," in Michel Ferrari, ed., *The Varieties of Religious Experience: Centenary Essays* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2002), 117–140.
 37. James, *Varieties*, 388.
 38. Leary, *Politics of Ecstasy*, 13, 22.
 39. Gordon Wasson, "The Hallucinogenic Fungi of Mexico: An Inquiry into the Origins of the Religious Idea Among Primitive Peoples," *Psychedelic Review* 1, no. 1 (1963): 32.
 40. Aldous Huxley, "Mescaline and the 'Other World' (1955)," in Michael Horowitz and Cynthia Palmer, eds., *Moksha: Aldous Huxley's Classic Writings on Psychedelics and the Visionary Experience* (Rochester: Park Street Press, 1999), 62.
 41. See the next section.
 42. Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "Altered States of Knowledge: The Attainment of Gnōsis in the Hermetica," *International Journal of the Platonic Tradition* 2 (2008): 135.
 43. Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "Gnosis," in Glenn Magee, ed., *Cambridge Handbook to Western Mysticism and Esotericism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 382.
 44. Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness* (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2002 [1911]), 49.
 45. James, *Varieties*, 380.

46. Tom Wolfe, *The Electric Kool Aid Acid Test* (London: Black Swan Books, 1989 [1971]), 205 (emphasis in original).
47. James, *Varieties*, 380–381.
48. *Ibid.*, 423.
49. Stanislav Grof, *LSD: Doorway to the Numinous* (Rochester: Park Street Press, 2009), 207.
50. Rick Strassman, *DMT: The Spirit Molecule* (Rochester: Park Street Press, 2001), 235.
51. James, *Varieties*, 381.
52. *Ibid.*
53. *Ibid.*
54. Wolfe, *Electric Kool Aid*, 45.
55. James, *Varieties*, 381.
56. Strassman, *DMT*, 132.
57. Raoul Adamson and Ganesha, quoted in Ralph Metzner, “The Experience of Ayahuasca: Teachings of the Amazonian Plant Spirits,” in Ralph Metzner, ed., *The Ayahuasca Experience: A Sourcebook on the Sacred Vine of Spirits* (Rochester: Park Street Press, 2006), 120, 148; Castaneda, *Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970 [1968]), 137; Bayard Taylor, “The Vision of Hasheesh,” *Putnam’s Monthly Magazine of American Literature, Science and Art* 3, no. 16 (April 1854): 404.
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59. Hanegraaff, “Altered States of Knowledge,” 134.
60. James, *Varieties*, 419.
61. Walter T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy* (Los Angeles: J. P. Tarcher, 1987), 132.
62. Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1946).
63. “What reader of Hegel can doubt that that sense of a perfected Being with all its otherness soaked up in itself, which dominates his whole philosophy, must have come from the prominence in his consciousness of mystical moods like this, in most persons kept subliminal? The notion is thoroughly characteristic of the mystical level, and the *Aufgabe* of making it articulate was surely set to Hegel’s intellect by a mystical feeling,” James, *Varieties*, 389 n. 1.
64. *Ibid.*, 388.
65. *Ibid.*, 389.
66. *Ibid.*, 405.
67. *Ibid.*, 419.
68. See Huxley, *Perennial Philosophy*, which popularized the term.
69. Arthur Versluis, *American Gurus: From American Transcendentalism to New Age Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 2.
70. See Steven Katz, ed., *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Steven Katz, ed., *Mysticism and Religious Traditions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

71. John Oman, *The Natural and the Supernatural* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1931), 405.
72. See Robert K. Forman, ed., *The Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).
73. Don Cupitt, *Mysticism After Modernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 74.
74. See Betty G. Eisner, "Set, Setting and Matrix," *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs* 29, no. 2 (1997): 213–216; Ben Sessa, *The Psychedelic Renaissance: Reassessing the Role of Psychedelic Drugs in 21st Century Psychiatry and Society* (London: Muswell Hill Press, 2012), 23–24; Rick Strassman, "Hallucinogens," in Mitch Earleywine, ed., *Mind-Altering Drugs: The Science of Subjective Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 53–54.
75. Walter Pahnke, "Drugs and Mysticism: An Analysis of the Relationship Between Psychedelic Drugs and the Mystical Consciousness," doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, 1963, 86.
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80. See Robert Wallis, *Shamans/Neo-Shamans: Contested Ecstasies, Alternative Archaeologies, and Contemporary Pagans* (London: Routledge, 2003), 35–39.
81. Berger, *Rumour of Angels*, 43. See also Ioan M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion: A Study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2003), 15–58.
82. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion*, 15.
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84. Theodore Roszak, ed., *Sources: An Anthology of Contemporary Materials Useful for Preserving Personal Sanity While Braving the Great Technological Wilderness* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1972), 39.
85. See Daniel Noel, *The Soul of Shamanism: Western Fantasies, Imaginal Realities* (New York: Continuum, 1997); Hanegraaff, "Entheogenic Esotericism," 400–403; Michael Harner, ed., *Hallucinogens and Shamanism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973); Paul C. Johnson, "Shamanism from Ecuador to Chicago: A Case Study in New Age Ritual Appropriation," in Graham Harvey, ed., *Shamanism: A Reader* (London: Routledge, 2003), 339–340; Carl A. P. Ruck, "Shamanic Induction of Altered States for Spiritual Inspiration," in J. Harold

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 90. Walter Y. Evans-Wentz, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000 [1927]). See also “Tribute to W. Y. Evans-Wentz,” in *ibid.*, 8.
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 92. Castaneda, *Teachings of Don Juan*, 208.
 93. Leary et al., *Psychedelic Experience*, 110.
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 97. Ralph Metzner, “Introduction: Amazonian Vine of Visions,” in Ralph Metzner, ed., *Sacred Vine of Spirits: Ayahuasca* (Rochester: Park Street Press, 2006), 17; see also Ralph Metzner, *The Unfolding Self: Varieties of Transformative Experience* (Ross: Pioneer Imprints, 2010), 100–107, 223–248.
 98. Metzner, “Introduction: Amazonian Vine of Visions,” 17. See also Ralph Metzner, “Albert Hofmann and the Quest for the Alchemical Philosopher’s Stone,” in Amanda Fielding, ed., *Hofmann’s Elixir: LSD and the New Eleusis* (Oxford: Beckley Foundation, 2008), 98–112.
 99. Castaneda, *Teachings of Don Juan*, 158.
 100. Joan Townsend, “Neo-Shamanism and the Modern Mystical Movement,” in Gary Doore, ed., *Shaman’s Path: Healing, Personal Growth and Empowerment* (Boston: Shambhala, 1988), 79; see also Castaneda, *Teachings of Don Juan*, 158.
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112. Stace, quoted in Leary, *Politics of Ecstasy*, 69.
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115. Huxley, *Doors of Perception*, 112–113.
116. Jerome Kroll and Bernard Bachrach, *The Mystic Mind: The Psychology of Medieval Mystics and Ascetics* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 27.
117. *Ibid.*
118. *Ibid.*, 1. See also Ann Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered: A Building Block Approach to the Study of Religion and Other Special Things* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).
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122. Charles Baudelaire, *Artificial Paradises*, trans. Stacy Diamond (New York: Citadel Press, 1996), 73.
123. Hugh Ross Mackintosh, *The Christian Apprehension of God* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2008 [1927]), 65.
124. See, for example, Geoffrey Parrinder, *Mysticism in the World's Religions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 175–184; James Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Guide to World Views* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1977), 150–203; see especially his discussion of Carlos Castaneda (183–197).
125. Sybille Bedford, *Aldous Huxley: A Biography*, vol. 2: 1939–1963 (London: Chatto & Windus, 1974), 332.

126. For some useful analysis, see Stephen Chermak, "The Presentation of Drugs in the News Media: The News Sources Involved in the Construction of Social Problems," *Justice Quarterly* 14, no. 4 (1997): 687–718; William Ellwood, *Rhetoric in the War on Drugs: The Triumphs and Tragedies of Public Relations* (Westport: Praeger, 1994); William Ellwood, "Declaring War on the Home Front: Metaphor, Presidents, and the War on Drugs," *Metaphor and Symbolic Activity* 10, no. 2 (1995): 93–114; Erich Goode, "The American Drug Panic of the 1980s: Social Construction or Objective Threat?," *International Journal of the Addictions* 25, no. 9 (1990): 1083–1098.
127. Hanegraaff, "Entheogenic Esotericism," 395.
128. David Brown, *God and Grace of Body: Sacrament in Ordinary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 304 (emphasis added).
129. Primal Scream, "Higher than the Sun," *Screamadelica* (Creation Records, 1991).
130. Bowker, *Sense of God*, 150.
131. *Ibid.*
132. *Ibid.*, 151.
133. *Ibid.*, 153.
134. Seymour Kety, quoted in *ibid.*
135. *Ibid.*, 155.

CHAPTER 2

1. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Christabel; Kubla Khan: A Vision; The Pains of Sleep* (London: John Murray, 1816), 58.
2. William S. Burroughs, *Burroughs Live: The Collected Interviews of William S. Burroughs, 1960–1997*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer (Los Angeles: Semiotext[e], 2001), 507.
3. Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater and Other Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 41.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*, 77.
6. *Ibid.*, 250.
7. See Terry Parssinen, *Secret Passions, Secret Remedies: Narcotic Drugs in British Society, 1820–1930* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), 3–58; Alethea Hayter, *Opium and the Romantic Imagination* (London: Faber & Faber, 1971), 19–35.
8. See Louise Foxcroft, *The Making of Addiction: The "Use and Abuse" of Opium in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 11.
9. George Wood and Franklin Bache, *The Dispensary of the United States of America* (Philadelphia: Grigg & Elliot, 1839), 1080.
10. Thomas Sydenham, quoted in Richard Davenport-Hines, *The Pursuit of Oblivion: A Social History of Drugs* (London: Phoenix Press, 2002), 13.

11. Parssinen, *Secret Passions*, 10.
12. Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1992), 146.
13. Charles Dickens, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), 37.
14. A useful discussion of attitudes to the Chinese in early twentieth-century Britain can be found in Marek Kohn, *Dope Girls: The Birth of the British Drug Underground* (London: Granta Books, 2001), 57–66.
15. Dickens, *Edwin Drood*, 37.
16. Harry Hubbell Kane, *Opium-Smoking in America and China: A Study of Its Prevalence, and Effects, Immediate and Remote, on the Individual and the Nation* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1882), 147.
17. *Ibid.*, 5, 7.
18. *Ibid.*, 7–8.
19. "The drug," says Chesterton, "may have accelerated or made easy a work which some weaknesses in [Coleridge's] moral character might have made him avoid or delay, because they were laborious; but there is nothing creative about a narcotic." G. K. Chesterton, *As I Was Saying* (London: Methuen, 1936), 90. For a far more robust defense of this position, see Elisabeth Schneider, *Coleridge, Opium, and Kubla Khan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953).
20. See Lester Grinspoon and James B. Bakalar, *Psychedelic Drugs Reconsidered* (New York: Lindesmith Center, 1997), 9. See also Meyer H. Abrams's response to Schneider's book in *The Milk of Paradise: The Effect of Opium Visions on the Works of DeQuincey, Crabbe, Francis Thompson, and Coleridge* (New York: Octagon Books, 1971), xi–xiv; and Alethea Hayter's discussion of the theories of both Schneider and Abrams in *Opium*.
21. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, quoted in Abrams, *Milk of Paradise*, x.
22. Marcus Boon, *The Road to Excess: A History of Writing on Drugs* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 18.
23. See, for example, Paul Devereux, *The Long Trip: A Prehistory of Psychedelia* (Harmondsworth: Arkana, 1997); Mike Jay, ed., *Artificial Paradises: A Drugs Reader* (London: Penguin, 1999); Andy Letcher, *Shroom: A Cultural History of the Magic Mushroom* (New York: Ecco, 2007); Richard Rudgley, ed., *Wildest Dreams: An Anthology of Drug-Related Literature* (London: Abacus, 2001).
24. He used "anodyne" instead of "opium" prior to his addiction, in order to emphasize his use of it as medicine. See John Livingstone Lowes, *The Road to Xanadu: A Study in the Ways of the Imagination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 380–381.
25. Samuel Purchas was an English cleric who compiled several volumes of writings by travelers and explorers, as well as producing a number of his own prose works based on his study of them. Coleridge particularly enjoyed reading *Purchas His Pilgrimage: or Relations of the World and the Religions observed in all Ages and Places discovered, from the Creation unto this Present* (London: Henry Featherstone, 1613), which, as he notes here, became the inspiration for "Kubla Khan."

26. Coleridge, *Christabel*, 51–53.
27. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 53.
28. There is some debate as to its veracity. See David Perkins, “The Imaginative Vision of *Kubla Khan*: On Coleridge’s Introductory Note,” in Harold Bloom, *Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (New York: Bloom’s Literary Criticism, 2010).
29. Lowes, *Road to Xanadu*, 381.
30. Coleridge, quoted in *ibid.*, 379. See also Hayter, *Opium*, 215–219.
31. Hayter, *Opium*, 216.
32. Perkins, “Imaginative Vision,” 39.
33. Thomas De Quincey, *On Murder* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 6 (emphasis added).
34. Charles Baudelaire, “Edgar Allan Poe, His Life and Works,” in Charles Baudelaire, *Selected Writings on Art and Literature*, trans. P. E. Charvet (London: Penguin Classics, 2006), 186–187.
35. Jean Cocteau, *Opium: The Diary of His Cure*, trans. Margaret Crosland (London: Peter Owen, 1990), 36.
36. De Quincey, *On Murder*, 6–7.
37. See Jennifer Ford, *Coleridge on Dreaming: Romanticism, Dreams and the Medical Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). While, as the title suggests, Ford focuses on Coleridge’s exploration of the physiological, medical nature of the imagination, nevertheless, it is probably the best recent analysis of the significance of dreams in Romanticism.
38. Hayter, *Opium*, 67.
39. See Ford, *Coleridge on Dreaming*, 3–4.
40. Perkins, “Imaginative Vision,” 45. See also Frederick Burwick, “The Dream-Visions of Jean Paul and Thomas De Quincey,” *Comparative Literature* 20 (1968): 1–26.
41. Perkins, “Imaginative Vision,” 45.
42. Hayter, *Opium*, 69–70.
43. *Ibid.*, 70.
44. *Ibid.*, 71.
45. Davenport-Hines, *Pursuit of Oblivion*, 48.
46. De Quincey, *Confessions and Other Writings*, 81.
47. “Lytton would often receive visitors while smoking a pipe six or seven feet in length, or taking opium through a hookah.” Leslie Mitchell, *Bulwer Lytton: The Rise and Fall of a Victorian Man of Letters* (London: Hambledon & London, 2003), 89; see also Hayter, *Opium*, 294–295.
48. See Hayter, *Opium*, 294.
49. Edward Bulwer Lytton, *Zanoni* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood & Sons, 1861), 1:67.
50. De Quincey, *Confessions and Other Writings*, 38.
51. *Ibid.*

52. Ibid.
53. Ibid., 38–39.
54. James, *Varieties*, 189–258.
55. Ibid., 196.
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid., 189.
58. De Quincey, *Confessions and Other Writings*, 39 (emphasis added).
59. Ibid., 42.
60. Ibid., 77.
61. See Robert Morrison, *The English Opium Eater: A Biography of Thomas De Quincey* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2009), 163.
62. Although the final version of *Confessions and Other Writings* appeared in the *London Magazine*, it began as an essay for *Blackwood's Magazine*.
63. Thomas Carlyle, quoted in Morrison, *English Opium Eater*, 211.
64. Ibid.
65. Ibid.
66. Hayter, *Opium*, 105.
67. Both are available in De Quincey, *Confessions and Other Writings*.
68. Ibid., 82.
69. Ibid., 254.
70. Joel Faflak, *Romantic Psychoanalysis: The Burden of the Mystery* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 152.
71. De Quincey, *Confessions and Other Writings*, 147. See also Morrison's account of the effects of Elizabeth's death on De Quincey, in Morrison, *English Opium Eater*, 14–18.
72. See John Caputo's discussion in *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1986), 178.
73. De Quincey, *Confessions and Other Writings*, 68.
74. Florence De Quincey, quoted in Morrison, *English Opium Eater*, 277.
75. De Quincey, *Confessions and Other Writings*, 147.
76. Ibid.
77. For a careful discussion of De Quincey's notion of the unconscious, see Markus Iseli, *Thomas De Quincey and the Cognitive Unconscious* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). For a rather different but interesting discussion of the possible origins of the "Dark Interpreter" in Jamaican Obeah and German Paganism, see Charles Rzepka, *Selected Studies in Romantic and American Literature, History, and Culture: Inventions and Interventions* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 81–94.
78. De Quincey, *Confessions and Other Writings*, 147.
79. Ibid.
80. Ede Frecska, "The Shaman's Journey: Supernatural or Natural? A Neuro-Ontological Interpretation of Spiritual Experiences," in Rick Strassman, Slawek Wojtowicz, Luis Luna, and Ede Frecska, *Inner Paths to Outer Space: Journeys to*

- Alien Worlds Through Psychedelics and Other Spiritual Technologies* (Rochester: Park Street Press, 2008), 179.
81. Jim DeKorne, *Psychedelic Shamanism: The Cultivation, Preparation, and Shamanic Use of Psychotropic Plants*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2011), 74.
 82. De Quincey, *Confessions and Other Writings*, 148.
 83. *Ibid.*, 82 (emphasis added).
 84. Lilian Furst, *Romanticism in Perspective*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1979), 119.
 85. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultural Despisers*, 2nd ed., trans. Richard Crouter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 39.
 86. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, trans. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928), 5.
 87. William Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David Erdman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 555.
 88. De Quincey, *Confessions and Other Writings*, 82.
 89. *Ibid.*
 90. *Ibid.*, 77.
 91. *Ibid.*, 82.
 92. Abrams, *Milk of Paradise*, 4.
 93. De Quincey, *Confessions and Other Writings*, 68.
 94. Abrams, *Milk of Paradise*, 4–5.
 95. De Quincey, *Confessions and Other Writings*, 68.
 96. *Ibid.*
 97. Abrams, *Milk of Paradise*, 5.
 98. Chesterton, *As I Was Saying*, 90. See also Morrison, “Introduction,” in De Quincey, *Confessions and Other Writings*, ix. Charles Baudelaire reaches a similar conclusion in a comparison between hashish and wine: *On Wine and Hashish*, trans. Andrew Brown (London: Hesperus Press, 2002).
 99. See Robert C. Fuller, *Religion and Wine: A Cultural History of Wine Drinking in the United States* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996).
 100. Quoted in Barry Milligan, *Pleasures and Pains: Opium and the Orient in 19th-Century British Culture* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1995), 2.
 101. See Susan Zieger’s thoughtful analysis of nineteenth-century drug autobiographies (particularly those of De Quincey, Fitz Hugh Ludlow, and Daniel Fredrick MacMartin) in relation to imperialism and American frontier discourse: “Pioneers of Inner Space: Drug Autobiography and Manifest Destiny,” *PMLA* 122, no. 5 (2007): 1531–1547.
 102. Abrams, *Milk of Paradise*, 3.
 103. Byron, quoted in Andrew Warren, *The Orient and the Young Romantics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 2.
 104. *Ibid.*
 105. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003), 98.
 106. *Ibid.*, 115.

107. Ibid.
108. Ibid., 67.
109. Ibid., 5–6.
110. Ibid., 12.
111. Wilhelm Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 66–67.
112. See John Drew, *India and the Romantic Imagination* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), 43–82.
113. See Halbfass, *India and Europe*.
114. Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and "the Mystic East"* (London: Routledge, 1999), 118.
115. De Quincey, *Confessions and Other Writings*, 72.
116. King, *Orientalism*, 118.
117. Stuart Tave, "Introduction," in Thomas De Quincey, *New Essays by De Quincey: His Contributions to the Edinburgh Saturday Post and Edinburgh Evening Post*, ed. Stuart Tave (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 17.
118. De Quincey, *Confessions and Other Writings*, 72.
119. Ibid., 55.
120. Ibid., 56.
121. Ibid., 57.
122. On the significance of his use of "amuck," see Sanjay Krishnan, *Reading the Global: Troubling Perspectives on Britain's Empire in Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 85–89.
123. De Quincey, *Confessions and Other Writings*, 57.
124. Ibid., 72.
125. Ibid.
126. Ibid., 73.
127. Ibid.
128. See Saree Makdisi, *Romantic Imperialism: Universal Empire and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 195–196.
129. Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of the Sublime and Beautiful: And Other Pre-Revolutionary Writings* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1998), 54.
130. Ibid., 86.
131. Ibid., 24.
132. Milligan, *Pleasures and Pains*, 12.
133. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, vol. 1: *Lectures, 1795: On Politics and Religion*, ed. Lewis Patton and Peter Mann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 226.
134. Milligan, *Pleasures and Pains*, 33.
135. Ibid., 34.
136. Ibid.

137. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Coleridge's Notebooks: A Selection*, ed. Seamus Perry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 16; see also 37.
138. See Tim Fulford, "Coleridge and the Oriental Tale," in Saree Makdisi and Felicity Nussbaum, eds., *Arabian Nights in Historical Context: Between East and West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 213–234.
139. See *ibid.*, 220.
140. Coleridge, quoted in Milligan, *Pleasures and Pains*, 35.
141. Milligan, *Pleasures and Pains*, 35.
142. *Ibid.*
143. De Quincey, *Confessions and Other Writings*, 7, 67.
144. David Courtwright, *Dark Paradise: A History of Opiate Addiction in America*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 58.
145. This is an area that has been completely overlooked by Colin Campbell in his survey of alternative spiritual and political trajectories in the modern West: *The Easternization of the West: A Thematic Account of Cultural Change in the Modern Era* (Abingdon: Routledge/Paradigm, 2007).
146. De Quincey, *On Murder*, 6.
147. Humphry Davy, *Researches, Chemical and Philosophical; Chiefly Concerning Nitrous Oxide, or Dephlogisticated Nitrous Air, and Its Respiration* (London: J. Johnson, 1800), 468–469.
148. It is interesting that James's brother, Henry James, rejected "those tenets of the Christian orthodoxy that speak of other beings, other worlds, or other lives than those discernible by the human heart." Any references to "supernatural, occult, psychical, and transcendent" in his work apply solely to the powers of the human mind. Quoted in Marcia Ian, "Henry James and the Spectacle of Loss: Psychoanalytic Metaphysics," in Sally Ledger and Scott McCracken, eds., *Cultural Politics at the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 121.
149. See, for example, Grinspoon and Bakalar, *Psychedelic Drugs*, 192–237; Stanislav Grof, *LSD Psychotherapy* (Santa Cruz: Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies, 2001); Thomas Roberts, *The Psychedelic Future of the Mind* (Rochester: Park Street Press, 2013).
150. Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16 (1986): 24.
151. *Ibid.*
152. De Quincey, *Confessions and Other Writings*, 50. This passage opens Charles Baudelaire's translation of *Confessions: Artificial Paradises*, trans. Stacy Diamond (New York: Citadel Press, 1996), 77.
153. De Quincey, *Confessions and Other Writings*, 137.
154. *Ibid.*
155. *Ibid.*, 68.
156. *Ibid.*, 6.
157. *Ibid.*, 6–7.

158. See Steven Katz, ed., *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Steven Katz, ed., *Mysticism and Religious Traditions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

CHAPTER 3

1. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (London: Longmans, Green, 1929 [1902]), 387.
2. See Mark Morrison, *Modern Alchemy: Occultism and the Emergence of Atomic Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).
3. Henry David Thoreau, *A Year in Thoreau's Journal: 1851* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993), 39.
4. Ibid. See also Mary Elkins Moller, *Thoreau in the Human Community* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), 79–80.
5. Margaret Fuller, quoted in Marcus Boon, *The Road to Excess: A History of Writing on Drugs* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 99.
6. Andrew Taylor Still, quoted in Catherine Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 401.
7. Lee A. Burrell III, "Thoreau on Ether and Psychedelic Drugs," *American Notes and Queries* 12, no. 7 (March 1974): 100.
8. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Self-Reliance and Other Essays* (New York: Dover, 1993), 76 (emphasis added).
9. Ibid.
10. See Christopher Lawrence, "The Power and the Glory: Humphry Davy and Romanticism," in Andrew Cunningham and Nicholas Jardine, eds., *Romanticism and the Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 213–227.
11. Ibid., 4.
12. See Jole Shackelford, *A Philosophical Path for Paracelsian Medicine: The Ideas, Intellectual Context, and Influence of Petrus Severinus (1520/2–1602)* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, University of Copenhagen, 2004), 236–244, 314.
13. Tobias George Smollett, *The Critical Review, or, Annals of Literature* (London: S. Hamilton, 1802), 34:292.
14. Ibid.
15. Thomas Beddoes, quoted in Mike Jay, *The Atmosphere of Heaven: The Unnatural Experiments of Dr. Beddoes and His Sons of Genius* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 102.
16. Ibid.
17. Humphry Davy, *Researches, Chemical and Philosophical: Chiefly Concerning Nitrous Oxide, or Dephlogisticated Nitrous Air, and Its Respiration* (London: J. Johnson, 1800), 556.

18. For a good discussion of the effects of nitrous oxide, along with a short historical overview, see Diana J. Walker and James P. Zacny, "Subjective Effects of Nitrous Oxide (N_2O)," in Mitch Earleywine, ed., *Mind-Altering Drugs: The Science of Subjective Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 305–337.
19. Davy, *Researches*, 457–458.
20. *Ibid.*, 461.
21. *Ibid.*, 462.
22. Davy, quoted in Holmes, *Age of Wonder*, 261.
23. Davy, *Researches*, 468–469, 489.
24. Trevor Levere, "Dr. Thomas Beddoes and the Establishment of His Pneumatic Institution: A Tale of Three Presidents," *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London* 32, no. 1 (1977): 46–47.
25. Beddoes, who had written numerous political pamphlets, was a supporter of the French Revolution and also of the Republican movement in Britain. As a result, he was dismissed from a readership in chemistry at Oxford. He was also highly critical of the medical establishment of his day for its attention to theory while doing too little to alleviate the suffering of the poor. See Jay, *Atmosphere*.
26. Levere, "Dr. Thomas Beddoes," 47.
27. Samuel Parkes, *The Chemical Catechism with Notes, Illustrations and Experiments*, 5th ed. (London: Samuel Parkes, 1812), 371.
28. Gregory Watt, quoted in Joseph M. Gabriel, "Anesthetics and the Chemical Sublime," *Raritan: A Quarterly Review* 30 (2010): 73.
29. Boon, *Road to Excess*, 91.
30. *Ibid.*
31. *Ibid.*, 91–92.
32. Molly Lefebure, "Humphry Davy: Philosophical Alchemist," in Richard Gravil and Molly Lefebure, eds., *The Coleridge Connection: Essays for Thomas McFarland* (Penrith: Humanities-Ebooks, 2007), 93–94.
33. Davy, quoted in Lefebure, "Humphry Davy," 93–94.
34. Humphry Davy, *Consolations in Travel, or The Last Days of a Philosopher* (London: John Murray, 1830), 20.
35. Immanuel Kant, quoted in Simon Schaffer, "Genius in Romantic Natural Philosophy," in Cunningham and Jardine, *Romanticism*, 83.
36. *Ibid.*, 83.
37. By the end of the nineteenth century, such pathological analyses of genius were not uncommon. See, for example, the discussion in James, *Varieties*, 16–17.
38. Davy, *Consolations*, 15.
39. *Ibid.*, 16–17.
40. *Ibid.*, 17–18.
41. *Ibid.*, 18.
42. *Ibid.*, 45–46.
43. Lefebure, "Humphry Davy," 93.

44. Holmes, *Age of Wonder*, 262.
45. William Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, ed. Sally Bushell, James Butler, and Michael C. Jaye (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 157.
46. Holmes, *Age of Wonder*, 283.
47. Jay, *Atmosphere*, 40.
48. James Wynbrandt, *The Excruciating History of Dentistry: Toothsome Tales and Oral Oddities from Babylon to Braces* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 106.
49. William Combe, *Doctor Syntax in Paris or A Tour in Search of the Grotesque. A Humorous and Satirical Poem* (London: W. Wright, 1820).
50. See Jay, *Atmosphere*, 40.
51. Combe, *Doctor Syntax*, 314.
52. *Ibid.*, 315.
53. *Ibid.*, 316.
54. See Emanuel M. Papper, "Crawford W. Long: The Influence of the Spirit of the Age of Romanticism on the Discovery of Anesthesia," in B. Raymond Fink, Lucien E. Morris, and C. R. Stephen, eds., *The History of Anesthesia: Third International Symposium: Proceedings* (Park Ridge: Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology, 1992), 318–325.
55. Crawford Long, "An Account of the First Use of Sulphuric Ether by Inhalation as an Anaesthetic in Surgical Operations," *Southern Medical and Surgical Journal* 5 (1849): 705–713.
56. John Collins Warren, quoted in Joseph M. Gabriel, "Anesthetics and the Chemical Sublime," *Raritan: A Quarterly Review* 30 (2010): 68.
57. Quoted in *ibid.* (emphasis added).
58. *Ibid.*, 69.
59. Benjamin Paul Blood, *The Anaesthetic Revelation and the Gist of Philosophy* (Amsterdam, NY: B. P. Blood, 1874).
60. William James, *Memories and Studies*, ed. Henry James Jr. (London: Longmans, Green, 1911), 373–374.
61. William James, *Essays in Philosophy*, ed. Frederick Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers, and Ignas K. Skrupskelis (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 229. See also William James, "Review of 'The Anaesthetic Revelation and the Gist of Philosophy,'" *Atlantic Monthly* 33, no. 205 (November 1874): 627–628; William James, "Consciousness Under Nitrous Oxide," *Psychological Review* 5 (1898): 194–196, reprinted in William James, *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*, ed. Frederick Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers, and Ignas K. Skrupskelis (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 438–440.
62. James, *Memories*, 371.
63. Benjamin Paul Blood, *The Pluriverse: An Essay in the Philosophy of Pluralism* (Boston: Marshall Jones, 1920), vii (original emphasis).
64. Benjamin Paul Blood, *The Bride of the Iconoclast: A Poem* (Boston: James Munroe, 1854), 4.

65. Blood, *Anaesthetic Revelation*, 29.
66. *Ibid.*, 32.
67. *Ibid.*, 33.
68. *Ibid.* (emphasis added).
69. *Ibid.*, 35.
70. To take an example from mid-twentieth-century Protestant theology, Emil Brunner's discussion in *Wahrheit als Begegnung* (1937) makes an absolute distinction between the "truth of revelation" and the "truth of reason." Truth, which Brunner identifies with the divine being ("God is truth"), can only be experienced in the moment of a personal ("I-Thou") divine-human encounter. That is to say, truth is experienced as an event of divine self-disclosure. Subsequent rational reflection on the event, formulated in doctrines, is not truth in the same sense as that which comes into being in the experience of the personal encounter itself. Emil Brunner, *Truth as Encounter*, trans. A. W. Loos and David Cairns (London: SCM Press, 1964).
71. Blood, *Anaesthetic Revelation*, 33.
72. James, *Memories*, 374–375.
73. Blood, *Anaesthetic Revelation*, 33–34.
74. James, *Essays*, 186.
75. Blood, *Anaesthetic Revelation*, 12.
76. James, *Memories*, 373–374.
77. Blood, *Pluriverse*, viii.
78. See Alan Gauld, *The Founders of Psychical Research* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968).
79. Egil Asprem, "The Society of Psychical Research," in Christopher Partridge, ed., *The Occult World* (London: Routledge, 2015), 266.
80. Emily Williams Kelly, "F. W. H. Myers and the Empirical Study of the Mind-Body Problem," in Edward F. Kelly, Emily Williams Kelly, Adam Crabtree, Alan Gould, Michael Grosso, and Bruce Greyson, *Irreducible Mind: Toward a Psychology for the 21st Century* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 63.
81. F. W. H. Myers, quoted in *ibid.*
82. Frederic Myers, *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death* (London: Longmans, Green, 1903), 1:xvii.
83. *Ibid.*, 1:xvi.
84. *Ibid.*, 1:xvii; see also 2:190–210.
85. See Frederic W. H. Myers, "The Subliminal Consciousness: Chapters I & II," *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 7 (1891–1892), 298–355; "The Subliminal Consciousness: Chapters III & IV," *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 8 (1892): 333–404; "The Subliminal Consciousness: Chapter V," *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 8 (1892): 436–535; "The Subliminal Consciousness: Chapters VI & VII," *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 9 (1893–1894), 3–128; "The Subliminal Consciousness: Chapters VIII & IX," *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 11 (1895): 334–593.

86. Myers, *Human Personality*, 1:xxi.
87. Kripal, *Authors of the Impossible*, 62. See also Kripal, "Frederic W. H. Myers," in Partridge, ed., *Occult World*, 264; Egil Asprem, *The Problem of Disenchantment: Scientific Naturalism and Esoteric Discourse 1900–1939* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 226–228.
88. Myers, quoted in Kripal, *Authors of the Impossible*, 63.
89. *Ibid.*
90. Myers, *Human Personality*, 1:189.
91. Myers, quoted in Kripal, *Authors of the Impossible*, 473.
92. "Crystal-vision," or "scrying," refers to staring at an object such as a crystal ball for the purposes of inducing visionary experiences. Myers, however, as with many other members of the SPR, understood the process in terms of self-hypnosis. It is, as Myers describes, an "empirical method of inducing hallucinations, by concentration of the mind aided by gazing into some clear depth or dark mirror," the effect of which is a "subliminal uprush." Myers, "Subliminal Consciousness: Chapter V," 348.
93. *Ibid.*, 444.
94. M. de G.V., "The Apparent Duality of Consciousness Under Anaesthetics," *Journal of the Society of Psychical Research* 7 (January 1895): 16. See also the comments on nitrous oxide experimentation, in Anonymous, "General Meeting," *Journal of the Society of Psychical Research* 5 (January 1891): 3.
95. Myers, "Subliminal Consciousness: Chapter V," 444.
96. *Ibid.*, 445.
97. *Ibid.*
98. See John Patrick Deveney's discussion of this general shift occasioned by the impact of occultism and New Thought on Spiritualism: "Man Is a Spirit Here and Now: The Two Faces of Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism and the Creation of the Magical Occult Theosophical Spiritualist New Thought Amalgam," in Cathy Gutierrez, ed., *Handbook of Spiritualism and Channeling* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 119–151, especially 132–134.
99. George Wyld, *Theosophy and the Higher Life, or, Spiritual Dynamics and the Divine and the Divine and Miraculous Man* (London: Trübner, 1880), 43.
100. *Ibid.*, 55.
101. *Ibid.*, 56.
102. George Wyld, "The Psychological Effects of Breathing Nitrous Oxide," *Spiritualist, and Journal of Psychological Science* 16, no. 2 (January 9, 1880): 13–14.
103. Wyld, *Theosophy*, 56.
104. *Ibid.*
105. *Ibid.*
106. See his publication of the debate concerning anaesthetics in *ibid.*, 118–132.
107. *Ibid.*, 123.
108. *Ibid.*

109. George Wyld, quoted in the "Publisher's Preface" to Louis-Alphonse Cahagnet, *Magnetic Magic: A Digest of the Practical Parts of the Masterpieces of L. A. Cahagnet*, ed. and trans. Robert Fryar (n.p.: privately printed, 1898), 10.
110. Ibid.
111. See Steven Connor, *The Matter of Air: Science and Art of the Ethereal* (London: Reaktion Books, 2010), 110.
112. William Ramsay, "Partial Anæsthesia," *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 9 (1894): 235.
113. While papers read at the meetings were typically published in *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* and, as such, the publication of Ramsay's paper is promised "in a future number of *Proceedings*," it was never actually published. See "Proceedings of General Meetings," *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 9 (1893–1894): 1.
114. Anonymous, "General Meeting," *Journal of the Society of Psychical Research* 6 (June 1893): 94.
115. Ibid.
116. Ibid., 94–95.
117. Ramsay, quoted in Blood, *Pluriverse*, 217–218.
118. Anonymous, "General Meeting," 94–95.
119. Ramsay, quoted in Blood, *Pluriverse*, 217.
120. Ramsay, quoted in *ibid.*, 218.
121. Ramsay, quoted in *ibid.*, 219.
122. Ramsay, quoted in *ibid.*, 222.
123. Ibid., 225 (emphasis in original).
124. James, *Varieties*, 524.
125. See Myers, "Subliminal Consciousness: Chapters I & II," 305.
126. James, *Varieties*, 511–512.
127. Myers, "Subliminal Consciousness: Chapters VI & VII," 8.
128. James, *Varieties*, 512–513.
129. Ibid., 513.
130. Ibid., 515–516.
131. William James, *Pragmatism* (New York: Dover, 1995), 20.
132. James, *Varieties*, 516.
133. Ibid.
134. Ibid.
135. William James, "On Some Hegelisms," in James, *Will to Believe*, 217.
136. Ibid., 216.
137. Ibid., 218.
138. Ibid.
139. Ibid.
140. James, *Varieties*, 388.
141. James, "On Some Hegelisms," 217–218.

142. Cunningham and Jardine, "Introduction: The Age of Relexion," in Cunningham and Jardine, eds., *Romanticism*, 2.
143. Ibid.
144. Heinrich von Kleist, quoted in *ibid.*
145. Andrew Swensen, "Theology and Religious Thought," in Christopher John Murray, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Romantic Era, 1760–1850* (New York: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2004), 2:1129.
146. Ibid.
147. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, vol. 2: 1801–1806, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), 388.
148. Guy de Maupassant, *Afloat*, trans. Marlo Johnston (London: Peter Owen, 1995), 73.
149. See Karen King, *What Is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 45.
150. Bernard Reardon, *Religion in the Age of Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 71.
151. Blood, *Pluriverse*, vii.
152. James, *Varieties*, 388.
153. John Middleton Murry, *God: Being an Introduction to the Science of Metabiology* (London: Jonathon Cape, 1929), 130.
154. James, *Essays*, 173–175. See also Christopher Nelson's discussion: "The Artificial Mystic State of Mind: WJ, Benjamin Paul Blood, and the Nitrous-Oxide Variety of Religious Experience," *Streams of William James: A Publication of the William James Society* 4, no. 3 (2002): 23–31.
155. Blood, *Anaesthetic Revelation*, 35.
156. Blood, *Pluriverse*, 211.
157. See Papper, "Crawford W. Long," 318–320.
158. For a discussion of the currents of secularizing thought in the nineteenth century, see Owen Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).
159. This, we will see, is a common psychedelic experience. See, for example, William A. Richards, *Sacred Knowledge: Psychedelics and Religious Experiences* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 69–77.
160. John Addington Symonds, quoted in James, *Varieties*, 390.
161. Combe, *Doctor Syntax*, 315.

CHAPTER 4

1. Harry Hubbell Kane, "A Hashish-House in New York: The Curious Adventures of an Individual Who Indulged in a Few Pipefuls of the Narcotic Hemp," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 67 (November 1883): 946–947.
2. See Robert Chambers, "The Hashish," *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal* 9, no. 256 (November 25, 1848): 341–344, reprinted in *Littell's Living Age* 20, no. 246

- (February 3, 1849): 217–220; selections were also reproduced in Anonymous, “The Hashish,” *Vermont Watcher and State Journal* 43, no. 29 (May 31, 1849): 1.
3. See Ernst Bloch, “Protocol of the Same Experiment,” trans. Howard Eiland, in Walter Benjamin, *On Hashish*, ed. Howard Eiland (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 30–32; Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986), 1:89–92.
 4. As discussed below, “profane illumination” was a term Benjamin used of central currents within Surrealism, which describes the process by which an individual, often inspired by dreams or intoxication, is able to perceive the ordinary as extraordinary. Such perspectives provided by “the energies of intoxication,” he believed, could lead to social revolution. See Walter Benjamin, “Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia,” in *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, part 1: 1927–1930, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 209. See also Margaret Cohen, *Profane Illumination: Walter Benjamin and the Paris of Surrealist Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).
 5. For example, in 1881, Harry Hubbell Kane devoted little space to a discussion of hashish in America, “owing to its rarity in this country,” in his *Drugs That Enslave: The Opium, Morphine, Chloral and Hashish Habits* (Philadelphia: Presley Blakiston, 1881), 5.
 6. *Ibid.*, 206–218. See also James H. Mills, *Cannabis Britannica: Empire, Trade, and Prohibition, 1800–1928* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 69–123.
 7. Written from a range of perspectives, the following are accessible and informed introductions: Joseph Berke and Calvin Hernton, *The Cannabis Experience* (London: Peter Owen, 1974); Martin Booth, *Cannabis: A History* (London: Bantam Books, 2003); Lester Grinspoon and James B. Bakalar, *Marihuana: The Forbidden Medicine* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); Leslie L. Iversen, *The Science of Marijuana*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Martin A. Lee, *Smoke Signals: A Social History of Marijuana—Medical, Recreational, and Scientific* (New York: Scribner, 2012); Sebastián Marincolo, *High: Insights on Marijuana* (Indianapolis: Dog Ear Publishing, 2010).
 8. For a good discussion of the subjective impact of cannabis, see Mitch Earleywine, “Cannabis: Attending to Subjective Effects to Improve Drug Safety,” in Mitch Earleywine, ed., *Mind-Altering Drugs: The Science of Subjective Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 240–257.
 9. See Ernest Small, “Evolution and Classification of *Cannabis sativa* (Marijuana, Hemp) in Relation to Human Utilization,” *Botanical Review* 81, no. 3 (2015): 189–294.
 10. See Mills, *Cannabis Britannica*, x–xi.
 11. In the West, it is usually the case that certain strains of “skunk” are stronger than hash. Of course, the strength of the hash depends entirely on the plants from which it is taken and on the production process.

12. Nick Jones, *Spliffs: A Celebration of Cannabis Culture* (London: Chrysalis Impact, 2003), 64.
13. For a good popular introduction to the varieties currently available (with photographs), see Jones, *Spliffs*, 64–93.
14. Grinspoon and Bakalar, *Marihuana*, 3.
15. Antoine Isaac Sylvestre de Sacy, “Des preparations enivrantes faites avec le chanvre, mémoire li à l’Institut,” *C.-T. ou Bulletin des societies méd. pub au nom de la Soc. méd. d’Emulation de Paris* 4 (1809): 201–206.
16. Hélène Peters, “Hashish and Mental Illness: The Experience and Observations of Moreau,” in Gabriel G. Nahas and Colette Latour, eds., *Cannabis: Physiopathology, Epidemiology, Detection* (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 1993), 343.
17. Jean Etienne Equirol, quoted in Marcus Boon, *The Road of Excess: A History of Writing on Drugs* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 132.
18. Tony James, *Dream, Creativity, and Madness in Nineteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 99.
19. Bo Holmstedt, “Introduction to Moreau de Tours,” in Jacques-Joseph Moreau, *Hashish and Mental Illness*, trans. Gordon J. Barnett (New York: Raven Press, 1973), xiii.
20. Jacques-Joseph Moreau, *Hashish and Mental Illness*, trans. Gordon J. Barnett (New York: Raven Press, 1973), 1.
21. Katrin Solhdju, “Alienating Travels and Traveling into Alienation: Moreau de Tours’s Experimental Attempts to Articulate the Body of Madness,” *Dingdingdong*, December 25, 2012, 16: <http://dingdingdong.org/wp-content/uploads/alienating-travels.pdf> (accessed March 24, 2016).
22. Holmstedt, “Introduction,” xv.
23. Moreau, *Hashish and Mental Illness*.
24. *Ibid.*, 93–95.
25. See *ibid.*, 98–129.
26. *Ibid.*, 27–90.
27. *Ibid.*, 28.
28. Peters, “Hashish and Mental Illness,” 345.
29. Moreau, *Hashish and Mental Illness*, 67.
30. *Ibid.*, 29.
31. Louis Rémy Aubert-Roche, *De la peste, ou, typhus d’Orient, documents et observations recueillies pendant les années 1834 à 1838, en Egypte, en Arabie, sur la Mer-Rouge, en Abyssinie, a Smyrne et à Constantinople, suivis d’un essai sur le Hachisch et son emploi dans le traitement de la peste* (Paris: Rouvier, 1843).
32. Holmstedt, “Introduction,” xix.
33. Michael Aldrich, “The Remarkable W. B. O’Shaughnessy,” *O’Shaughnessy’s*, Spring 2006, 26. See also Mills, *Cannabis Britannica*, 17–46.
34. E. P. Whineray, “A Pharmaceutical Study of Cannabis Sativa (Being a Collation of Facts as Known at the Present Date),” *Equinox* 1, no. 1 (1909): 233.

35. In the first issue of his journal, *The Equinox*, Crowley included an essay by another London pharmacist, E. P. Whineray (whom he admired and whose shop on Stafford Street he frequently visited), in which he reveals that “the important constituent is a resin. The active principle is stated to be a red oil, Cannabinol, which is liable to become oxidized and inert.” Ibid.
36. John Russell Reynolds, “On the Therapeutic Uses and Toxic Effects of Cannabis Indica,” *Lancet* 135, no. 3473 (March 22, 1890), 637–638.
37. See, for example, Iversen, *Science of Marijuana*, 120.
38. See Chris Bennett, “The Incredible, Delectable, Miracle of 19th Century Medicine: Hasheesh Candy!,” *Cannabis Culture*, February 7, 2013: <http://www.cannabisculture.com/content/2013/02/07/incredible-delectable-miracle-19th-century-medicine-hasheesh-candy> (accessed March 19, 2016).
39. Ibid.
40. Brocardus, quoted in Bernard Lewis, *Assassins: A Radical Sect of Islam* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), 1.
41. Brion Gysin, “A Quick Trip to Alamut: The Celebrated Castle of the Hash-head Assassins,” in Jason Louv, ed., *Ultraculture Journal* 1 (New York: Ultraculture, 2007), 363; see also Berke and Hernton, *Cannabis Experience*, 193–204.
42. Farhad Daftary, *The Assassin Legends: Myths of the Isma’ilis* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1994), 2.
43. Ibid., 34.
44. Farhad Daftary, “Ḥasan Ṣabbāḥ,” in Ehsan Yarshater, ed., *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (New York: Encyclopaedia Iranica Foundation, 2004), 12:34.
45. Lewis, *Assassins*, 2.
46. Frederick Barbarossa, quoted in *ibid.*
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid.
49. Arnold of Lübeck, quoted in *ibid.*, 4–5.
50. See Emanuel Mickel, *The Artificial Paradises in French Literature: The Influence of Opium and Hashish on the Literature of French Romanticism and Les Fluers Du Mal* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969), 57.
51. On hashish use in Egypt, see Gabriel Nahas, “Hashish and Drug Abuse in Egypt During the 19th and 20th Centuries,” *Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine* 61 (1985): 428–444.
52. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003), 18.
53. See Daftary, *Assassin Legends*.
54. Lewis, *Assassins*, 11.
55. Moreau, *Hashish and Mental Illness*, 6.
56. Edward William Lane, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (London: Charles Knight, 1837), 2:147.
57. Daftary, *Assassin Legends*, 91.

58. Ibid., 91–92. See also George Lane, “The Mongols and the Advent of Hashish in Western Asia,” in Howard Marks, ed., *The Howard Marks Book of Dope Stories* (London: Vintage Books, 2001), 69–72.
59. On the subjective effects of cannabis, see Earleywine, “Cannabis,” 240–257.
60. In his discussion of De Quincey’s encounter with the Malay, Sanjay Krishnan provides an insightful analysis of the use of “amuck.” See Krishnan, *Reading the Global: Troubling Perspectives on Britain’s Empire in Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 85–89.
61. See Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall, *The History of the Assassins*, trans. Oswald Charles Wood (London: Smith and Elder, 1835), 137.
62. Anonymous, “Hasheesh and Its Smokers and Eaters,” *Scientific American* 14, no. 7 (October 23, 1858): 49.
63. Alexandre Dumas, *The Count of Monte Cristo* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1997), 227–228.
64. Ibid., 228–229.
65. Arthur Rimbaud, “Morning of Drunkenness.” Available in *Collected Poems*, trans. Martin Sorrell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 273. See also the discussion of Rimbaud’s experiences of transcendence in Robert C. Zaehner, *Mysticism, Sacred and Profane: An Inquiry into Some Varieties of Praeternatural Experience* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 61–83.
66. For a good English translation, see Théophile Gautier, “The Club of Assassins,” in Charles Baudelaire and Théophile Gautier, *Hashish, Wine, Opium*, trans. Maurice Strang (London: Calder & Boyars, 1972), 31–56.
67. Ibid., 36.
68. Ibid., 40.
69. Ibid., 47. On Gautier’s understanding of the Orient, see F. Elizabeth Dahab, “Théophile Gautier and the Orient,” *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 1, no. 4 (1999): 1–7: <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1054&context=clcweb> (accessed April 15, 2016).
70. Gautier, “The Club of Assassins,” 47.
71. Robert S. de Ropp, *Drugs and the Mind* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1958), 62.
72. Robert Shea and Robert Anton Wilson, *The Illuminatus! Trilogy* (London: Constable & Robinson, 1975), 22; see also Robert Anton Wilson, *Sex, Drugs and Magick*, 2nd ed. (Tempe: New Falcon Publications, 2000), 54–56, 116–144.
73. William Burroughs, quoted in Arthur Versluis, *American Gurus: From American Transcendentalism to New Age Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 140. See also William S. Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg, *The Yage Letters* (London: Penguin, 2008), 70–72.
74. Robert Calvert, “The Hashishins,” in Trevor Hughes, ed., *Hassan I Sabbah* (Liscard: Zephyr, 1995), 25.

75. Anonymous, "Marihuana Menaces Youth," *Scientific American* 154, no. 3 (March 1936): 151. See Trevor Hughes, ed., *Reefer Madness* (Liscard: Zephyr, 1996).
76. Harry Anslinger, "Marijuana: Assassin of Youth." Reproduced in Trevor Hughes, ed., *Reefer Madness* (Liscard: Zephyr, 1996), 9.
77. His comments regarding Homer are, of course, ill-informed, in that in *The Odyssey* Homer refers only to the intoxicating and enchanting fruit offered by the Lotus-Eaters, not to cannabis. See Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Richard Lattimore (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2007), 140 (Book 9:104).
78. Harry J. Anslinger, "Marihuana Tax Act (1937): Statement of H. J. Anslinger, Commissioner of Narcotics, Bureau of Narcotics, Department of the Treasury": <http://www.druglibrary.org/schaffer/hemp/taxact/taxact.htm> (accessed March 29, 2016).
79. See Robert Mack, "Cultivating the Garden: Antoine Galland's *Arabian Nights* in the Traditions of English Literature," in Saree Makdisi and Felicity Nussbaum, eds., *Arabian Nights in Historical Context: Between East and West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 51–82.
80. Sadie Plant, *Writing on Drugs*, 48.
81. See De Quincey, *Confessions and Other Writings*, 127, 302, 312.
82. Plant, *Writing on Drugs*, 48.
83. Boon, *Road of Excess*, 144.
84. See Mickel, *Artificial Paradises*.
85. Théophile Gautier, *Charles Baudelaire: His Life*, trans. Guy Thorne (Norderstedt: Vero Verlag, 2014), 77; see Charles Baudelaire, *Artificial Paradises*, trans. Stacy Diamond (New York: Citadel Press, 1996), 33.
86. See Frank Hilton, *Baudelaire in Chains: Portrait of the Artist as Drug Addict* (London: Peter Owen, 2004).
87. Baudelaire, "Wine and Hashish," 90.
88. Baudelaire, *Artificial Paradises*, 74.
89. Charles Baudelaire, "Wine and Hashish: Compared as Means for the Multiplication of Personality," in Baudelaire and Gautier, *Hashish, Wine, Opium*, 88.
90. Baudelaire, "Wine and Hashish," 79.
91. Baudelaire, *Artificial Paradises*, 74.
92. Osborn, "Artificial Paradises," 660.
93. *Ibid.*, 85.
94. *Ibid.*
95. *Ibid.*, 86.
96. *Ibid.*, 88.
97. *Ibid.*, 87.
98. *Ibid.*, 85–86.
99. Baudelaire, *Artificial Paradises*, 20.
100. James, *Memories*, 373–374.
101. Baudelaire, "Wine and Hashish," 87.

102. Baudelaire, *Artificial Paradises*, 70–71.
103. For a good overview of the relationship between drugs and music, see Jörg Fachner, “Music and Drug-Induced Altered States of Consciousness,” in David Aldridge and Jörg Fachner, eds., *Music and Altered States: Consciousness, Transcendence, Therapy and Addictions* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2006), 82–96.
104. Baudelaire, “Wine and Hashish,” 86.
105. Ibid.
106. Baudelaire, *Artificial Paradises*, 73.
107. Baudelaire, “Wine and Hashish,” 87.
108. Ibid., 86–87.
109. Ibid., 86.
110. Baudelaire, *Artificial Paradises*, 32.
111. Ibid., 33.
112. Ibid., 38–39.
113. Ibid., 39.
114. Gustave Flaubert, *The Letters of Gustave Flaubert: 1857–1880*, ed. and trans. Francis Steegmuller (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 20–21.
115. See Baudelaire’s letter to Flaubert in Flaubert, *Letters*, 22–23; see also Gustave Flaubert, *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*, trans. Lafcadio Hearn (New York: Modern Library, 2001).
116. Michel Foucault, “Introduction,” trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon, in Flaubert, *Temptation*, xxxvii.
117. Sadie Plant, *Writing on Drugs* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999), 46.
118. Gustave Flaubert, quoted in *ibid.*, 46–47.
119. Taylor, “Vision of Hasheesh,” 402–408. See also Bayard Taylor, *A Journey to Central Africa; or, Life and Landscapes from Egypt to the Negro Kingdoms of the White Nile* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1854), 518–519; Bayard Taylor, *The Lands of the Saracen; or, Pictures of Palestine, Asia Minor, Sicily, and Spain* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1859), 133–148.
120. Taylor, “Vision of Hasheesh,” 404.
121. Ibid.
122. Ibid., 404–405; reprinted in Taylor, *Lands of the Saracen*, 140.
123. He considered himself a Pythagorean largely because he believed the philosopher to be an early user of hashish in his teaching. See Fitz Hugh Ludlow, *The Hasheesh Eater: Being Passages from the Life of a Pythagorean* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1857), 176–187.
124. Ibid., 18–19.
125. Boon, *Road of Excess*, 152.
126. William Blair, “An Opium Eater in America,” *Knickerbocker; or, New York Monthly Magazine*, July 1842, 47–57; reprinted in Horace B. Day, *The Opium Habit, with Suggestions as to the Remedy* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1868), 179–197. See also Zieger, “Pioneers,” 1535–1537.
127. Ludlow, *Hasheesh Eater*, 17.

128. Ibid., 230.
129. Fitz Hugh Ludlow, "The Apocalypse of Hasheesh," *Putnam's Monthly Magazine* 8, no. 48 (December 1856): 233–239; reprinted in Ludlow, *Hasheesh Eater*, 280–289.
130. Ludlow, *Hasheesh Eater*. Cannabis was first recommended as a cure for lockjaw by O'Shaughnessy.
131. See Fitz Hugh Ludlow, *The Annotated Hasheesh Eater*, ed. David M. Gross (n.p.: CreateSpace, 2007), xvii.
132. Donald Dulchinos, *Pioneer of Inner Space: The Life of Fitz Hugh Ludlow, Hasheesh Eater* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1998), 11.
133. Ludlow, *Hasheesh Eater*, v.
134. Ibid., vi.
135. Ibid., vii.
136. Ibid., xiii.
137. Later, Ludlow would become familiar with opium addiction as a result of visits to an asylum to visit those who had succumbed to it. In 1867, he produced the first article in a major American publication to address the issue: "What Shall They Do to Be Saved?," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, August 1867, 377–387; reprinted in Day, *Opium Habit*, 250–284.
138. Ludlow, *Hasheesh Eater*, ix.
139. Ibid., 123, 158.
140. Ibid., ix.
141. Ibid., x.
142. Plant, *Writing on Drugs*, 49.
143. Dulchinos, *Pioneer*, 58.
144. Ludlow, *Hasheesh Eater*, 106–107 (emphasis added).
145. "Sensitive organization" is an unusual term for Ludlow to use, and it suggests that he was referencing the theories of Karl von Reichenbach, who, as noted in the first volume of the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, discussed "certain organizations called 'sensitive.'" Society for Psychical Research, "Objects of the Society," *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 1 (1882): 3. Reichenbach's interest was in those "sensitive" individuals he believed were able to detect the universal "Odic" life force, which radiates from people, animals, and objects. See Karl von Reichenbach, *The Mysterious Odic Force*, trans. Leslie Korth (Wellingborough: Aquarian Press, 1977). Ludlow does make some reference to "the idea of force." He even uses the term "odic," although only as an adjective of odor. Ibid., 319.
146. Ludlow, *Hasheesh Eater*, 108.
147. Ibid.
148. Ibid., x.
149. Robert Irwin, *The Arabian Nights: A Companion* (London: Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2005), 154.
150. *The Book of the Thousand Nights and One Night*, 2nd ed., trans. Powys Mathers (London: Routledge, 1986), 1:567.

151. While Colin Campbell ignores the significance of *Arabian Nights*, for a useful short discussion of Easternization during this period, see his *The Easternization of the West: A Thematic Account of Cultural Change in the Modern Era* (Abingdon: Routledge/Paradigm, 2007), 25–30.
152. Irwin, *Arabian Nights*, 18. Concerning stories of the Orient that were “made up,” it should be noted that there is a question as to whether the initial translator of the *Arabian Nights*, Galland, had indeed fabricated some of them or, at least, significantly embellished them. See Irwin, *Arabian Night*, 16–18.
153. Yuriko Yamanaka and Tetsuo Nishio, “Introduction: The Imagined Other and the Reflected Self,” in Yuriko Yamanaka and Tetsuo Nishio, eds., *Arabian Nights and Orientalism: Perspectives from East and West* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), xv.
154. Saree Makdisi and Felicity Nussbaum, “Introduction,” in Saree Makdisi and Felicity Nussbaum, eds., *Arabian Nights in Historical Context: Between East and West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 2. See also Ulrich Marzolph, “The *Arabian Nights* in Comparative Folk Narrative Research,” in Yamanaka and Nishio, eds., *Arabian Nights*, 3–24.
155. Reardon, *Religion*, 3.
156. See for example, Ludlow, *Hasheesh Eater*, 85. See also the discussion of hashish-induced near-death experience in Ronald Siegel and Ada E. Hirschman, “Hashish Near-Death Experiences,” *Anabiosis: Journal of Near-Death Studies* 4, no. 1 (1984): 69–86.
157. Ludlow, *Hasheesh Eater*, 101.
158. See Leonard Jenkin, “The Golden Wrong: A Life of Fitz Hugh Ludlow, with an Examination of His Writings,” doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, 1972.
159. Ludlow, *Hasheesh Eater*, 305.
160. Laurens Perseus Hickok, *Rational Psychology; or, The Subjective Idea and the Objective Law of All Intelligence* (New York: Iveson, Phinney, 1861 [1849]). See also John Bare, “Laurens Perseus Hickok: Philosopher, Theologian, and Psychologist,” in Gregory Kimble and Michael Wertheimer, eds., *Portraits of Pioneers in Psychology* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1998), 3:1–15; John Bascom, “Laurens Perseus Hickok,” *American Journal of Psychology* 19, no. 3 (1908): 359–373.
161. See, for example, Bare, “Laurens Perseus Hickok,” 1–15; Bascom, “Laurens Perseus Hickok,” 359–373.
162. It is not mentioned at all by George Trumbull Ladd in *Elements of Physiological Psychology* (1887), Edwin Diller Starbuck in *The Psychology of Religion* (1899), or even William James in *Principles of Psychology* (1890) and *Varieties* (1902).
163. Hickok, *Rational Psychology*, 14.
164. See, for example, *ibid.*, 48–49.
165. *Ibid.*, 49.
166. *Ibid.*, 2.
167. Ludlow, *Hasheesh Eater*, 301.
168. *Ibid.*, 301–302. See Tommi Kakko’s analysis of Ludlow, which, although it wanders into areas of Kant that are not actually addressed in *The Hasheesh Eater*, is

- nevertheless a helpful discussion of some of the issues surrounding the significance of hallucinations: Tommi Kakko "Hallucinatory Terror: The World of the Hashish Eater," in Dale Jacquette, ed., *Cannabis—Philosophy for Everyone: What Were We Just Talking About?* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 103–113.
169. Ludlow is almost certainly drawing on Kant's use of the concept in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. That is to say, although he was a member of a Bohemian group to which Emerson also belonged, he is not here referring *directly* to American Transcendentalism. Although Dulchinos makes much of the influence of Emerson (e.g., *Pioneer*, 78), in fact Ludlow makes no reference to Emerson in either *The Hasheesh Eater* or "The Apocalypse of Hasheesh." Following Hickok, he is much more interested in Kant and subsequent Idealist thought.
 170. Ludlow, *Hasheesh Eater*, 114.
 171. *Ibid.*, 305–306.
 172. *Ibid.*, 55, 100, 146, 162, 172, 204, 242.
 173. *Ibid.*, 148–149.
 174. *Ibid.*, 148.
 175. *Ibid.*
 176. *Ibid.*, 149.
 177. *Ibid.*, 21, 148, 336–338.
 178. *Ibid.*, 341.
 179. Frank Carpenter, quoted in Dulchinos, *Pioneer*, 280.
 180. Dulchinos, *Pioneer*, 54.
 181. There is, for example, some evidence that he was influenced by the ideas of Emanuel Swedenborg, although it has to be said that he makes no direct reference to Swedenborg's thought. See Dulchinos, *Pioneer*, 77–78, 88.
 182. Ludlow, *Hasheesh Eater*, 150.
 183. *Ibid.*, 152.
 184. *Ibid.*, 159.
 185. *Ibid.*, 144–145.
 186. *Ibid.*, 145–146.
 187. Bernard McGinn, ed., *Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism* (New York: Random House, 2006), 365–366.
 188. Teresa of Ávila, *The Life of Teresa of Ávila*, trans. J. M. Cohen (London: Penguin, 1957), 234.
 189. Ludlow, *Hasheesh Eater*, 86.
 190. McGinn, *Essential Writings*, xvi.
 191. "Like Eblis, I refused to worship earth when I had seen heaven, and once more dared to assume his pride." Ludlow, *Hasheesh Eater*, 214.
 192. See, for example, Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Satan: The Early Christian Tradition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 130–133.
 193. Ludlow, *Hasheesh Eater*, 96.
 194. *Ibid.*, 74.
 195. *Ibid.*, 220.

196. Ibid., 96–97. These experiences of identification with Christ were initially discussed in his earlier article, “Apocalypse of Hasheesh,” 629–630.
197. See Norman Zinberg, *Drug, Set, and Setting: The Basis for Controlled Intoxicant Use* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).
198. Ludlow, “Apocalypse of Hasheesh,” 630.
199. Ludlow, *Hasheesh Eater*, 152.
200. Ibid., 75.
201. Ibid., 74.
202. Ibid., 74–75.
203. See Berke and Hernton, *Cannabis Experience*, 165–172.
204. Ludlow, *Hasheesh Eater*, 75.
205. Ibid., 64.
206. Ibid., 31.
207. Ibid., 64.
208. Ibid., 75.
209. Ludlow, “Apocalypse of Hasheesh,” 630.
210. For a useful philosophical analysis of this idea in Christian thought, see Charles Taliaferro, “Human Nature, Personal Identity, and Eschatology,” in Jerry L. Walls, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 536–542. See also Stephen Patterson’s discussion in *The Gospel of Thomas and Christian Origins: Essays on the Fifth Gospel* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 61–92.
211. Ludlow, *Hasheesh Eater*, 164–165.
212. Ibid., 75.
213. See also the lithograph from the French School entitled “Caricature of the Romantic Writer Searching his Inspiration in the Hashish” (c. 1849), held at Musée de la Ville de Paris, Musée Carnavalet, Paris, France. It been used to illustrate the cover of Benjamin’s *On Hashish*.
214. Dumas, *Count of Monte Cristo*, 228.
215. Ibid., 229.
216. Lee, *Smoke Signals*, 29.
217. Baudelaire, “Wine and Hashish,” 85–86.
218. Ibid., 87.
219. Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception; Heaven and Hell* (London: Flamingo, 1994), 46.
220. Ludlow, “Apocalypse of Hasheesh,” 630.
221. Ludlow, *Hasheesh Eater*, 32–33.
222. Bloch, *Principle of Hope*, 1:89.
223. Benjamin, “Hashish in Marseilles,” 117.
224. Bloch, *Principle of Hope*, 1:89.
225. Ibid.
226. See Benjamin, “From the Notebooks,” trans. Howard Eiland, in Benjamin, *On Hashish*, 142.
227. Howard Eiland, “Translator’s Foreword,” in Benjamin, *On Hashish*, ix.

CHAPTER 5

1. Paschal Beverly Randolph, *Guide to Clairvoyance* (Boston: Rockwell & Rollins, 1867), 3, 7, 39.
2. See, for example, Tatiana Kontou and Sarah Willbrun, eds., *The Ashgate Research Companion to Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism and the Occult* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), which omits any analysis of drug-induced transcendence. Even Marlene Tromp's *Altered States: Sex, Nation, Drugs, and Self-Transformation in Victorian Spiritualism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), despite its title, does very little to examine drug-induced altered states in Victorian Spiritualism and Theosophy.
3. Éliphas Lévi, *The History of Magic*, 2nd ed., trans. Arthur E. Waite (London: William Rider & Son, 1922), 106; see also 139, 436, 472.
4. Eugen Weber, *France, Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 29.
5. *Ibid.*, 31.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Sigmund Freud, "Über Coca" (1884). Reprinted in *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment* 1 (1984): 206–217.
8. Howard Shaffer, "Über Coca: Freud's Cocaine Discoveries," *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment* 1 (1984): 206.
9. Howard Markel, *An Anatomy of Addiction: Sigmund Freud, William Halsted, and the Miracle Drug, Cocaine* (New York: Vintage Books, 2012), 6.
10. Weber, *France*, 32.
11. Robert Chambers (although authors of articles in the journal are not identified, he wrote most of them during this period, so there is little reason to doubt his authorship of this), "The Hashish," *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal* 9, no. 256 (November 25, 1848): 341–344; republished in *Littell's Living Age* 20, no. 246 (February 3, 1849): 217–220; cf. Anonymous, "The Hashish," *Vermont Watcher and State Journal* 43, no. 29 (May 31, 1849): 1.
12. Chambers, "The Hashish," 341.
13. Jocelyn Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 281.
14. Frank Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism: A History and a Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1902), 182.
15. *Ibid.*, 182. See also Ronald Siegel and Ada E. Hirschman, "Hashish Near-Death Experiences," *Anabiosis: Journal of Near-Death Studies* 4, no. 1 (1984): 69–86.
16. Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism*, 84.
17. John Patrick Deveney, *Paschal Beverly Randolph: A Nineteenth-Century American Spiritualist, Rosicrucian and Sex Magician* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 52.
18. Randolph betrays the influence of *The Agraph* in his comments about, for example, the ability to contact living persons at distance by means of "the telegraph of the

- soul." Paschal Beverly Randolph, *Seership! The Magnetic Mirror: A Practical Guide for Those Who Aspire to Clairvoyance-Absolute: Original, and Selected from Various English and Asiatic Adepts* (Boston: Randolph, 1870), 83.
19. See Deveney, *Paschal Beverly Randolph*, 4.
 20. For example, see Marlene Tromp's discussion of Orientalism and gender in Spiritualism during this period in *Altered States*, 77–96; see also Christopher Partridge, "Lost Horizon: H. P. Blavatsky's Theosophical Orientalism," in Mikael Rothstein and Olav Hammer, eds., *Handbook of the Theosophical Current* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 309–333; Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, "The Theosophical Society, Orientalism, and the 'Mystic East': Western Esotericism and Eastern Religion in Theosophy," *Theosophical History* 13, no. 3 (2007): 3–28.
 21. Throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century, popular texts, such as Emma Hardinge Britten's *On the Road*, commend Cahagnet's *Celestial Telegraph* to their readers. It is, she says, "strongly recommended to the student, not only for the value of its facts and the soundness of its philosophy, but because it affords an excellent example of Spiritualism manifested through mesmerism, and presents the wonderful results obtained through clairvoyance and somnambulism." Emma Hardinge Britten, *On the Road, or The Spiritual Investigator: A Complete Compendium of the Science, Religion, Ethics, and Various Methods of Investigating Spiritualism* (Melbourne: George Robertson, 1878), 54. There is also evidence to suggest that it was being discussed in popular occult publications. See, for example, Fred Hockley, "Remarks upon the Rev. George Sandby's Review of M. Alphonse Cahagnet's *Arcanes de la Vie Future Devoilés*, &c.," *Zoist* 29 (April 1850): 54–64. Indeed, the article is followed by several pages of further discussion by other correspondents.
 22. Louis-Alphonse Cahagnet, *Sanctuaire du Spiritualisme* (Paris: Germer Baillière, 1850).
 23. Louis-Alphonse Cahagnet, "Hashish Visions," *Spiritual Telegraph and Fireside Preacher* 8, no. 36 (December 31, 1859): 424–425.
 24. Paschal Beverly Randolph, "What Effects Can Intoxicating Agents Have on the Soul of Man?," *Banner of Light* 8, no. 7 (November 10, 1860): 5.
 25. Anonymous, "Mr. Wilkie Collins and 'Precipitations,'" *Supplement to the Theosophist* 10 (October 1888): xxx (emphasis added).
 26. J. A. Anderson, "Alcohol," *Pacific Theosophist* 5, no. 4 (November 1894): 49.
 27. Adolph d'Assier, *Posthumous Humanity: A Study of Phantoms*, trans. Henry S. Olcott (London: George Redway, 1887), 223. From the few comments Podmore makes regarding drugs, it is clear that he too is not persuaded of their value as technologies of transcendence—see, for example, *Modern Spiritualism*, 330, 360.
 28. Paschal Beverly Randolph, "What Is Life? What Is Animal Life?," *Banner of Light* 8, no. 13 (December 22, 1860): 8.
 29. Jules Hinde, "Hashish," *Light: Journal of Psychical, Occult, and Mystical Research* 8, no. 645 (May 20, 1893): 233.
 30. See Alan Gauld, *A History of Hypnotism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

31. See Adam Crabtree, *From Mesmer to Freud: Magnetic Sleep and the Roots of Psychological Healing* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); Gauld, *History of Hypnotism*.
32. Adam Crabtree, "Animal Magnetism and Mesmerism," in Partridge, ed., *Occult World*, 188.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
36. William Gregory, *Letters to a Candid Inquirer, on Animal Magnetism* (Philadelphia: Blanchard & Lea, 1851), 138.
37. See, for example, his account of inducing Madame Pichard on August 31, 1848, in *Sanctuaire du Spiritualisme*, 165–176. As Antoine Faivre notes: "Ainsi, le 31 août 1848 il fit absorber du haschich à une de ses patientes, Mme Pichard, qui se mit alors à tenir des discours visionnaires à caractère cosmique, eux aussi." "Éloquence magique, ou descriptions des mondes de l'au-delà explorés par le magnétisme animal: au carrefour de la *Naturphilosophie* romantique et de la théosophie chrétienne (première moitié du XIXe siècle)," *Aries* 8, no. 2 (2008): 195. It is a little odd, therefore, that Susanna Crockford questions Faivre on this point, claiming that she has yet to find a reference to this. While Faivre may have inadvertently suggested that the account appears in *Arcanes de la vie future dévoilés* (translated as *The Celestial Telegraph*), it is clear that he had *Sanctuaire du spiritualisme* in mind: "From Spiritualist Magnetism to Spiritism: The Development of Spiritualism in France, 1840–1870," in Christopher Moreman, ed., *The Spiritualist Movement: Speaking with the Dead in America and Around the World* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2013), 140.
38. Cahagnet, *Celestial Telegraph; or Secrets of the Life to Come, Revealed Through Magnetism* (New York: J. S. Redfield, 1851 [1847]), 1:68.
39. Ibid., 1:68.
40. Ibid., 1:3.
41. Ibid., 1:100.
42. Randolph, *Seership!*, 29–30.
43. Louis-Alphonse Cahagnet, *Magnetic Magic: A Digest of the Practical Parts of the Masterpieces of L. A. Cahagnet*, ed. and trans. Robert Fryar (n.p.: privately printed, 1898), 24.
44. Ibid., 17.
45. Ibid.
46. It should be noted that his use of hashish seems measured. There is, in other words, little to support Ronald Siegel's unreferenced claim that he used "dosages of hashish ten times greater" than Gautier used. Siegel, *Intoxication: The Universal Drive for Mind-Altering Substances* (Rochester: Park Street Press, 2005), 165.
47. Cahagnet, *Sanctuaire*, 4–8; Louis-Alphonse Cahagnet, *The Sanctuary of Spiritualism; A Study of Human Soul, and of Its Relations with the Universe, Through Somnambulism and Ecstasy*, trans. M. Flinders Pearson (London: George Peirce, 1851), 3–6.

48. Cahagnet, *Sanctuary*, 4–6, 14.
49. Ibid., 4.
50. Ibid., 57.
51. He specifically mentions that he has read Jacob Böhme, Louis Claude de Saint-Martin, and Teresa of Ávila. Ibid., 142. See also Louis-Alphonse Cahagnet, ed., *Abrégé des Merveilles du ciel et de l'enfer d'Emmanuel Swedenborg avec annotations et observations* (Paris: Germer-Baillière, 1854), 3–5; and the references to Louis Claude de Saint-Martin in *Celestial Telegraph*, 1:3, 144, 175; 2:214, 216.
52. Cahagnet, *Sanctuary*, 67.
53. Ibid., 64.
54. Ibid.
55. Ibid., 64, 222.
56. Ibid., 29.
57. Ibid., 174–177; *Sanctuaire*, 283–287.
58. Cahagnet, *Sanctuary*, 184; cf. 177.
59. Ibid., 113.
60. Ibid., 4.
61. Cahagnet, “Hashish Visions,” 425; Cahagnet, *Sanctuary*, 75.
62. Cahagnet, “Hashish Visions,” 425; Cahagnet, *Sanctuary*, 75.
63. Cahagnet, *Sanctuary*, 76.
64. Cahagnet, “Hashish Visions,” 425; Cahagnet, *Sanctuary*, 76.
65. Cahagnet, “Hashish Visions,” 425.
66. Cahagnet, ed., *Abrégé des Merveilles*.
67. See Lynn Rosellen Wilkinson, *The Dream of an Absolute Language: Emanuel Swedenborg and French Literary Culture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 109.
68. Cahagnet, *Sanctuary*, 145.
69. Cahagnet, “Hashish Visions,” 425.
70. Cahagnet, *Sanctuary*, 67.
71. See Alan Gauld, *Mediumship and Survival: A Century of Investigations* (London: Heinemann, 1982), 220–224.
72. Cahagnet, *Sanctuary*, 4, 77.
73. Ibid., 4.
74. Ibid., 67.
75. Cahagnet, *Sanctuaire*, 129.
76. Cahagnet, *Sanctuary*, 66.
77. Paschal Beverly Randolph, *Dealings with the Dead; The Human Soul, Its Migrations and Its Transmigrations* (Utica: M. J. Randolph, 1862), 117, 272.
78. Paschal Beverly Randolph, “What Effects,” 5.
79. Randolph, “What Is Life?,” 8.
80. Randolph, *Guide*, 35.
81. Randolph, “What Is Life?,” 8.
82. Hugh Urban, “Paschal Beverly Randolph,” in Partridge, ed., *Occult World*, 231.

83. Paschal Beverly Randolph, *P. B. Randolph, the "Learned Pundit," and "Man with Two Souls," His Curious Life, Works and Career* (Boston: Randolph Publishing Co., 1872).
84. He isn't mentioned at all in Emma Hardinge Britten's *Modern American Spiritualism: A Twenty Years' Record of the Communion Between Earth and the World of Spirits* (New York: E. H. Britten, 1870); and he is only mentioned in passing in Podmore's *Modern Spiritualism*. The current scholarly interest in his work is largely the result of Deveney's impressive study, *Paschal Beverly Randolph*.
85. See, for example, *The Two Worlds* 3, no. 114 (January 17, 1890): i.
86. Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism*, 23, 26, 31.
87. *Ibid.*
88. Lana Finley, "Paschal Beverly Randolph in the African American Community," in Stephen C. Finley, Margarita Simon Guillory, and Hugh R. Page Jr., eds., *Esotericism in African American Religious Experience* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 37, 45.
89. Deveney, *Paschal Beverly Randolph*, 204.
90. See *ibid.*, 237–240.
91. Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (New York: D. Appleton, 1895 [1892]), 285–286.
92. Randolph, *Guide*, 48.
93. Paschal Beverly Randolph, "Rosicrucian Papers No. 5," *Religio-Philosophical Journal* 5, no. 20 (February 6, 1869): 3.
94. Randolph, *Seership!*, 30.
95. Randolph, "What Is Life?," 8.
96. Randolph, "What Effects," 5.
97. Paschal Beverly Randolph, "Hashish!," *Banner of Light* 8, no. 4 (October 20, 1860), 7.
98. Emma Hardinge Britten, quoted in Deveney, *Paschal Beverly Randolph*, 394. See also Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism*, 23, 26, 31.
99. See Deveney, *Paschal Beverly Randolph*, 211–228.
100. Paschal Beverly Randolph, *Eulis! The History of Love* (Toledo: Randolph Publishing Co., 1874), 48.
101. *Ibid.*
102. Christopher Partridge, "Lost Horizon: H. P. Blavatsky's Theosophical Orientalism," in Mikael Rothstein and Olav Hammer, eds., *Handbook of the Theosophical Current* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 309–333; Christopher Partridge, "Orientalism and the Occult," in Christopher Partridge, ed., *The Occult World* (London: Routledge, 2015), 611–625.
103. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003), 177.
104. Ludlow, *Hasheesh Eater*, x.
105. Nordau, *Degeneration*, 218.
106. Randolph, *Guide*, 3.
107. *Ibid.*
108. Randolph, *Eulis!*, 48.

109. Randolph, *Guide*, 17–18.
110. Randolph, “What Effects,” 5.
111. Randolph, *Guide*, 35–36.
112. Randolph, *Seership!*, 29–30.
113. Randolph, *Guide*, 41.
114. Randolph, *P. B. Randolph*, 9. He was particularly close to the Scottish medium Daniel Dunglas Home, whose best man he was and who had “become the latest thing in Parisian society.” Arthur F. Davidson, *Alexandre Dumas (Père): His Life and Works* (Westminster: Archibald Constable, 1902), 319. See also Mme. (Julie) Home, *D. D. Home, His Life and Mission*, ed. Arthur Conan Doyle (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1921), 61–64, 222.
115. Ludlow, *Hasheesh Eater*, 31, 37, 64, 92, 96, 102, 107, 111, 123, 227, 261; Chambers, “The Hashish,” 217.
116. See Théophile Gautier, “The Club of Assassins,” in Charles Baudelaire and Théophile Gautier, *Hashish, Wine, Opium*, trans. Maurice Strang (London: Calder & Boyars, 1972), 41–46; cf. Jacques-Joseph Moreau, *Hashish and Mental Illness*, trans. Gordon J. Barnett (New York: Raven Press, 1973), 7, 11, 77.
117. Gautier, “Club of Assassins,” 34.
118. Charles Baudelaire, *Artificial Paradises*, trans. Stacy Diamond (New York: Citadel Press, 1996), 36.
119. Randolph, “What Effects,” 5.
120. *Ibid.*
121. *Ibid.*
122. *Ibid.*
123. Randolph, *Guide*, 35.
124. *Ibid.*, 47.
125. Randolph, *Eulis!*, 48.
126. Randolph, *Dealings with the Dead*. This book notes that he was preparing a publication entitled *Hashish: Its Uses and Abuses*. There is, however, no known extant manuscript or, indeed, indication of whether it was eventually published.
127. On Platonic thought in early esotericism, see Dylan M. Burns, “Ancient Esoteric Traditions: Mystery, Revelation, Gnosis,” in Partridge, ed., *Occult World*, 17–33.
128. Deveney, *Paschal Beverly Randolph*, 103.
129. Randolph, *Dealings with the Dead*, 49.
130. *Ibid.*, 25, 50; cf. 186.
131. *Ibid.*, 25, 26.
132. He traces the journey of his monad through plant life, fish, mammals, to “Chimpanzee, Gorilla . . . Troglodyte . . . Bosjesman, Hottentot, Negro, Malay, Kanaka, Digger, Indian, Tartar, Chinese, Hindoos, Persians, Arabian, Greek, Turk, German, Baul, Briton, American! There’s the list, in general terms.” *Ibid.*, 47–48.
133. *Ibid.*, 48.

134. Ibid., 45.
135. Ibid., 21 (emphasis added).
136. Ibid., 54.
137. Cahagnet, "Hashish Visions," 425.
138. Benjamin Walker, *Beyond the Body: The Human Double and Astral Planes* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), 49.
139. Randolph, "What Is Life?," 8.
140. Ibid.
141. Ibid.
142. Ibid.
143. See, for example, Tromp, *Altered States*, 153–155; Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 64–65.
144. Tromp, *Altered States*, 151.
145. See Tromp's useful discussion of gender, stress, and alcoholism in late nineteenth-century Spiritualism in *ibid.*, 151–179.
146. Owen, *Darkened Room*, 65–66.
147. See Tromp, *Altered States*, 160–179.
148. Owen, *Darkened Room*, 65.
149. James Burns, quoted in *ibid.*
150. Alfred Smedley, quoted in Marlene Tromp, "Eating, Feeding and Flesh: Food in Victorian Spiritualism," in Tatiana Kontou and Sarah Willbrun, eds., *The Ashgate Research Companion to Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism and the Occult* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 298.
151. We might think here of Mary Douglas's famous structuralist analysis of dirt, contagion, and taboo in *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 2002 [1966]).
152. Tromp, "Eating," 298.
153. Chandos Leigh Hunt, *Vaccination Brought Home to the People* (London: James Burns, 1876), 17–18.
154. Chandos Leigh Hunt, *Private Instructions in the Science and Art of Organic Magnetism*, 3rd ed. (London: G. Wilson, 1885), 5.
155. Chandos Leigh Hunt, "The Action of Man upon the Spirit-World, and the Action of the Spirit World upon Man," *Medium and Daybreak* 8, no. 396 (November 2, 1877): 689.
156. Ibid.
157. Ibid., 689–690.
158. Leslie Mitchell, *Bulwer Lytton: The Rise and Fall of a Victorian Man of Letters* (London: Hambledon & London, 2003), 139–140.
159. James Brevitt, quoted in Tromp, *Altered States*, 154.
160. George Wyld, quoted in the "Publisher's Preface" to Cahagnet, *Magnetic Magic*, 10.

161. Emma Hardinge Britten, *Art Magic, or, Mundane, Sub-Mundane, and Super-Mundane Spiritualism* (New York: E.H. Britten, 1876), 170–171.
162. *Ibid.*, 128–129.
163. *Ibid.*, 162.
164. Emma Hardinge Britten, ed., *Ghost Land; or Researches into the Mysteries of Occult Spiritism* (Boston: E. H. Britten, 1876), 34, 379.
165. The account is reproduced in Helen Norton Stevens, *Memorial Biography of Adele M. Fielde: Humanitarian* (New York: Fielde Memorial Committee, 1918), 51–53.
166. See Leonard Warren, *Adele Marion Fielde: Feminist, Social Activist, Scientist* (London: Routledge, 2002), 135–145.
167. Adele M. Fielde, “An Experience in Hasheesh-Smoking,” *Therapeutic Gazette* 4 (1888): 449.
168. *Ibid.*, 451.
169. Anonymous, “The Psychic Effects of Hasheesh,” *Two Worlds* 3, no. 114 (January 17, 1890): 112. There are several basic errors in this article: as well as masculinizing her, the article cites the title of the original publication as *Popular Science Monthly*, rather than the *Therapeutic Gazette*.
170. *Ibid.*
171. Fielde, “Experience,” 449.
172. *Ibid.*, 449–450.
173. *Ibid.*, 450.
174. *Ibid.*
175. *Ibid.*
176. In China, she helped and worked with women who had suffered at the hands of husbands who were alcoholics or drug addicts. See Warren, *Adele Marion Fielde*, 89.
177. “Theosophy teaches that we should be very careful not to alter our consciousness by artificial means, so many Theosophists shun the use of drugs, including alcohol and tobacco, except under a doctor’s orders.” Theosophical Society in America, “Cults, the Occult, and Theosophy”: <https://www.theosophical.org/online-resources/leaflets/1793> (accessed June 7, 2016).
178. See, for example, Pablo Sender, “Drugs and Spirituality: An Occult Perspective,” *Quest* 103, no. 1 (Winter 2015): 16–19.
179. Maria Moritz, “Looking for Spirituality in India: A German Theosophist’s Experiments with *Ganga*, 1894–1896,” in Harald Fischer-Tiné and Jana Tschurenne, eds., *A History of Alcohol and Drugs in Modern South Asia: Intoxicating Affairs* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 128.
180. See *ibid.*, 128–129.
181. Bill Keiden and Geoffrey Hodson, “Mature Answers”: <http://www.geoffreyhodson.com/Mature-Answers.html> (accessed June 7, 2016).
182. *Ibid.*
183. *Ibid.*

184. See Benjamin Walker's helpful discussion of the "etheric body" in his *Encyclopedia of Esoteric Man* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), 88–89.
185. Keiden and Hodson, "Mature Answers."
186. See Annie Besant, *The Influence of Alcohol* (Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House 1892); Moritz, "Looking for Spirituality in India," 128–129.
187. Charles Leadbeater, *The Chakras: A Monograph* (Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House, 2009 [1927]): <http://www.anandgholap.net/Chakras-CWL.htm> (accessed June 5, 2016).
188. Ibid.
189. Helena P. Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, ed. Boris de Zirkoff (Wheaton: Theosophical Publishing House, 1950), 4:351–352.
190. Hannah M. Wolff, "Madame Blavatsky," *Two Worlds* 4, no. 213 (December 11, 1891): 671.
191. Albert Rawson, "Mme. Blavatsky: A Theosophical Occult Apology," *Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly*, February 1892, 202. He even illustrates his article with a sketch of her with cigarette in hand (201).
192. Wolff, "Madame Blavatsky," 672. Wolff, notes H. W. Burr, was "the widow of the late John B. Wolff, President of the First Spiritual Society of Washington D.C.," who "became acquainted with Blavatsky sometime before the publication of 'Isis Unveiled.'" *Madame Blavatsky* (n.p.: n.p., 1893), 1–2.
193. See Chapter 4; see also Randolph, *Guide*, 35–36.
194. Rawson, "Mme. Blavatsky," 202.
195. Blavatsky, quoted in *ibid.*
196. Helena P. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled: A Master-Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012 [1877]), 2:589.
197. Ibid., 2:589–590.
198. Helena P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011 [1888]), 2:378.
199. Ibid., 2:498–499.
200. Ibid., 2:45.
201. Ibid., 2:499.
202. Ibid., 1:523.
203. Ibid., 2:499.
204. Ibid., 2:124.
205. Helena P. Blavatsky, *Secret Instructions to Probators of an Esoteric Occult School* (Pomeroy: Health Research, 1969), 99. See also her comment on drug-induced artificial states of consciousness in *Secret Doctrine*, 3:566.
206. Helena P. Blavatsky, *Collected Writings*, ed. Boris de Zirkoff (Wheaton: Theosophical Publishing House, 1956), 7:58.
207. Ibid.
208. Dion Fortune, for example, insisted that not only are drugs "bad for the heart," but they resulted in "psychic obsession." Similarly, Francis King claimed that

- those who have not trained in a spiritual discipline “over many years . . . are likely to experience nothing but a welter of confused images, valueless at best, at worst resulting in some form of pathological psychic disturbance.” Francis King, *Tantra for Westerners: A Practical Guide to the Way of Action*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Mandrake, 2013), 139.
209. Eugen Weber, *Apocalypses: Prophecies, Cults, and Millennial Beliefs Through the Ages* (London: Hutchinson, 1999), 15.
 210. W. B. Yeats, *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats*, vol. 3: *Autobiographies*, ed. William H. O'Donnell and Douglas N. Archibald (New York: Scribner, 1999), 219–266.
 211. Mark Micale, “France,” in Michael Saler, ed., *The Fin-de-Siècle World* (London: Routledge, 2015), 100.
 212. Weber, *France*, 9.
 213. *Ibid.*, 10.
 214. *Ibid.*
 215. Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (New York: D. Appleton, 1895 [1892]).
 216. See *ibid.*, 230–232.
 217. *Ibid.*, 317–322.
 218. *Ibid.*, 285–286.
 219. *Ibid.*, 97.
 220. Arthur Symons, “The Decadent Movement in Literature” (1893), in Arthur Symons, *Selected Writings*, ed. Roger Holdsworth (New York: Routledge, 2003), 72.
 221. *Ibid.*
 222. Weber, *France*, 40.
 223. Joris-Karl Huysmans, *Against Nature*, trans. Robert Baldick (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1959); *The Damned (Là-Bas)*, trans. Terry Hale (London: Penguin, 2001).
 224. Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1992), 101. See also Robert Baldick, *The Life of J.-K. Huysmans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), 88.
 225. Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, 101.
 226. Dennis Denisoff, “Decadence and Aestheticism,” in Gail Marshall, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 38.
 227. Huysmans, quoted in Robert Ziegler, *Satanism, Magic and Mysticism in Fin-de-Siècle France* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 1.
 228. Richard D.E. Burton, quoted in Ziegler, *Satanism*, 4.
 229. Michael Saler, “Introduction,” in Saler, *Fin-de-Siècle World*, 3.
 230. Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 151.
 231. See Joscelyn Godwin, Christian Chancel, and John Patrick Deveney, *The Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor: Initiatic and Historical Documents of an Order of Practical Occultism* (York Beach: Samuel Weiser, 1995), 44.

232. Ibid., 74.
233. William Alexander Ayton, quoted in *ibid.*, 75, 77.
234. See Robert A. Gilbert, "The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn," in Partridge, ed., *Occult World*, 237–246; Robert A. Gilbert, *Revelations of the Golden Dawn: The Rise and Fall of a Magical Order* (London: Quantum, 1997).
235. Gilbert, "Hermetic Order," 237.
236. Owen, *Place of Enchantment*, 51–52.
237. Waite, quoted in Owen, *Place of Enchantment*, 52.
238. See Robert Fitzroy Foster, *W. B. Yeats: A Life. I: The Apprentice Mage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 108; Virginia Berridge, "The Origins of the English Drug 'Scene,' 1890–1930," *Medical History* 32, no. 1 (1988): 55.
239. Arthur Symons, quoted in Norman Alford, *The Rhymers' Club: Poets of the Tragic Generation* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1994), 80.
240. Symons, quoted in *ibid.*
241. Havelock Ellis, "Mescal: A New Artificial Paradise," *Contemporary Review* 73 (January 1898): 131; see also Havelock Ellis, "Mescal: A Study of a Divine Plant," *Popular Science Monthly*, May 1902, 52–71.
242. Peyote buttons were being traded by Parke, Davis & Co. as early as 1887. See, for example, an early advertisement in the *Therapeutic Journal* (1888), xxiv. The journal is saturated with Parke, Davis & Co. advertisements for a range of narcotic remedies.
243. Ellis, "Mescal," 140.
244. See Lester Grinspoon and James B. Bakalar, *Psychedelic Drugs Reconsidered* (New York: Lindesmith Center, 1997), 12; Sebastián Maríncolo, *High: Insights on Marijuana* (Indianapolis: Dog Ear Publishing, 2010), 73–85.
245. See, Christopher Partridge, "Psychedelic Music," in Christopher Partridge and Marcus Moberg, eds., *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Religion and Popular Music* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 294–305.
246. Ellis, "Mescal," 140.
247. Ibid., 134.
248. Ibid., 139.
249. Margaret Mills Harper, "Yeats and the Occult," in Marjorie Howes and John Kelly, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to W. B. Yeats* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 146. See also Denis Donoghue, *Irish Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 98–112; Mary Catherine Flannery, *Yeats and Magic: The Earlier Works* (Gerard's Cross: Colin Smythe, 1977); William Gorski, *Yeats and Alchemy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996); George Mills Harper, *Yeats's Golden Dawn: The Influence of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn on the Life and Art of W. B. Yeats* (London: Macmillan, 1974); George Mills Harper, ed., *Yeats and the Occult* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1975); George Mills Harper, *The Making of Yeats's "A Vision": A Study of the Automatic Script*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1987); Heather Martin, *W. B. Yeats: Metaphysician as*

- Dramatist* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1986); Virginia Moore, *The Unicorn: William Butler Yeats' Search for Reality* (New York: Macmillan, 1954).
250. W. B. Yeats, *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats*, vol. 8: *A Vision: The Original 1925 Version*, ed. Catherine E. Paul and Margaret Mills Harper (New York: Scribner, 2008), liv–lv.
251. W. B. Yeats, quoted in Lawrence Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt: A Life of Aleister Crowley* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2000), 60.
252. Donoghue, *Irish Essays*, 104. It should be noted that, according to James Webb, Yeats had been introduced to Sinnett's work by Edward Dowden in Dublin. *The Flight From Reason* (London: Macdonald, 1971), 209.
253. See Harper, *Yeats's Golden Dawn*.
254. Harper, "Yeats and the Occult," 144.
255. W. B. Yeats, *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats*, vol. 5: *Later Essays*, ed. William H. O'Donnell (New York: Scribner, 1994), 186.
256. It should also be noted that, particularly during periods when he was struggling emotionally, he was not above using drugs recreationally as a form of self-medication. See, for example, Foster, *W. B. Yeats*, 182–183.
257. See *ibid.*, 109.
258. W. B. Yeats, *Discoveries: A Volume of Essays* (Dundrum: Dun Emer Press, 1907), 24–25; cf. W. B. Yeats, *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats*, vol. 3: *Autobiographies*, ed. William H. O'Donnell and Douglas N. Archibald (New York: Scribner, 1999), 264. Louis Claude de Saint-Martin was a French esoteric thinker influenced by Jakob Böhme, whose writings he translated into French. He was a student of Martinès de Pasqually and a central figure in the emergence of Martinism. See Christian Giudice, "Martinism in Eighteenth-Century France," in Partridge, ed., *Occult World*, 182–187.
259. Yeats, *Discoveries*, 25.
260. *Ibid.*, 26.
261. *Ibid.*, 27.
262. Flannery, *Yeats and Magic*, 99–100.
263. W. B. Yeats, *The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats*, vol. 3: *Autobiographies* (New York: Scribner, 1999), 267–286.
264. Flannery, *Yeats and Magic*, 100–101.
265. Donoghue, *Irish Essays*, 105.
266. Anna MacBride White and A. Norman Jeffares, eds., *The Gonne-Yeats Letters, 1893–1938* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1994), 70; see also Warwick Gould, "'The Music of Heaven': Dorothea Hunter," in Deidre Toomey, ed., *Yeats and Women: Yeats Annual, No. 9* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1992), 156.
267. White and Jeffares, *The Gonne-Yeats Letters*, 71.
268. Foster, *W. B. Yeats*, 196.
269. Maude Gonne, *The Autobiography of Maud Gonne: A Servant of the Queen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 204.

270. Ibid.
271. An earlier version of this research was published as Christopher Partridge, "Aleister Crowley on Drugs," *International Journal for the Study of New Religions* 7, no. 2 (2016): 125–151.
272. See Richard Kaczynski, *Perdurabo: The Life of Aleister Crowley* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2010), 394.
273. W. B. Yeats, quoted in *ibid.*, 66, 73.
274. While Crowley's parents belonged to the Plymouth Brethren sect, his father, Edward, who was an itinerant preacher, came from a wealthy Quaker family who had made their fortune in the brewing industry.
275. Huysmans, *Against Nature*.
276. "Ethyl Oxide" was dictated to Leah Hirsig ("Alostrael") on May 30, 1923, in Tunisia. See Aleister Crowley, *Magical Diaries of Aleister Crowley: Tunisia 1923*, ed. Stephen Skinner (York Beach: Weiser, 1996), 33.
277. Posthumously published. Crowley wrote this admirably candid diary during a period of rehabilitation in Fontainebleu. It was originally entitled, "Liber TzBA Vel NIKH."
278. Aleister Crowley (writing under the pseudonym Oliver Haddo), "The Psychology of Hashish," in Israel Regardie and Aleister Crowley, *Roll Away the Stone: An Introduction to Aleister Crowley's Essays on the Psychology of Hashish, with the Complete Text of Aleister Crowley's "The Herb Dangerous"* (North Hollywood: Newcastle Publishing, 1994), 93–152; "The Drug," *Idler* 34, no. 36 (January 1909): 403–408, reprinted in Aleister Crowley, *The Drug and Other Stories* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2015), 107–113; "Cocaine," *International* 11, no. 10 (1917): 291–294; "Absinthe—The Green Goddess," *International* 11, no. 2 (1917): 47–51; "Liber XVIII: The Fountain of Hyacinth" (1921): <http://hermetic.com/crowley/libers/lib93.html> (accessed July 4, 2016). Cf. John Symonds, *The Great Beast: The Life and Magick of Aleister Crowley* (London: Macdonald, 1971), 274–283; *Diary of a Drug Fiend* (London: Abacus, 1979 [1922]); "A New York Specialist" (pseud.), "The Great Drug Delusion," *English Review*, June 1922, 571–576; "A London Physician" (pseud.), "The Drug Panic," *English Review*, July 1922, 65–70; "Ethyl Oxide" (1923): <http://lib.oto-usa.org/crowley/essays/ethyl-oxide.html> (accessed June 27, 2016).
279. Between 1909 and 1914 Crowley's journal *The Equinox* published a wide range of material, from poetry and short stories to discussions of yoga and the occult. The title reflects the fact that it was published twice a year on the vernal and autumnal equinoxes. Overall, there were ten issues.
280. E. P. Whineray, "A Pharmaceutical Study of Cannabis Sativa (Being a Collation of Facts as Known at the Present Date)," *Equinox* 1, no. 1 (1909): 233–255; Aleister Crowley, "The Psychology of Hashish," *Equinox* 1, no. 2 (1909): 31–89; Charles Baudelaire, "The Poem of Hashish," *Equinox* 1, no. 3 (1910): 39–64; Fitz Hugh Ludlow, "The Hasheesh Eater," *Equinox* 1, no. 4 (1910): 135–146.

- "The Herb Dangerous" is available in Israel Regardie and Aleister Crowley, *Roll Away the Stone and The Herb Dangerous* (North Hollywood: Newcastle Publishing, 1994).
281. Abraham Maslow, *Religions, Values, and Peak Experiences* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1964), 183.
 282. Crowley, "The Psychology of Hashish," 115.
 283. Martin Booth, *A Magick Life: A Biography of Aleister Crowley* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2000), 102.
 284. This was the motto for Crowley's short-lived journal, *The Equinox*, "the official organ" of the A.∴A.∴—the occult order he established following his departure from the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.
 285. Crowley, "Great Drug Delusion," 573.
 286. Aleister Crowley, *The Book of the Law* (York Beach: Red Wheel/Weiser, 1976 [1938]), 9.
 287. Aleister Crowley, *Magick: Liber ABA*, Book 4 (York Beach: Samuel Weiser, 2000 [1913]), 126.
 288. See Crowley, *Book of the Law*, 10.
 289. *Ibid.*, 19.
 290. Crowley, quoted in Booth, *Magick Life*, 334–335.
 291. Crowley, "Cocaine," 292.
 292. Israel Regardie was Crowley's secretary from 1928 to 1932. He was also an influential occultist and an important figure in the popularization of the Golden Dawn. See Gerald Suster, *Crowley's Apprentice: The Life and Ideas of Israel Regardie* (London: Rider, 1989).
 293. Israel Regardie, "Roll Away the Stone," in Regardie and Crowley, *Roll Away the Stone*, 23.
 294. Israel Regardie, *The Eye in the Triangle: An Interpretation of Aleister Crowley* (Las Vegas: New Falcon Publications, 2014 [1970]), 117–118.
 295. John F. C. Fuller, *The Star in the West: A Critical Essay upon the Works of Aleister Crowley* (London: Walter Scott, 1907), 305.
 296. Regardie, "Roll Away the Stone," 24 (emphasis in original). See also Crowley, "Psychology of Hashish," 119.
 297. Regardie, "Roll Away the Stone," 24.
 298. *Ibid.* (emphasis added).
 299. George Sylvester Viereck, in Crowley, "Cocaine," 291.
 300. See Richard Davenport-Hines, *The Pursuit of Oblivion: A Social History of Drugs* (London: Phoenix Press, 2002), 148–173.
 301. Crowley, "Cocaine," 293.
 302. *Ibid.*
 303. Regardie, "Roll Away the Stone," 9.
 304. Regardie, *Eye in the Triangle*, 127.
 305. Regardie, "Roll Away the Stone," 25–26.

306. The phrase is taken from *The Chaldean Oracles*. There are various translations available online. Crowley used the version edited by William Wynn Westcott. However, for a good translation and scholarly commentary, see Ruth Majercik, *The Chaldean Oracles: Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989), 38: "The initiate would aid in releasing the soul [loosening the girders of the soul] by engaging in certain breathing exercises."
307. Aleister Crowley, "The Temple of Solomon the King (Book 4)," *Equinox* 1, no. 4 (1910): 117.
308. Lawrence Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt: A Life of Aleister Crowley* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2000), 277.
309. Aleister Crowley, *Moonchild* (York Beach: Samuel Weiser, 1970 [1929]), 252.
310. Crowley, "Great Drug Delusion," 573.
311. *Ibid.*
312. Crowley, *Magick: Liber ABA*, 115.
313. Kaczynski, *Perdurabo*, 361.
314. *Ibid.*
315. John Symonds, who was not, it has to be said, a great admirer of Crowley, met him in 1946 and was appointed as his literary executor.
316. John Symonds, *The Magic of Aleister Crowley* (London: Frederick Muller, 1958), 76; see also John Symonds, *The Great Beast: The Life and Magick of Aleister Crowley* (London: Macdonald, 1971), 236–238, 245.
317. Aleister Crowley, "Liber XVIII: The Fountain of Hyacinth" (1921): <http://hermetic.com/crowley/libers/lib93.html> (accessed July 4, 2016); see also Symonds, *Great Beast*, 274–283.
318. Crowley, "Liber XVIII."
319. Symonds, *Magic*, 51.
320. Crowley, "Liber XVIII."
321. *Ibid.*
322. Crowley, "Cocaine," 294.
323. Aleister Crowley, "The Attainment of Happiness," *Vanity Fair*, November 1916: <https://www.100thmonkeypress.com/biblio/acrowley/periodicals/attainment/attainment.pdf> (accessed July 7, 2016).
324. See Richard Kaczynski, *The Weiser Concise Guide to Aleister Crowley* (San Francisco: Weiser, 2009), 29–30.
325. Marco Pasi is, understandably, skeptical that he ever managed to free himself from addiction, noting that following his failed attempt at Fontainebleau, he continued using until his death. Pasi, *Aleister Crowley and the Temptation of Politics* (London: Routledge, 2014), 17.
326. William S. Burroughs, *Junky* (London: Penguin, 1977 [1953]), xv–xvi.
327. Crowley, *Diary*, 353. The "astral shape" of "a jar of opium [is] a soft seductive woman with a cruel smile." Crowley, *Magick: Liber ABA*, 501.
328. See Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, 65.

329. Aleister Crowley, quoted in *ibid.*
330. Allan Bennett, quoted in Regardie, *Eye in the Triangle*, 117.
331. Regardie, *Eye in the Triangle*, 117.
332. Crowley, "Psychology of Hashish," 121.
333. *Ibid.*, 106–107.
334. *Ibid.*, 98.
335. Crowley, quoted in Kaczynski, *Weiser Concise Guide*, 64.
336. See Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, 35, 51.
337. Crowley, "Psychology of Hashish," 95.
338. *Ibid.*, 96.
339. *Ibid.*, 98.
340. *Ibid.*, 98–99.
341. Regardie, "Roll Away the Stone," 20.
342. *Ibid.*
343. *Ibid.*, 26–27.
344. Aleister Crowley, *The Book of Thoth* (York Beach: Weiser, 1974 [1944]), 124, 127.
345. Crowley, "Psychology of Hashish," 95.
346. *Ibid.*, 100. Fuller notes that the phrase originates in the Chaldean Oracles: "The girders of the soul which give her breathing are easy to be loosed." Fuller, *Star in the West*, 305 n. 3.
347. Fuller, *Star in the West*, 305.
348. Crowley, "Psychology of Hashish," 99.
349. *Ibid.*, 95.
350. Crowley, *Magick: Liber ABA*, 501.
351. Crowley, *Book of Thoth*, 124.
352. Robert Anton Wilson, "Introduction," in Regardie, *Eye in the Triangle*, xxiii; see also Robert Anton Wilson, *Sex, Drugs and Magick*, 2nd ed. (Tempe: New Falcon Publications, 2000); Booth, *Magick Life*, 336.
353. Louis Lewin, "Ueber Anhalonium Lewinii," *Archiv für experimentelle Pathologie und Pharmakologie* 26, no. 6 (1888): 401–411. In 1924, he published the influential study of psychoactive plants *Phantastica: Narcotic and Stimulating Drugs, Their Use and Abuse*, trans. P. H. A. Wirth (Rochester: Park Street Press, 1998 [1924]). Originally published in German, it was translated into English in 1933.
354. Aleister Crowley, *The Confessions of Aleister Crowley*, ed. John Symonds and Kenneth Grant (London: Arkana, 1989), 768.
355. It is sometimes mentioned in code. Because the initials of the drug, "A" and "L," correspond to Hebrew letters א (aleph) and ל (lamedh), in accordance with gematria, Crowley assigned it the number 31: א = 1; ל = 30. See Matthew Rogers, "Frenzies of the Beast: The Phaedran *Furores* in the Rites and Writings of Aleister Crowley," in Henrik Bogdan and Martin Starr, eds., *Aleister Crowley and Western Esotericism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 215; see also the table in Crowley, *Magical Diaries*, 230.

356. Aleister Crowley, "A.∴A.∴. Præmonstrance," *Equinox* 3, no. 1 (1919): 16.
357. Aleister Crowley, quoted in Symonds, *Great Beast*, 236.
358. Arthur Bernhard-Smith, "A Note on the Action of Mescal," *British Medical Journal* 2, no. 2740 (July 5, 1913): 21.
359. Aleister Crowley, "Energized Enthusiasm: A Note on Theurgy," *Equinox* 1, no. 9 (1913): 37.
360. See, for example, Kaczynski, *Perdurabo*, 315.
361. See Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, 229–230.
362. See *ibid.*, 253.
363. Crowley, "Energized Enthusiasm," 37.
364. Aleister Crowley, *The Vision and Voice, with Commentary and Other Papers* (Boston: Red Wheel/Weiser, 1998 [1922]), 259 n. 2.
365. Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, 209.
366. See, for example, Gordon Wasson, Albert Hofmann, and Carl Ruck, *The Road to Eleusis: Unveiling the Secret of the Mysteries* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2008); Gordon Wasson, "The Divine Mushroom of Immortality," in Peter T. Furst, ed., *Flesh of the Gods: The Ritual Use of Hallucinogens* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1972), 193–195; Gordon Wasson, "Persephone's Quest," in R. Gordon Wasson, Stella Kramrisch, Jonathon Ott, and Carl Ruck, *Persephone's Quest: Enthogens and the Origins of Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 33. See also Mircea Eliade, *From Primitives to Zen: A Thematic Sourcebook of the History of Religions* (London: Collins, 1967), 300–301.
367. Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, 210.
368. Raymond Radclyffe, quoted in Booth, *Magick Life*, 286–288.
369. Symonds, *Magic*, 105–106.
370. Crowley, *Book of the Law*, 31.
371. Symonds, *Magic*, 177–178; see also Symonds, *Great Beast*, 216.
372. "Lytton calls him Adonai in 'Zanoni,' and I often use this name in the note-books." Crowley, "Temple of Solomon the King (Book 1)," 159; cf. Edward Bulwer Lytton, *Zanoni* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood & Sons, 1861), 1:130.
373. Lytton, *Zanoni*, 1:139; see also 2:46–61, 81, 99–111.
374. *Ibid.*, 1:139; see also 2:31, 101.
375. *Ibid.*, 1:139; see also 2:102–104.
376. *Ibid.*, 1:130.
377. Marco Pasi, "The Varieties of Magical Experience: Aleister Crowley's Views on Occult Practice," in Henrik Bogdan and Martin Starr, eds., *Aleister Crowley and Western Esotericism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 73.
378. *Ibid.*
379. Crowley, "Psychology of Hashish," 133.
380. *Ibid.*, 141–142.
381. *Ibid.*, 142.
382. Throughout his discussion, his estimation of Crowley is almost entirely lacking in critical distance and, indeed, approaches hagiography. For example, not only does

he claim that his “fine classical and scientific education at Cambridge” (omitting to mention that he failed to complete his studies) and “his mountaineering exploits” equipped him to “tackle the problem of psychedelic drugs” (how, he does not say), but he goes on to insist that “Crowley was an experimental mystic of the highest magnitude. He had practiced yoga and magical techniques assiduously for many years until he had achieved a thoroughgoing mastery over both Eastern and Western methods. All of these rare skills were eventually brought to bear on his experimentation with a variety of drugs.” Moreover, Crowley’s writings, he claims, “bear witness to, and provide massive evidence of, his objective and scientific attitude to the whole process.” This is actually very far from being the case. See Regardie, “Roll Away the Stone,” 42–43.

383. Suster, *Crowley's Apprentice*, 142.
384. *Ibid.*, 143.
385. *Ibid.*
386. *Ibid.*, 142.
387. See Regardie, “Roll Away the Stone,” 39.
388. *Ibid.*, 40.
389. *Ibid.*, 25.
390. Kenneth Grant, quoted in Suster, *Crowley's Apprentice*, 141.
391. See Regardie, “Roll Away the Stone,” 38–39.
392. *Ibid.*, 41.
393. See Suster, *Crowley's Apprentice*, 140–144.
394. *Ibid.*, 143–144.
395. King, *Tantra*, 138. James Webb even claims that there is “first hand evidence” provided by “a former disciple of Crowley”; Webb, *The Occult Establishment* (La Salle: Open Court, 1976), 439, 482. See also Tobias Churton, *Aleister Crowley: The Beast in Berlin: Art, Sex, and Magick in the Weimar Republic* (Rochester: Inner Traditions, 2014), 171–172; Chris Bennett, Lynn Osburn, and Judy Osburn, *Green Gold the Tree of Life: Marijuana in Magic and Religion* (Frazier Park: Access Unlimited, 1995), 253.
396. Aldous Huxley, quoted in Nicholas Murray, *Aldous Huxley: An English Intellectual* (London: Abacus, 2003), 399.
397. Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception; Heaven and Hell* (London: Flamingo, 1994), 3.
398. Sissy Wessberg, quoted in David King Dunaway, *Aldous Huxley Recollected: An Oral History* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1995), 93–94.
399. Francis Huxley, “Aldous,” in Dunaway, *Aldous Huxley Recollected*, xi.
400. Sybille Bedford, *Aldous Huxley: A Biography*, vol. 2: 1939–1963 (London: Chatto & Windus, 1974), 143.
401. George Pendle, *Strange Angel: The Otherworldly Life of Rocket Scientist John Whiteside Parsons* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2005), 134.
402. John Carter, *Sex and Rockets: The Occult World of Jack Parsons* (Port Townsend: Feral House, 2004), 124.

403. Martin P. Starr, *The Unknown God: W. T. Smith and the Thelemites* (Bolingbrook: Teitan Press, 2003), 37.
404. Robert Cornow, quoted in Pendle, *Strange Angel*, 324.
405. Parsons, quoted in *ibid.*, 218.
406. Parsons, quoted in Carter, *Sex and Rockets*, 125.
407. Philippe Vergne, quoted in Priscilla Frank, "Meet Cameron, the Countercultural Icon Who Bewitched Los Angeles," *Huffington Post*, August 8, 2014: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/08/08/marjorie-cameron-moca_n_5656561.html (accessed July 6, 2016).
408. Rani Singh, "Harry Smith, An Ethnographic Modernist in America," in Andrew Perchuk and Rani Singh, eds., *Harry Smith: The Avant-Garde in the American Vernacular* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2010), 44.
409. See Harry Smith, *Think of the Self Speaking: Selected Interviews* (Seattle: Elbow/Cityful Press, 1999).
410. Harry Smith, *Heaven and Earth Magic* (originally released in 1957, then reedited several times and released in 1962); *The Kiowa Peyote Meeting* (Folkways, 1973); *Anthology of American Folk Music* (Folkways, 1952)
411. Harry Smith, "Liner Notes," *Anthology of American Folk Music*, 18. The Smithsonian Institution has made these liner notes, along with the notes from the 1997 release of the anthology, available for download at: <http://www.folkways.si.edu/albumdetails.aspx?itemid=2426> (accessed July 4, 2012).
412. Singh, "Harry Smith," 29.
413. William Breeze, quoted in *ibid.*, 49.
414. See Christopher Partridge, *The Lyre of Orpheus: Popular Music, the Sacred and the Profane* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 157–168.
415. Quoted in Genesis P-Orridge, ed., *The Psychick Bible*, 2nd ed. (Port Townsend: Feral House, 2006), iii. See also David Keenan, *England's Hidden Reverse: A Secret History of the Esoteric Underground*, 2nd ed. (London: Strange Attractor Press, 2016), 55–60.
416. Jason Louv, "Introduction: On the Way to the Garden," in Genesis P-Orridge, *The Psychick Bible*, 2nd ed. (Port Townsend: Feral House, 2006), 19.
417. See Armand Hoog, "Who Invented the *Mal du Siècle*?" *Yale French Studies* 13 (1954): 42–51.
418. Symonds, *Magic*, 119.
419. King, *Tantra*, 138.
420. Don Webb, *Overthrowing the Old Gods: Aleister Crowley and the Book of the Law* (Rochester: Inner Traditions, 2013), 5.
421. Kaczynski, *Perdurabo*, 562.
422. William Breeze, an accomplished violist, is perhaps most well known outside occult circles for his work with the bands Psychic TV, Coil, and Current 93, all of which share an interest in Crowley and modern occultism. See, for example, Keenan, *England's Hidden Reverse*, 370–372.
423. William Breeze, "Introduction," in Crowley, *The Drug*, xi, xiii. A similar point is suggested by Regardie in "Roll Away the Stone," 5.

424. Booth, *Magick Life*, 336.
425. Timothy Leary, *The Politics of Ecstasy* (London: Paladin, 1970), 97. See also Robert Greenfield, *Timothy Leary: A Biography* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2006), 430–431.
426. Timothy Leary, *Flashbacks: A Personal and Cultural History of an Era. An Autobiography* (New York: Tarcher/Putnam, 1990), 258.
427. Art Kleps, *Millbrook: A Narrative of the Early Years of American Psychedelianism* (Oakland: Original Kleptonian Neo-American Church, 1975), 243.
428. Timothy Leary, *Confessions of a Hope Fiend* (New York: Bantam, 1973), 60, 173, 197, 287–288.
429. Leary, *Flashbacks*, 199.
430. Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (London: Faber & Faber, 1971), 147.
431. The books in which Leary references Crowley most are Leary, *Confessions* and Timothy Leary, *The Game of Life* (Phoenix: New Falcon Publications, 1993 [1979]). However, again, although some interesting, if highly idiosyncratic points are made, they do not amount to a serious engagement with his work.
432. Suster, *Crowley's Apprentice*, 140.
433. See Christopher Partridge, “Aleister Crowley on Drugs,” *International Journal for the Study of New Religions* 7, no. 2 (2016): 125–151.
434. “I should have been assigned publicly my proper place among my peers of the past without difficulty had it not been for one fatal fact. My point of view is so original, my thoughts so profound, and my allusions so recondite, that superficial readers, carried away by the sheer music of the words, found themselves, so to speak, intoxicated and unable to penetrate to the pith.” Crowley, quoted in Booth, *A Magick Life*, 244.
435. See Nicholas Campion, *The New Age in the Modern West: Counterculture, Utopia, and Prophecy from the Late Eighteenth Century* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 57–70.
436. See Crowley, *Book of the Law*, 12–13.
437. Nordau, *Degeneration*, 285.
438. Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, 101.
439. See Egil Asprem, *The Problem of Disenchantment: Scientific Naturalism and Esoteric Discourse 1900–1939* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 516–518.
440. Robert Chambers, “The Hashish,” *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal* 9, no. 256 (November 25, 1848): 341.
441. Gonne, *Autobiography*, 204.

CHAPTER 6

1. Oliver Sacks, *Hallucinations* (London: Picador, 2012), 97.
2. Ralph Metzner, “Introduction,” in Ralph Metzner, ed., *The Ecstatic Adventure* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), 7.
3. Douglas Osto, *Altered States: Buddhism and Psychedelic Spirituality in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 186.

4. From Timothy Leary's essay "Homage to Huxley," published in *The Politics of Ecstasy* (London: Paladin, 1970 [1968]), 254.
5. David Solomon, ed., *LSD: The Consciousness Expanding Drug* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons/Berkeley Medallion Books, 1966), v.
6. Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception; Heaven and Hell* (London: Flamingo, 1994), 62.
7. Robert Masters and Jean Houston, *Psychedelic Art* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1968), 18.
8. See, for example, the list of studies in Heinrich Klüver, "Mescal Visions and Eidetic Vision," *American Journal of Psychology* 37, no. 4 (1926): 514–515.
9. Louis Lewin, *Phantastica: Narcotic and Stimulating Drugs, Their Use and Abuse*, trans. P. H. A. Wirth (Rochester: Park Street Press, 1998 [1924]).
10. Kurt Beringer, *Der Meskalinrausch. Seine Geschichte und Erscheinungsweise* (Berlin: Julius Springer Verlag, 1927).
11. Heinrich Klüver, "Mescal Visions and Eidetic Vision," *American Journal of Psychology* 37, no. 4 (1926): 502–515.
12. Heinrich Klüver, *Mescal: The "Divine" Plant and Its Psychological Effects* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1928).
13. Jean Etienne Equirol, quoted in Marcus Boon, *The Road of Excess: A History of Writing on Drugs* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 132.
14. See Dan Merkur, *The Ecstatic Imagination Psychedelic Experiences and the Psychoanalysis of Self-actualization* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 49–65.
15. "For the psychology of schizophrenia . . . mescal experiments might play a part in throwing light upon the genesis and pathology of the subject-object relation. And mescal seems especially recommendable, since it does not destroy the critical attitude of the observer." Klüver, "Mescal Visions," 513.
16. Lewin, *Phantastica*, 76.
17. *Ibid.*
18. Irvine Page, "Chemistry of the Brain: Past Imperfect, Present Indicative, and—Future Perfect?," *Science* 125, no. 3251 (April 19, 1957): 726.
19. *Ibid.*, 727.
20. Lewin, *Phantastica*, 80.
21. Charles S. Grob, "Psychiatric Research with Hallucinogens: What Have We Learned?," *Heffter Review of Psychedelic Research* 1 (1998): 10.
22. See Page, "Chemistry of the Brain," 723.
23. Linnda Caporael has argued that the symptoms of ergotism may have been responsible for accusations of bewitchment during the Salem witch trials: "Ergotism: The Satan Loose in Salem," *Science* 192, no. 4234 (April 2, 1976): 21–26. This, however, has been questioned by, among others, Nicholas Spanos: "Ergotism and the Salem Witch Panic: A Critical Analysis and an Alternative Conceptualization," *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 19 (1983): 358–369.

24. Albert Hofmann, *LSD: My Problem Child and Insights/Outlooks*, trans. Jonathon Ott, ed. Amanda Fielding (Oxford: Beckley Foundation Press/Oxford University Press, 2013), 18.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid., 3.
28. Ibid., 3–4. Interestingly, the metaphysical “visions of . . . youth” were also important for Humphry Davy: *Fragmentary Remains, Literary and Scientific, of Sir Humphry Davy* (London: John Churchill, 1858), 13.
29. Hofmann, *LSD*, 4 (emphasis added).
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid., 38–39; see also Albert Hofmann, *Erinnerungen Eines Psychonauten: Von Der Entdeckung Entheogener Drogen* (Berlin: Supposé, 2003 [spoken word CD]).
33. Hofmann, *LSD*, 39.
34. Ibid. For a recent overview of LSD research, see Torsten Passie, John Halpern, Dirk Stichtenoth, Hinderk Emrich, and Annelie Hintzen, “The Pharmacology of Lysergic Acid Diethylamide: A Review,” *CNS Neuroscience and Therapeutics* 14 (2008): 295–314.
35. Werner Stoll was the son of Arthur Stoll, a professor of chemistry at Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich and president of Sandoz from 1949 to 1956.
36. Quoted in Martin A. Lee and Bruce Shlain, *Acid Dreams: The Complete Social History of LSD* (New York: Grove Press, 1992), 13–14.
37. Ibid., 19–20.
38. Steven Novak, “LSD Before Leary: Sidney Cohen’s Critique of 1950s Psychedelic Drug Research,” *Isis: A Journal of the History of Science* 88 (1997): 91–92.
39. Sidney Katz, “My 12 Hours as a Madman,” *Maclean’s*, October 1, 1953, 9–11, 46–55.
40. Erika Dyck, *Psychedelic Psychiatry: LSD from Clinic to Campus* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 34. Dyck also provides a number of interesting photographs of Katz during the experiment.
41. Novak, “LSD Before Leary,” 92.
42. Ibid.
43. See Don Lattin, *Distilled Spirits: Getting High, then Sober, with a Famous Writer, a Forgotten Philosopher, and a Hopeless Drunk* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).
44. Gerald Heard, “The Poignant Prophet,” *Kenyon Review* 27, no. 1 (1965): 65.
45. Gerald Heard, quoted in Novak, “LSD Before Leary,” 93.
46. Gerald Heard, quoted in *ibid.*
47. According to the psychologist Betty Eisner, who worked with Cohen, Wilson even considered using LSD within Alcoholics Anonymous. See Lattin, *Distilled Spirits*, 197–199.

48. Aldous Huxley, "Letter: To Dr. Humphry Osmond (12 January, 1955)," in Michael Horowitz and Cynthia Palmer, eds., *Moksha: Aldous Huxley's Classic Writings on Psychedelics and the Visionary Experience* (Rochester: Park Street Press, 1999), 69.
49. Ibid.
50. Lee and Shlain, *Acid Dreams*, 44.
51. Available at the Psychedelic Museum: <https://ehive.com/collections/6444/objects/658643/mother-hubbard-is-my-connection-ld-related-badge> (accessed June 30, 2017).
52. Lee and Shlain, *Acid Dreams*, 44.
53. Ibid., 45.
54. Ronald Sandison, *A Century of Psychiatry, Psychotherapy and Group Analysis: A Search for Integration* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2001), 32.
55. Ronald Sandison, quoted in Andy Roberts, *Albion Dreaming: A Popular History of LSD in Britain* (London: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2008), 57.
56. Alfred Hubbard, quoted in Lee and Shlain, *Acid Dreams*, 45.
57. Huxley, "Letter: To Dr. Humphry Osmond (23 December, 1955)," 86.
58. Lee and Shlain, *Acid Dreams*, 49.
59. Richard Gehman, "The Ageless Cary Grant," *Good Housekeeping*, September 1960, 66–67, 144–160. See also Laura Berquist, "The Curious Story Behind the New Cary Grant," *Look*, September 1959, 57–59; Joe Hyams, "Grant Tells Why Marriage Failed," *New York Herald Tribune*, April 21, 1959, 22; Joe Hyams, "What Psychiatry Has Done for Cary Grant," *New York Herald Tribune*, April 20, 1959, 16; Joe Hyams, "How a New Shock Drug Unlocks Troubled Minds," *This Week* (*Los Angeles Times* Sunday supplement), November 8, 1959, 6–7, 9–10; Gloria Powell, "How LSD Changed Cary Grant's Private Life," *National Police Gazette*, December 1967, 3–4, 25. For a useful popular discussion of Cary's LSD use, see Judy Balaban and Cari Beauchamp, "Cary in the Sky with Diamonds," *Vanity Fair*, July 8, 2010. There is also a useful discussion in Stephen Siff, *Acid Hype: American News Media and the Psychedelic Experience* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 99–104.
60. Hyams, "What Psychiatry Has Done for Cary Grant," 16.
61. See particularly Theodore Roszak's work: *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (London: Faber & Faber, 1970 [1968]); *Where the Wasteland Ends: Politics and Transcendence in Postindustrial Society* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1972); *Unfinished Animal: The Aquarian Frontier and the Evolution of Consciousness* (London: Faber & Faber, 1976).
62. Aldous Huxley, quoted in Nicholas Murray, *Aldous Huxley: An English Intellectual* (London: Abacus, 2003), 315.
63. A selection of articles, including several from Huxley, from the magazine were subsequently published in Christopher Isherwood, ed., *Vedanta for the Western World* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1948). A selection of Huxley's articles from

- the magazine have been compiled in Aldous Huxley, *The Divine Within: Selected Writings on Enlightenment* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1992).
64. Murray, *Aldous Huxley*, 383.
 65. Sybille Bedford, *Aldous Huxley: A Biography*, vol. 2: 1939–1963 (London: Chatto & Windus, 1974), 116.
 66. Huxley, quoted in *ibid.*
 67. Huxley, quoted in Murray, *Aldous Huxley*, 383.
 68. See Christopher Partridge, “UFO Religions,” in George Chryssides and Benjamin Zeller, eds., *The Bloomsbury Handbook of New Religious Movements* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 209–211.
 69. Huxley, quoted in Murray, *Aldous Huxley*, 388.
 70. Gerald Heard, *The Riddle of the Flying Saucers: Is Another World Watching?* (London: Carroll & Nicholson, 1950). The book’s central thesis concerns Martian bees (yes, “bees”!) concerned about the cosmic effects of atomic testing and nuclear war.
 71. Murray, *Aldous Huxley*, 300.
 72. Grace Hubble, quoted in Murray, *Aldous Huxley*, 316.
 73. Huxley, quoted in Murray, *Aldous Huxley*, 405.
 74. Robert S. de Ropp, *Drugs and the Mind* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1958), 52.
 75. See, for example, Aldous Huxley, “A Case for ESP, Pk, and Psi,” *Life*, January 11, 1954, 96–100, 102, 104, 106, 108.
 76. Problems with his eyesight date back to 1911 (although there is evidence that the health of his eyes was never very good), when he succumbed to a severe case of keratitis punctate. This, along with, no doubt, some of the ophthalmic treatments used at the beginning of the twentieth century, resulted in virtual blindness for almost eighteen months and significantly impaired sight for the rest of his life. See Murray, *Aldous Huxley*, 30–35, 386–387.
 77. “And so it was that at eleven o’clock one morning, 4 May 1953, the most famous English literary drug-taking since De Quincey took place in Huxley’s Hollywood home.” *Ibid.*, 399. The quotations are from Francis Huxley, “Aldous,” in David King Dunaway, *Aldous Huxley Recollected: An Oral History* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1995), xi.
 78. This photograph is reproduced in Allene Symons, *Aldous Huxley’s Hands: His Quest for Perception and the Origin and Return of Psychedelic Science* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2015), 131; Horowitz and Palmer, eds., *Moksha*, ii.
 79. The reference is, of course, to Huxley’s novel *Eyeless in Giza* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1936).
 80. Huxley, “Aldous,” xi.
 81. *Ibid.*, xii.
 82. Huxley, quoted in *ibid.*
 83. Huxley, quoted in *ibid.*, xiii.

84. Humphry Osmond and John Smythies, "Schizophrenia: A New Approach," *British Journal of Psychiatry* 98, no. 411 (1952): 309–315.
85. *Ibid.*, 310.
86. *Ibid.*, 311.
87. *Ibid.*
88. *Ibid.*, 133–142.
89. "Mescaline" is a variant spelling common in the early twentieth century.
90. Huxley, *Doors of Perception*, 2–3.
91. John Smythies and Humphry Osmond, "The Present State of Psychological Medicine," *Hibbert Journal* 51 (1953): 133–142. See also John Smythies and Vanna Smythies, *Two Coins in the Fountain: A Love Story* (Scotts Valley: BookSurge Publishing, 2005), 53.
92. Huxley, *Doors of Perception*, 3.
93. Humphry Osmond, "May Morning in Hollywood," in Horowitz and Palmer, eds., *Moksha*, 32–39.
94. Smythies and Smythies, *Two Coins*, 54.
95. Huxley, "Letter to Dr. Humphry Osmond (19 April, 1953)," in Horowitz and Palmer, eds., *Moksha*, 29.
96. *Ibid.*
97. *Ibid.*
98. See, for example, Aldous Huxley, "Mescaline and the 'Other World' (1955)," in Horowitz and Palmer, eds., *Moksha*, 61–66; R. D. Laing, "Transcendental Experience in Relation to Religion and Psychosis," *Psychedelic Review* 6 (1965): 7–15.
99. Huxley, "Letter to Dr. Humphry Osmond (19 April, 1953)," 30.
100. *Ibid.* (emphasis added).
101. Osmond, "May Morning in Hollywood," 32.
102. Bedford, *Aldous Huxley*, 142–143.
103. Huxley, "Letter to Dr. Humphry Osmond (30 March, 1956)," in Horowitz and Palmer, eds., *Moksha*, 107.
104. *Ibid.*
105. Osmond, quoted in *ibid.*, 107.
106. Osmond, quoted in *ibid.*, 107.
107. Humphry Osmond, "A Review of the Clinical Effects of Psychotomimetic Agents," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 66 (March 1957): 429.
108. Peter Haining, "The Psychedelic Generation: A Retrospective Introduction," in P. Haining, ed., *The Walls of Illusion: A Psychedelic Retro* (London: Souvenir Press, 1998), 9.
109. David Bradshaw, "Aldous Huxley (1894–1963)," in Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception; Heaven and Hell* (London: Flamingo, 1994), xiii.
110. Huston Smith, *Cleansing the Doors of Perception: The Religious Significance of Entheogenic Plants and Chemicals* (New York: Tarcher/Putnam, 2000), 63.

111. Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater and Other Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 68.
112. While usage varies a little, *yagé* is another term for the Amazonian psychoactive plant/potion *ayahuasca*.
113. William S. Burroughs, "In Search of Yage," in William S. Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg, *The Yage Letters*, ed. Oliver Harris (London: Penguin, 2006), 50.
114. Lester Grinspoon and James B. Bakalar, *Psychedelic Drugs Reconsidered* (New York: Lindesmith Center, 1997), 102.
115. Huxley, *Doors of Perception*, 10.
116. *Ibid.*
117. *Ibid.*, 8, 10, 15–17.
118. *Ibid.*, 7.
119. *Ibid.*; cf. Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1944), 30.
120. *Ibid.*, 7–8.
121. See particularly Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy*.
122. Walter T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy* (Los Angeles: J. P. Tarcher, 1987), 132.
123. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (London: Longmans, Green, 1929 [1902]), 419.
124. Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness* (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2002 [1911]), 72.
125. Huxley, "Culture and the Individual," in Horowitz and Palmer, eds., *Moksha*, 254–255.
126. Huxley, *Perennial Philosophy*, 35 (emphasis added).
127. Grinspoon and Bakalar, *Psychedelic Drugs*, 103.
128. See, for example, Dunlap, *Exploring Inner Space*, 118–133.
129. Huxley, *Doors of Perception*, 8.
130. Huxley, "Culture and the Individual," 253, 254.
131. *Ibid.*, 255.
132. Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (London: Vintage, 2007 [1932]), 46, 47.
133. Aldous Huxley, *Island* (St. Albans: Triad/Panther Books, 1976 [1962]).
134. Huxley, "Culture and the Individual," 255.
135. Laura Huxley, "Love and Work (1962)," in Horowitz and Palmer, eds., *Moksha*, 223.
136. Huxley, *Doors of Perception*, 11.
137. See Jake Poller, "Beyond the Subliminal Mind: Psychical Research in the Work of Aldous Huxley," *Aries: Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism* 15 (2015), 247–266.
138. C. D. Broad, quoted in *ibid.*
139. Huxley, "Love and Work (1962)," 223.
140. Huxley, *Doors of Perception*, 12–13.
141. Hick, *Fifth Dimension*, 100.
142. *Ibid.*

143. Ibid., 108.
144. Huxley, "Culture and the Individual," 248.
145. Huxley, quoted in Bedford, *Aldous Huxley*, 333.
146. Laura Huxley, "O Nobly Born! (1963)," in Horowitz and Palmer, eds., *Moksha*, 262–266.
147. Bedford, *Aldous Huxley*, 332.
148. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Stephen Kalberg (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).
149. Vatican, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, rev. ed. (London: Burns & Oates, 1999), 400.
150. Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Mephistopheles: The Devil in the Modern World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 58.
151. "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?" (Mark 8:34–37).
152. Baudelaire, "Poem of Hashish," 75.
153. Robert C. Zaehner, *Mysticism, Sacred and Profane: An Inquiry into Some Varieties of Praeternatural Experience* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 200–202.
154. The lecture was subsequently published in Robert C. Zaehner, *Concordant Discord: The Interdependence of Faiths* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970).
155. Michael Dummett, "Introduction," in Robert C. Zaehner, *The City Within the Heart* (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1980), xii.
156. Robert C. Zaehner, quoted in Jeffrey Kripal, *Roads of Excess, Palaces of Wisdom: Eroticism and Reflexivity in the Study of Mysticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 161.
157. Zaehner, *Concordant Discord*, 429.
158. Zaehner, *Mysticism, Sacred and Profane*, ix.
159. Ibid.
160. Robert C. Zaehner, *Drugs, Mysticism and Make-Believe* (London: Collins, 1972), 66.
161. Ibid. Incidentally, Ron Clark's design for the dust jacket of the first British edition of this book has always struck me as inspired, in that around a large photograph of Pope John XXIII there are smaller photographs of Leary, his followers, and a hippie in Katmandu. Not only does this faithfully illustrate the content of the book, but, as we will see, it also reflects Zaehner's overall theological bias and his principal concerns about popular Easternization and psychedelic culture.
162. Kripal, *Roads of Excess*, 163.
163. Zaehner, *Concordant Discord*, 382; quoted in Kripal, *Roads of Excess*, 163.
164. Kripal, *Roads of Excess*, 163.
165. Zaehner, *Concordant Discord*, 194; quoted in Kripal, *Roads of Excess*, 163.

166. Kripal, *Roads of Excess*, 163–164.
167. Zaehner, *Mysticism, Sacred and Profane*, 212.
168. See Smythies and Smythies, *Two Coins*, 54, 70.
169. See Edward Osborn and C. C. Evans, “An Experiment in the Electroencephalography of Mediumistic Trance,” *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 36 (1952): 586–588.
170. Zaehner, *Mysticism, Sacred and Profane*, 226.
171. Zaehner, *Drugs, Mysticism*, 226.
172. *Ibid.*
173. Zaehner, *Mysticism, Sacred and Profane*, ix.
174. *Ibid.*, 1.
175. See Colin Campbell, *The Easternization of the West: A Thematic Account of Cultural Change in the Modern Era* (Abingdon: Routledge/Paradigm, 2007); Harvey Cox, *Turning East: The Promise and Peril of the New Orientalism* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1977); Christopher Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West: Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture and Occulture* (London: T & T Clark International, 2004), 1:87–118.
176. Zaehner, *Mysticism, Sacred and Profane*, xii.
177. *Ibid.*, 176.
178. *Ibid.*, 12, 13.
179. *Ibid.*, 88.
180. Huxley, *Doors of Perception*, 38.
181. See *ibid.*, 131.
182. *Ibid.*, 37.
183. *Ibid.*, 37–38.
184. See, for example, John Gale, Michael Robson, and Georgia Rapsomatioti, eds., *Insanity and Divinity: Studies in Psychosis and Spirituality* (Hove: Routledge, 2014); Jim Geekie, Patte Randal, Debra Lampshire, John Read, eds., *Experiencing Psychosis: Personal and Professional Perspectives* (Hove: Routledge, 2012).
185. Zaehner, *Mysticism, Sacred and Profane*, 33.
186. *Ibid.*, xiii–xiv.
187. *Ibid.*, 21.
188. *Ibid.*, 21.
189. *Ibid.*, 22.
190. Huxley, *Doors of Perception*, 11.
191. Zaehner, *Mysticism, Sacred and Profane*, 22.
192. *Ibid.*, 28–29.
193. See, for example, the essays he wrote for *Vedanta and the West*, several of which can be found in Isherwood, ed., *Vedanta*.
194. Zaehner, *Mysticism, Sacred and Profane*, 33.
195. *Ibid.*, 29.
196. *Ibid.*, 33.

197. For a good analysis of some of the philosophical problems with Zaehner's work, see Nelson Pike, *Mystic Union: An Essay on the Phenomenology of Mysticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 177–193.
198. See, for example, Dunlap, *Exploring Inner Space*, 134–150.
199. Zaehner, *Mysticism, Sacred and Profane*, 24.
200. See Dan Merkur, *The Ecstatic Imagination Psychedelic Experiences and the Psychoanalysis of Self-Actualization* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 163–172.
201. Zaehner, *Mysticism, Sacred and Profane*, 24–25.
202. *Ibid.*, 226.
203. Harry Abbot Williams, “Theology and Self-Awareness,” in Alexander Roper Vidler, ed., *Soundings: Essays Concerning Christian Understanding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 72.
204. Huxley, *Doors of Perception*, 112.
205. *Ibid.*
206. *Ibid.*, 113.
207. Alan Watts, *The Joyous Cosmology: Adventures in the Chemistry of Consciousness* (New York: Vintage Books, 1962).
208. Alan Watts, *This Is It and Other Essays on Zen and Spiritual Experience* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973 [1960]), 128.
209. *Ibid.*
210. *Ibid.*, 129.
211. *Ibid.*, 130.

CHAPTER 7

1. Theodore Roszak, *Sources* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1972), 40.
2. See *ibid.*; Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (London: Faber & Faber, 1971).
3. For a limited but nevertheless useful overview of the social and particularly religious contexts, see Hugh McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). By far the most insightful discussion of the period is Roszak's *The Making of a Counter Culture*.
4. See John Lardas, *The Bop Apocalypse: The Religious Visions of Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Burroughs* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001).
5. McLeod, *Religious Crisis of the 1960s.*, 124.
6. Robert C. Cottrell, *Sex, Drugs, and Rock 'n' Roll: The Rise of America's 1960s Counterculture* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), ix.
7. Timothy Leary, *The Politics of Ecstasy* (London: Paladin, 1970 [1968]), 38.
8. Allen Ginsberg, *Howl, Kaddish and Other Poems* (London: Penguin, 2009), 119.
9. Theodore Roszak, “Introduction to the 1995 Edition,” in Theodore Roszak, ed., *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its*

Youthful Opposition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). Roszak, who was greatly influenced by Blake, has in mind the latter's *America, A Prophecy*: "For every thing that lives is holy, life delights in life . . ."

10. Huston Smith, *Cleansing the Doors of Perception: The Religious Significance of Entheogenic Plants and Chemicals* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, 2000), 10. See also Huston Smith, *Tales of Wonder: Chasing the Divine* (New York: HarperOne, 2009), 156, 171–176; 124–126.
11. Smith, *Cleansing the Doors*, 10.
12. *Ibid.*, 11.
13. Smith, "Introduction," in Aldous Huxley, *The Divine Within: Selected Writings on Enlightenment* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1992), 1.
14. Smith, *Tales of Wonder*, 171.
15. *Ibid.*, 171; cf. Timothy Leary, *High Priest*, 2nd ed. (Oakland: Ronin Publishing, 1995), 289.
16. Smith, *Cleansing the Doors*, 11.
17. See Chapter 4; see also Ronald Siegel and Ada E. Hirschman, "Hashish Near-Death Experiences," *Anabiosis: Journal of Near-Death Studies* 4, no. 1 (1984): 69–86.
18. Smith, *Cleansing the Doors*, 12.
19. *Ibid.*, 15.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.* Years later, Smith would still speak of psychoactives as "substances that awaken the divine spirit"; Huston Smith, *And Live Rejoicing: Chapters from a Charmed Life* (Novato: New World Library, 2012), 28. Indeed, I recall asking him to comment on this aspect of his work in 2004 in San Antonio at the meeting of the American Academy of Religion. Not only was he happy to do so, but it was very clear that the effect of those early psychedelic experiences had informed both his religious life and his understanding of reality.
22. For example, engaging overviews of psychedelic and countercultural thought in the 1960s, along with some assessment of its cultural significance, can be found in the following: Don Lattin, *The Harvard Psychedelic Club* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010); Timothy Leary, Ralph Metzner, and Gunther Weil, eds., *The Psychedelic Reader: The Revolutionary 1960s Forum of Psychopharmacological Substances* (New York: Citadel Press Books, 2007); John Markoff, *What the Dormouse Said: How the Sixties Counterculture Shaped the Personal Computer Industry* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2005); Robert Masters and Jean Houston, *Psychedelic Art* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1968); Tom Wolfe, *The Electric Kool Aid Acid Test* (London: Black Swan Books, 1989 [1971]).
23. One only has to think of, for example, Herbert Marcuse, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Guy Debord, Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan, Louis Althusser, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault, whose work opened up new areas of analysis.
24. Marianne Leary, quoted in Peter Connors, *White Hand Society: The Psychedelic Partnership of Timothy Leary and Allen Ginsberg* (San Francisco: City Light

- Books, 2010), 19. See also Timothy Leary, *Flashbacks: A Personal and Cultural History of an Era: An Autobiography* (New York: Tarcher/Putnam, 1990), 15; John Higgs, *I Have America Surrounded: The Life of Timothy Leary* (London: Friday Books, 2006), 22–23.
25. Lattin, *Harvard Psychedelic Club*, 17.
 26. Timothy Leary, *Interpersonal Diagnosis of Personality: A Functional Theory and Methodology for Personality Evaluation* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1957).
 27. Leary, *High Priest*, 7.
 28. *Ibid.*, 9.
 29. Huxley, *Doors of Perception*, 8–9.
 30. Ludwig Wittgenstein, quoted in Russell Nieli, *Wittgenstein: From Mysticism to Ordinary Language* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 91.
 31. Nieli, *Wittgenstein*, 91.
 32. *Ibid.*, 92.
 33. See, for example, Walter Houston Clark, *The Psychology of Religion: An Introduction to Religious Experience and Behavior* (New York: Macmillan, 1958), 67; W. David Watts, *The Psychedelic Experience: A Sociological Study* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1971), 43–44. See also Arthur Koestler, *Drinkers of Infinity: Essays 1955–1967* (London: Hutchinson, 1968), 201–212.
 34. See Arthur Koestler, *The Invisible Writing* (London: Vintage, 2005), 428–430.
 35. Koestler, quoted in Nieli, *Wittgenstein*, 93 (emphasis added).
 36. Leary, *High Priest*, 9.
 37. Koestler, quoted in Nieli, *Wittgenstein*, 93.
 38. Leary, *High Priest*, 9.
 39. Leary, *Flashbacks*, 17.
 40. *Ibid.*, 20.
 41. *Ibid.*, 18.
 42. *Ibid.*, 30.
 43. Gordon Wasson, “Seeking the Magic Mushroom,” *Life*, May 13, 1957, 101.
 44. See Leary, *Flashbacks*, 92.
 45. *Ibid.*, 31–32.
 46. *Ibid.*, 32.
 47. Leary, *High Priest*, 12.
 48. Leary, *Flashbacks*, 33.
 49. *Ibid.*, 34.
 50. Timothy Leary, Richard Alpert, and Ralph Metzner, “Rationale of the Mexican Psychedelic Training Center,” in James Penner, ed., *Timothy Leary: The Harvard Years: Early Writings on LSD and Psilocybin with Richard Alpert, Huston Smith, Ralph Metzner, and Others* (Rochester: Park Street Press, 2014), 342–343.
 51. Leary, *Flashbacks*, 37.
 52. See Timothy Leary, “Mushrooms for Lunch (1960),” in Michael Horowitz and Cynthia Palmer, eds., *Moksha: Aldous Huxley’s Classic Writings on Psychedelics*

- and the Visionary Experience* (Rochester: Park Street Press, 1999), 180; see also Leary, *High Priest*, 64.
53. Leary, *Flashbacks*, 41; see also Leary, "Mushrooms for Lunch (1960)," 180–182.
 54. Leary, *Flashbacks*, 42.
 55. Aldous Huxley in a letter to Michael Hollingshead, quoted in Michael Hollingshead, *The Man Who Turned On the World* (London: Blond and Briggs, 1973), 31 (emphasis added).
 56. Leary, *Flashbacks*, 44.
 57. *Ibid.*
 58. Metzner recalled that Wasson eventually put pressure on Harvard University to remove Leary and Alpert. Ram Dass and Ralph Metzner, *Birth of a Psychedelic Culture* (Santa Fe: Synergetic Press, 2010), 87. Leary has also noted that "Wasson made it clear that he was the only one capable of explaining the mushrooms, and he was proud that he published his reports in respectable journals and magazines like *Life*. He was particularly upset that mushroom visions had been published in 'vulgar' magazines. He expressed approval of police raids on 'oddballs'—young people who used psychedelic mushrooms for personal growth and spiritual discovery." Leary, *Flashbacks*, 93.
 59. Hollingshead, *Man Who Turned On*, 207.
 60. Walter Houston Clark, *Chemical Ecstasy: Psychedelic Drugs and Religion* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1969), 55.
 61. Allen Ginsberg, "A Tale of the Tribe." CD sleeve notes to Timothy Leary, *Beyond Life with Timothy Leary* (Mercury Records, 1997). Cf. Allen Ginsberg, "Foreword," in Timothy Leary, *High Priest*, 2nd ed. (Oakland: Ronin Publishing, 1995), xviii–xix.
 62. Aldous Huxley, quoted in Sybille Bedford, *Aldous Huxley: A Biography*, vol. 2: 1939–1963 (London: Chatto & Windus, 1974), 335.
 63. Hollingshead, *Man Who Turned On*, 11.
 64. For an account of the meeting, see *ibid.*, 14–20.
 65. Leary, *High Priest*, 244.
 66. *Ibid.*
 67. *Ibid.*, 253.
 68. See, for example, Allen Ginsberg, "US Senate Statement," in Allen Ginsberg, *Deliberate Prose: Selected Essays 1952–1995* (London: Penguin, 2000), 67, 79, 109.
 69. Leary, *High Priest*, xi.
 70. Timothy Leary, Ralph Metzner, and Richard Alpert, *The Psychedelic Experience: A Manual Based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead* (London: Penguin, 2008 [1964]).
 71. See Ram Dass and Metzner, *Birth of a Psychedelic Culture*, 51.
 72. Theodore Roszak, *Unfinished Animal: The Aquarian Frontier and the Evolution of Consciousness* (London: Faber and Faber, 1976), 4. See also, Jeffrey Kripal's comments on "human potentialities," in *Esalen: America and the Religion of No Religion* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007), 85, 480.

73. Lattin, *Harvard Psychedelic Club*, 57 (emphasis added).
74. Timothy Leary, *The Game of Life* (Phoenix: New Falcon Publications, 1993 [1979]), 2.
75. Timothy Leary, *Your Brain Is God* (Oakland: Ronin Publishing, 1995).
76. See Ram Dass and Metzner, *Birth of a Psychedelic Culture*, 81–91. See also Leary, *Flashbacks*, 148–163; Higgs, *I Have America Surrounded*, 54–57.
77. Quoting Jim Roubichek, Allen Ginsberg makes this point with reference to Leary: “LSD inhibits conditioned reflexes.” Allen Ginsberg, “Foreword,” xix.
78. Eric Berne, *Games People Play: The Psychology of Human Relationships* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968 [1964]); see Leary, *High Priest*, 38.
79. Leary, *Flashbacks*, 196.
80. Ibid.
81. See Timothy Leary, “The Diagnosis of Behavior and the Diagnosis of Experience,” in Penner, *Timothy Leary*, 41–71.
82. Paul Heelas, *The New Age Movement: The Celebration of the Self and the Sacralization of Modernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 31.
83. Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture*, 156, 168.
84. Timothy Leary, “How to Change Behavior: A Presentation at the International Congress of Applied Psychology in Copenhagen in August of 1961,” in Penner, *Timothy Leary*, 29.
85. Timothy Leary, “Introduction,” in David Solomon, ed., *LSD: The Consciousness Expanding Drug* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons/Berkeley Medallion Books, 1966), 20.
86. Ibid.
87. Ibid., 21.
88. Ibid., 21–22.
89. Leary, *High Priest*, 28.
90. Leary, “Introduction,” 11.
91. Leary, *Your Brain Is God*.
92. Timothy Leary, *Psychedelic Prayers and Other Meditations* (Oakland: Ronin Publishing, 1997), 35.
93. Ibid., 95.
94. Ralph Metzner, “Introduction,” in Timothy Leary, *Psychedelic Prayers and Other Meditations* (Oakland: Ronin Publishing, 1997), 9.
95. Ibid., 10.
96. Leary, *Flashbacks*, 93.
97. Gordon Wasson, quoted in Leary, *Flashbacks*, 92.
98. Walter Pahnke, “Drugs and Mysticism: An Analysis of the Relationship Between Psychedelic Drugs and the Mystical Consciousness,” doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, 1963.
99. See Clark, *Chemical Ecstasy*, 40–62.
100. Leary, *Flashbacks*, 107.
101. Ibid.

102. Pahnke, "Drugs and Mysticism," 97.
103. *Ibid.*, ix.
104. *Ibid.*
105. *Ibid.*, xi.
106. *Ibid.*
107. Clark, *Psychology of Religion*.
108. James Pratt, *The Religious Consciousness: A Psychological Study* (New York: Macmillan, 1921).
109. Richard Maurice Bucke, *The Cosmic Consciousness: A Study in the Evolution of the Human Mind* (Philadelphia: Innes & Sons, 1901).
110. Pahnke, "Drugs and Mysticism," 34. The quote is taken from Kenneth Walker, *The Conscious Mind: A Commentary on the Mystics* (London: Rider, 1962).
111. Pahnke, "Drugs and Mysticism," 40–45.
112. See *ibid.*, 24–27, 105.
113. See Smith, *Cleansing the Doors*, 21–22, 99–105; Timothy Leary, "The Religious Experience: Its Production and Interpretation," *Psychedelic Review* 1, no. 3 (1964): 324–346. See also the discussion of Zaehner's arguments in Chapter 6.
114. Pahnke, "Drugs and Mysticism," 46.
115. See Paula Hruby, "Unitive Consciousness and Pahnke's Good Friday Experiment," in Thomas B. Roberts, ed., *Psychoactive Sacramentals: Essays on Entheogens and Religion* (San Francisco: Council of Spiritual Practices, 2001), 59–69.
116. Pahnke, "Drugs and Mysticism," xii; see also 47–57.
117. See *ibid.*, 57–60.
118. *Ibid.*, xiii.
119. *Ibid.* See also 60–61.
120. *Ibid.* See also 61–63.
121. *Ibid.*
122. *Ibid.* See also 64–67.
123. *Ibid.*, 64–67.
124. Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John Harvey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950 [1917]).
125. *Ibid.*, xiv. See also 67–70.
126. *Ibid.*
127. *Ibid.*
128. *Ibid.*, xv. See also 70–71.
129. *Ibid.*, 71–73.
130. Koestler referred to Leary as "my enthusiastic friend at Harvard." *Drinkers of Infinity*, 203.
131. Leary, *Flashbacks*, 34.
132. Pahnke, "Drugs and Mysticism," xv.
133. Ann Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered: A Building Block Approach to the Study of Religion and Other Special Things* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 40.

134. Pahnke, "Drugs and Mysticism," 73–76.
135. Ibid., 76–81.
136. Ibid., xvi.
137. Ibid.
138. Willis W. Harman, Robert H. McKim, Robert E. Mogar, James Fadiman, and Myron J. Stolaroff, "Psychedelic Agents in Creative Problem-Solving: A Pilot Study," *Psychological Reports* 19, Monograph Supplement 2 (1966): 211. See also Marlene Dobkin de Rios and Oscar Janiger, *LSD, Spirituality and the Creative Process* (Rochester: Park Street Press, 2003), 76–114; Dan Merkur, *The Ecstatic Imagination Psychedelic Experiences and the Psychoanalysis of Self-Actualization* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 85–90; David Rubin, ed., *Psychedelic: Optical and Visionary Art Since the 1960s* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2010); Paul Schimmel, ed., *Ecstasy* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005).
139. Pahnke, "Drugs and Mysticism," xvi.
140. Ibid.
141. Harman et al., "Psychedelic Agents," 212. The study referred to in this article is C. Savage, J. Fadiman, R. E. Mogar, and M. Allen, "The Effects of Psychedelic (LSD) Therapy on Values, Personality, and Behavior," *International Journal of Neuropsychiatry* 2 (1966): 241–254.
142. Pahnke, "Drugs and Mysticism," xvi.
143. Ibid.
144. Smith, *Cleansing the Doors*, 15.
145. Clark, *Chemical Ecstasy*, 77.
146. Walter Pahnke, "The Contribution of the Psychology of Religion to the Therapeutic Use of Psychedelic Substances," in Harold A. Abramson, ed., *The Use of LSD in Psychotherapy and Alcoholism* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966), 648.
147. Pahnke, "Drugs and Mysticism," 83.
148. Ibid., 220.
149. Leary, *Flashbacks*, 108.
150. Pahnke, "Drugs and Mysticism," 243. See also Walter Pahnke, "Drugs and Mysticism," *International Journal of Parapsychology* 8, no. 2 (1966): 308–313.
151. Leary, "The Religious Experience," 325.
152. Smith, *Cleansing the Doors*, 17.
153. Ibid., 100–101.
154. Leary, *Flashbacks*, 109.
155. Robert C. Zaehner, *Drugs, Mysticism and Make-Believe* (London: Collins, 1972), 104.
156. Ibid.
157. Pahnke, "Drugs and Mysticism" (1963), 150; see also Walter Pahnke, "LSD and Religious Experience," in Richard DeBold and Russell Leaf, eds., *LSD, Man and Society* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1967), 60–84.
158. See Rick Doblin, "Pahnke's 'Good Friday Experiment': A Long-Term Follow-up and Methodological Critique," *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 23 (1991): 14–15.

159. Ibid., 16.
160. Ibid., 18.
161. Smith, *Cleansing the Doors*, 105.
162. Ibid., 100–101.
163. Leary, *High Priest*, 282.
164. Leary, “The Religious Experience,” 324.
165. Ibid., 328–329.
166. Ibid., 329.
167. Ibid., 340.
168. Ibid., 329.
169. Ibid., 345.
170. Ibid., 326.
171. Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture*.
172. See Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle, “Introduction: Historicizing the American Counterculture of the 1960s and ’70s,” in Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle, eds., *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960’s and 70’s* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 5–14.
173. See the various texts gathered together by Brian Ward in his anthology, *The 1960s: A Documentary Reader* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010); see also Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle, eds., *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960’s and 70’s* (New York: Routledge, 2002). See also Partridge, *Hippie Ghetto*; Lewis Yablonsky, *The Hippie Trip* (New York: Pegasus, 1968).
174. Evidence of the darker side of the hippie counterculture is evident in reportage from the period such as Nicholas von Hoffman’s *We Are the People Our Parents Warned Us Against* (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1967).
175. Campbell, *Easternization of the West*, 187–188. See also McLeod, *Religious Crisis*, 124–140.
176. Campbell, *Easternization of the West*, 188; cf. Nicholas Campion, *The New Age in the Modern West: Counterculture, Utopia, and Prophecy from the Late Eighteenth Century to the Present Day* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 93–120.
177. Philip Deloria, “Counterculture Indians and the New Age,” in Braunstein and Doyle, eds., *Imagine Nation*, 172.
178. Paul Goodman, quoted in Deloria, “Counterculture Indians,” 172.
179. Leary, *High Priest*, 133.
180. Wuthnow, *Experimentation in American Religion*, 138, 157.
181. See, for example, Ostro, *Altered States*.
182. See, for example, McLeod, *Religious Crisis*; Wuthnow, *Experimentation in American Religion*; Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).
183. Wuthnow, *After Heaven*, 69.
184. McLeod, *Religious Crisis*, 124.
185. Leary, *High Priest*, 80.

186. See Timothy Leary and Huston Smith, "Statement of Purpose for the International Federation for Internal Freedom (IFIF)," in Penner, *Timothy Leary*, 328–333.
187. Leary, *High Priest*, 200.
188. *Ibid.*, 125.
189. Wuthnow, *After Heaven*, 83.
190. Leary et al., "Rationale of the Mexican Psychedelic Training Center," 339–340.
191. Allen Ginsberg, "Notes for *Howl* and Other Poems," in Donald Allen, ed., *The New American Poetry, 1945–1960* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 416.
192. Alan Watts, "A Psychedelic Experience: Fact or Fantasy?," in Solomon, ed., *LSD*, 129–130.
193. Nina Graboi, "Stepping into the Future," in David Jay Brown and Rebecca McClen Novick, *Mavericks of the Mind: Conversations for the New Millennium* (Freedom: Crossing Press, 1993), 230.
194. R. D. Laing, *Politics of Experience and the Bird of Paradise* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967).
195. See Ram Dass and Metzner, *Birth of a Psychedelic Culture*, 125–138.
196. Leary, *Flashbacks*, 190.
197. *Ibid.*
198. Timothy Leary, Ralph Metzner, and Gunther Weil, "Statement of Purpose," *Psychedelic Review* 1 (1963): 6.
199. *Ibid.*
200. Robert Mogar and Gerald Pearlman, "Editorial," *Psychedelic Review* 11 (1971): 1.
201. All the issues of the *Psychedelic Review* are now available online: <http://www.maps.org/research-archive/psychedelicreview/> (accessed October 4, 2016); see also "classic selections" from the journal in Timothy Leary, Ralph Metzner, and Gunther Weil, eds., *The Psychedelic Reader: The Revolutionary 1960s Forum of Psychopharmacological Substances* (New York: Citadel Press Books, 2007).
202. Leary, *Flashbacks*, 188; see also Ram Dass and Metzner, *Birth of a Psychedelic Culture*, 121–125; Timothy Leary and Ralph Metzner, "Hermann Hesse: Poet of the Interior Journey," *Psychedelic Review* 1, no. 2 (1963): 167–182.
203. See Alan W. Watts, *The Joyous Cosmology: Adventures in the Chemistry of Consciousness* (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), 21.
204. Hollingshead, *Man Who Turned On*, 105.
205. *Ibid.*, 130.
206. *Ibid.*, 141.
207. Leary and Metzner, "Hermann Hesse," 181.
208. Art Kleps, *Millbrook: A Narrative of the Early Years of American Psychedelianism* (Oakland: Original Kleptonian Neo-American Church, 1975), 61.
209. *Ibid.*, 2.
210. Alan Watts, quoted in Stanley Krippner, "The Psychedelic Adventures of Alan Watts": <http://stanleykrippner.weebly.com/the-psychedelic-adventures-of-alan-watts.html> (accessed October 5, 2016).

211. Leary, *Politics of Ecstasy*, 185.
212. Robert C. Fuller, *Stairways to Heaven: Drugs in American Religious History* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000), 81.
213. Ram Dass and Metzner, *Birth of a Psychedelic Culture*, 222–223.
214. The pamphlet was subsequently published in Leary, *Politics of Ecstasy*, 182–193; more recently it has been published in Timothy Leary, *Start Your Own Religion* (Oakland: Ronin Publishing, 2005).
215. Leary, *Politics of Ecstasy*, 183.
216. *Ibid.*, 182–183.
217. *Ibid.*, 183.
218. Linda Woodhead and Paul Heelas, ed., *Religion in Modern Times: An Interpretive Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 342.
219. Leary, *Politics of Ecstasy*, 183. See also, Nora Sayre, *Sixties Going on Seventies*, revised edition (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 187–190.
220. *Ibid.*, 184.
221. *Ibid.*, 185.
222. *Ibid.*, 189.
223. *Ibid.*, 187–188.
224. *Ibid.*, 188.
225. See, for example, the discussions in the “Psychedelics and Buddhism” issue of *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review*, Fall 1996, and Allan Hunt Badiner and Alex Grey, eds., *Zig Zag Zen: Buddhism and Psychedelics* (Santa Fe: Synergetic Press, 2015 [2002]).
226. Ram Dass, *Miracle of Love: Stories About Neem Karoli Baba* (New York: Dutton, 1979), 229.
227. See Ram Dass, *Be Here Now* (San Cristobal: Hanuman Foundation, 1978 [1971]); see also Andrew Rawlinson, *The Book of Enlightened Masters: Western Teachers in Eastern Traditions* (Chicago: Open Court, 1997), 489–493; Jeffrey Kripal, *Esalen: America and the Religion of No Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 126.
228. Ram Dass, Joan Halifax, Robert Aitken, and Richard Baker, “The Roundtable,” *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review* 6, no. 1 (1996): 104, 108.
229. See Art Kleps, “A Critique of the Sri Ram Ashrama,” in Art Kleps, *The Boo Hoo Bible: The Neo-American Church Catechism* (San Cristobal: Toad Books, 1971), 117–126.
230. Bill Haines, quoted in Joe Dana, “The New Gurus: Interviews with Art Kleps, John Leary, Karl Kesler, Bill Haines, and Belle Barr,” *Oracle of Southern California* 11 (December 1967): 26.
231. Kleps, *Millbrook*, 130.
232. See Kleps, “Critique of the Sri Ram Ashrama,” 117.
233. Robert Forte, “Psychedelic Experience and Spiritual Practice. A Buddhist Perspective: An Interview with Jack Kornfield,” in Badiner and Grey, *Zig Zag Zen*, 59.

234. Ralph Metzner, "A New Look at the Psychedelic *Tibetan Book of the Dead*," in Badiner and Grey, *Zig Zag Zen*, 9.
235. Leary et al., *Psychedelic Experience*, 6.
236. Metzner, "Introduction," 9.
237. Primarily written by John Lennon after reading *The Psychedelic Experience*, the song was released on *Revolver* (Parlophone, 1966).
238. This type of interpretation is evident in Donald Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 71–76; see also Timothy Miller, *The Hippies and American Values* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 32.
239. Leary et al., *Psychedelic Experience*, 3–4.
240. *Ibid.*, 5–6.
241. *Ibid.*, 3–4.
242. *Ibid.*, 34.
243. *Ibid.*, 34–35.
244. *Ibid.*, 49–50.
245. *Ibid.*, 58.
246. Leary, *Politics of Ecstasy*, 183.
247. Leary et al., *Psychedelic Experience*, 58.
248. William Hitchcock, quoted in Kleps, *Millbrook*, 174.
249. Kleps, quoted by Dana, "New Gurus," 20.
250. See Kleps, *Boo Hoo Bible*, 65.
251. See the newspaper clippings reproduced in *ibid.*, 65.
252. Kleps, *Millbrook*, 13.
253. *Ibid.*, 14.
254. Kleps, quoted in Peter Stafford, *Psychedelics Encyclopedia*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: Ronin Publishing, 1992), 17.
255. Kleps, *Millbrook*, 78.
256. Kleps, quoted in Stafford, *Psychedelics Encyclopedia*, 17.
257. Kleps, quoted in Stafford, *Psychedelics Encyclopedia*, 15.
258. See Art Kleps, "With LSD I Saw God," *Pageant*, August 1966, 58–97.
259. Kleps, quoted in Stafford, *Psychedelics Encyclopedia*, 16.
260. See Kleps, *Millbrook*, 201.
261. See, for example, Art Kleps, "Synchronicity and the Plot/Plot," *Psychedelic Review* 8 (1966): 123–124; also available in Kleps, *Boo Hoo Bible*, 153–155.
262. Kleps, quoted in Stafford, *Psychedelics Encyclopedia*, 16.
263. Kleps, *Millbrook*, 17.
264. The text was published by Kleps in his *The Neo-American Church Catechism and Handbook* (Millbrook: Kriya Press of the Sri Ram Ashram, 1967). See also Kleps, *Boo Hoo Bible*, 127–136.
265. Kleps, *Millbrook*, 24.
266. *Ibid.*, 82.

267. Ibid. 38.
268. Leary, *Politics of Ecstasy*, 261.
269. Kleps, *Millbrook*, 55.
270. Ibid., 24.
271. Ibid., 26.
272. Ibid.
273. Joseph Martin and John Quinn, "USA vs LSD: Meet the Big Boo Hoo, High Hallucinogeneral," *New York Daily News*. Reprinted in Kleps, *Boo Hoo Bible*, 74.
274. Wendy Kleps, "Wendy's True Confession: To Jawaharlal Nehru," in Kleps, ed., *Boo Hoo Bible*, 73.
275. In May 1966, Kleps, Leary, and Ginsberg were required to testify before the United States Senate regarding the rise in the use of psychedelic substances on college campuses.
276. Art Kleps, "Testimony Before the Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency," May 25, 1966: <http://okneoac.org/senate-testimony> (accessed October 2, 2016).
277. Kleps, quoted in Dana, "New Gurus," 21. See also Kleps, "With LSD I Saw God," 67.
278. Kleps, *Boo Hoo Bible*, 19B.
279. These principles were formally cited at the trial of Judith Kuch. See United States District Court for the District of Columbia, *United States of America v. Judith H. Kuch*, Crim. No. 1473-67 (July 1, 1968): <https://sites.google.com/site/extempore88/UnitedStatesv.Kuch288F.Supp.4391968.htm?attredirects=0> (accessed October 3, 2016). The current principles, which have been modified since 1968, can be found on the Church's membership application form, available at: <http://okneoac.org/membership> (accessed October 3, 2016). See also Kleps, "With LSD I Saw God," 60.
280. Original Kleptonian Neo-American Church, "About the OKNeoAC": <http://okneoac.org/about/> (accessed July 19, 2017).
281. This point was made in relation to the philosophical tradition emerging out of Platonic and Cartesian discussions of dream skepticism. See Art Kleps, "Rhetorical Strategy in Confrontations with Occultists, Cosmicinders, and Supernaturalists," *Divine Toad Sweat*, March 1, 1974: <http://okneoac.org/dts/rhetorical-strategy> (accessed July 18, 2017).
282. Art Kleps, *History of the Psychedelic Movement Cartoon and Coloring Book* (Millbrook: The Neo-American Church, 1967).
283. Kleps, *Millbrook*, 207.
284. Ibid., 156.
285. Kleps, "Testimony." See also Kleps, "With LSD I Saw God," 60.
286. Kleps, *Millbrook*, 156.
287. Kleps, quoted in Dana, "New Gurus," 20.
288. Kleps, *Millbrook*, 156.
289. Kleps, quoted in Dana, "New Gurus," 20.

290. Kleps, *Millbrook*, 156.
291. United States District Court for the District of Columbia, *United States of America v. Judith H. Kuch*, Crim. No. 1473-67 (July 1, 1968): <https://sites.google.com/site/extempore88/UnitedStatesv.Kuch288F.Supp.4391968.htm?attredirects=0> (accessed October 3, 2016).
292. See Kleps, "Boo Hooing It Up in the Provinces"; Walter Bowart, "Neo-American Church Gives 'Em Hell"; and "United States of America v. Judith H. Kuch." All three can be found in Kleps, *Boo Hoo Bible*, 21, 51–53, 89.
293. The publicity for the event is reproduced in Kleps, *Boo Hoo Bible*, 87. See also Donald Smith, "Drug 'Eat-In': Psychedelic Church Sets Law Test," reproduced in Kleps, *Boo Hoo Bible*, 86.
294. See Clark, *Psychology of Religion*, 58.
295. Kleps, quoted in Dana, "New Gurus," 22. The Board of Directors was officially called "The Board of Toads." The minutes of their first meeting records that "Arthur Kleps, Timothy Leary, William Haines, and Michael Duncan" were "the duly elected Toads of the Neo-American Church elected at the annual meeting of the organization." Kleps, *Boo Hoo Bible*, 43.
296. Ram Dass and Metzner, *Birth of a Psychedelic Culture*, 212.
297. Kleps, *Boo Hoo Bible*, 205–208.
298. Kleps, *Millbrook*, 206–207.
299. Leary, *Politics of Ecstasy*, 261.
300. *Ibid.*, 261–263.
301. Kleps, *Millbrook*, 208.
302. See John Aiken, "The Church of the Awakening," in Bernard Aaronson and Humphry Osmond, ed., *Psychedelics: The Uses and Implications of Hallucinogenic Drugs* (London: Hogarth Press, 1970), 165–182.
303. See Nicholas Schou, *Orange Sunshine: The Brotherhood of Eternal Love and Its Quest to Spread Peace, Love, and Acid to the World* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2011). See also Leary, *Flashbacks*, 263–274.
304. For an overview of psychedelic religions during this period, see R. Stuart, "Entheogenic Sects and Psychedelic Religions," *MAPS Bulletin* 12, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 17–24; see also Clark, *Psychology of Religion*, 58–59; Devin Lander, "Start Your Own Religion: New York State's Acid Churches," *Nova Religio* 14, no. 3 (2011): 64–80; Pahnke, "LSD and Religious Experience," 74–76.
305. See Morgan Shipley, *Psychedelic Mysticism: Transforming Consciousness, Religious Experiences, and Voluntary Peasants in Postwar America* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015), 193–234; Arthur Versluis and Morgan Shipley, "Stephen Gaskin Interview," *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 4, no. 1 (2010): 141–158.
306. Michael Traugot, "The Farm," in William Zellner and Marc Petrowsky, eds., *Sects, Cults, and Spiritual Communities: A Sociological Analysis* (Westport: Praeger, 1998), 42; see also Albert Bates, "The Farm," in Timothy Miller, ed., *Spiritual and Visionary Communities: Out to Save the World* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 121–138.

307. Yasus Afari, *Overstanding Rastafari: Jamaica's Gift to the World* (Kingston: Senyacum, 2007), 89–90.
308. See James S. Slotkin, *The Peyote Religion: A Study in Indian-White Relations* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1956). See also David Aberle, *The Peyote Religion Among the Navaho* (Chicago: Aldine, 1966).
309. Huxley, *Doors of Perception*, 49.
310. Ibid.
311. See, for example, Joseph Calabrese, *A Different Medicine: Postcolonial Healing in the Native American Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Thomas Maroukis, *The Peyote Road: Religious Freedom and the Native American Church* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010); Omer Stewart, *Peyote Religion: A History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987).
312. Huxley, *Doors of Perception*, 45–46.
313. The Ultimate Authority of the Clear Light may be the short-lived organization that Clark refers to as the Church of the Clear Light “on the West Coast” in *Chemical Ecstasy*, 59. The term “clear light” is, of course, significant in that it is taken from the discussion of the first *bardo* in *The Psychedelic Experience*.
314. Robert E. Brown, ed., *The Psychedelic Guide to the Preparation of the Eucharist in a Few of Its Many Guises* (Austin: Linga Sharira Incense Co., 1973 [1968]), 1.
315. Ibid., 3–4.
316. See Jeffrey Kripal’s wonderfully evocative and comprehensive history of the institute, *Esalen*.
317. Ram Dass and Metzner, *Birth of a Psychedelic Culture*, 220.
318. See Kripal, *Esalen*, 483–484.
319. Ibid., 117.
320. John Perry Barlow, “Foreword,” in Ram Dass and Metzner, *Birth of a Psychedelic Culture*, ix.
321. The Nixon administration even tried to profane Esalen by linking it to the Manson murders. In fact, although Charles Manson had attempted to stay at Esalen prior to the murders, he was turned away. Indeed, the only connection between Esalen and Manson was that two of his victims, Abigail Folger and Sharon Tate, had visited. See Kripal, *Esalen*, 133.
322. Michael Murphy, quoted in *ibid.*, 134; see also Robert Forte, “The Esalen Institute, Sacred Mushrooms, and the Game of Golf: An Interview with Michael Murphy,” in Robert Forte, ed., *Timothy Leary: Outside Looking In* (Rochester: Park Street Press, 1999), 197–207.
323. Kripal, *Esalen*, 134.
324. Cox, *Turning East*, 32.
325. Timothy Wylie, *Love, Sex, Fear, Death: The Inside Story of the Process Church of the Final Judgment* (Port Townsend: Feral House, 2009), 69.
326. Ruben van Luijk, *Children of Lucifer: The Origins of Modern Religious Satanism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 299.
327. Ram Dass et al., “The Roundtable,” 102.

328. Alan Watts, *In My Own Way: An Autobiography* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), 402.
329. Cox, *Turning East*, 32.
330. He has also argued that 1964 was the critical year—which is debatable. See Campbell, *Easternization of the West*, 184–249.
331. See, for example, Cox, *Turning East*; Wuthnow, *Experimentation in American Religion*; Wuthnow, *After Heaven*.
332. Ram Dass et al., “The Roundtable,” 103.
333. Surya Dass, “What Does Being a Buddhist Mean to You?,” *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review* 6, no. 1 (1996): 43.
334. Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert, “Foreword,” in Watts, *Joyous Cosmology*, xiii.
335. Campbell, *Easternization of the West*, 141.
336. Watts, *This Is It*, 143.
337. *Ibid.*, 144.
338. Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics: An Exploration of Parallels Between Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism* (London: Fontana, 1976), 12.
339. Fritjof Capra, *Uncommon Wisdom: Conversations with Remarkable People* (London: Flamingo, 1989), 24.
340. Capra, *Tao of Physics*, 12.
341. Capra, *Uncommon Wisdom*, 99.
342. Capra, *Tao of Physics*, 12; cf. Capra, *Uncommon Wisdom*, 99–102.
343. Capra, *Tao of Physics*, 11.
344. *Ibid.*, 12–13.
345. *Ibid.*, 209.
346. Watts, *Joyous Cosmology*, xviii.
347. Watts, *This Is It*, 127–128.
348. Kripal, *Esalen*, 122.
349. Leary et al., *Psychedelic Experience*, 86.
350. Alan Watts, “Some Remembrances of Aldous Huxley,” *Psychedelic Review* 1, no. 3 (1964): 265.
351. Watts, *In My Own Way*, 99; see also Dunaway, *Aldous Huxley Recollected*, 102.
352. Watts, “Some Remembrances,” 265.
353. Alan Watts, *Nature, Man and Woman* (London: Abacus, 1976 [1958]), 15.
354. Watts, *In My Own Way*, 396.
355. *Ibid.*, 396–397.
356. Watts, *This Is It*, 132–133.
357. Published in *ibid.*, 125–153.
358. Watts, *Joyous Cosmology*, 94.
359. *Ibid.*, 78.
360. Paul Krassner and Alan Watts, “An Impolite Interview with Alan Watts,” *Realist* 14 (December 1959–January 1960): 9.
361. See Forte, “Esalen Institute,” 199.

362. Ram Dass and Metzner, *Birth of a Psychedelic Culture*, 143.
363. Leary, *High Priest*, 296–297.
364. *Ibid.*, 297–298.
365. *Ibid.*, 300.
366. Sayre, *Sixties Going on Seventies*, 189.
367. Leary, *High Priest*, 301.
368. Leary, *Politics of Ecstasy*, 106–107.
369. *Ibid.*, 107.
370. *Ibid.*, 27.
371. *Ibid.*, 27.
372. One of the images can be found in Leary, *High Priest*, 299. For color plates of “The Psychedelic Temple” and “Mandala,” see Masters and Houston, *Psychedelic Art*, 11–13.
373. Aldous Huxley, “Letter: To Dr. Timothy Leary (11 February, 1962),” in Michael Horowitz and Cynthia Palmer, eds., *Moksha: Aldous Huxley’s Classic Writings on Psychedelics and the Visionary Experience* (Rochester: Park Street Press, 1999), 235.
374. *Ibid.*
375. *Ibid.*
376. Leary, *Politics of Ecstasy*, 27–28.
377. Arthur Avalon, *The Serpent Power* (New York: Dover, 1974 [1919]); see also Hollingshead, *Man Who Turned On*, 140–141.
378. Leary, *Politics of Ecstasy*, 47.
379. Leary, *Psychedelic Prayers*, 91–95.
380. *Ibid.*, 96.
381. Quoted in Hoffman, *We Are the People*, 160.
382. See Kripal, *Esalen*, 86–89.
383. See, for example, Campbell, *Easternization of the West*; Osto, *Altered States*; Partridge, *Re-Enchantment of the West*; Wuthnow, *After Heaven*; Wuthnow, *Experimentation in American Religion*.
384. See Osto’s overview of “psychedelic Buddhism” in *Altered States*.
385. Osto, *Altered States*, 84.
386. Clark, *Chemical Ecstasy*, 110.
387. Leary, quoted in Hollingshead, *Man Who Turned On*, 207.
388. Clark, *Chemical Ecstasy*, 110.
389. Abraham Maslow, *Religions, Values, and Peak Experiences* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976 [1964]), 27; see also 59–68.
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391. Charles Tart, “Introduction to Section 7: Major Psychedelic Drugs,” in Charles Tart, ed., *Altered States of Consciousness* (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1972), 388.
392. Maslow, *Religions, Values, and Peak Experience*, viii, x.
393. Ram Dass and Metzner, *Birth of a Psychedelic Culture*, 214.
394. *Ibid.*

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CHAPTER 8

1. Terence McKenna and Dennis McKenna, *The Invisible Landscape: Mind, Hallucinogens, and the I Ching* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), 9.
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43. Schultes, "Teonanacatl," 440.
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48. Santo Daime emerged in Brazil in the 1930s. It was led by Raimundo Irineu Serra (Master Irineu), who came to be understood as a reincarnation of the spirit of Jesus. See Andrew Dawson, *Santo Daime: A New World Religion* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 14–18, 77; see also Beatriz Caiuby Labate and Gustavo Pacheco, “The Historical Origins of Santo Daime: Academics, Adepts, and Ideology,” in Beatriz C. Labate and Henrik Jungaberle, eds., *The Internationalization of Ayahuasca* (Zurich: Lit Verlag, 2011), 71–84.
49. “The *children* [i.e., the mushrooms],” declared María Sabina, “are the blood of Christ.” María Sabina with Álvaro Estrada, “The Life,” in María Sabina, *Selections*, ed. Jerome Rothenberg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 57.
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52. See Paja Faudree, “Tales from the Land of Magic Plants: Textual Ideologies and Fetishes of Indigeneity in Mexico’s Sierra Mazateca,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 57 (2015): 838–869.
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54. See Sabina, “The Life,” 5.
55. Wasson, “Seeking the Magic Mushroom,” 100.
56. Wasson and Wasson, *Mushrooms, Russia and History*, 2:291–292.
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64. Wasson, “Hallucinogenic Fungi of Mexico,” 30.
65. Wasson, *Soma*, 3.
66. Ainslie T. Embree, *The Hindu Tradition* (New York: Vintage, 1972), 21.
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68. Wasson, “Persephone’s Quest,” 32.
69. Benny Shanon, for example, admits that “the ideas entertained here were primarily based on the fact that in the arid areas of the Sinai peninsula and Southern Israel there grow two plants containing the same psychoactive molecules found in

the plants from which the powerful Amazonian hallucinogenic brew Ayahuasca is prepared.” He also makes the point, as many researchers do, that his interest has its origins in personal experience: “Fifteen years ago, the contingencies of life led me to encounter the Amazonian powerful psychoactive brew Ayahuasca, and to have my first personal experiences with it. Subsequently, when reading about the topic, I was struck by the similarity between the visions I have had with the brew and those reported in the records of the experiences of indigenous Amerindians.” Benny Shanon, “Biblical Entheogens: A Speculative Hypothesis,” *Time and Mind: The Journal of Archaeology, Consciousness and Culture* 1, no. 1 (2008): 51, 55. Numerous other examples could be cited.

70. Wasson, “Persephone’s Quest,” 32–33. See also Wasson, *Soma*.
71. Wasson, *Soma*, 25.
72. *Ibid.*, 25.
73. *Ibid.*, 29.
74. See also David Flattery and Martin Schwartz, *Haoma and Harmaline: The Botanical Identity of the Indo-Iranian Sacred Hallucinogen “Soma” and Its Legacy in Religion, Language, and Middle Eastern Folklore*, Near Eastern Studies 21 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).
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76. John Brough, “Soma and *Amanita muscaria*,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 34 (1971): 331–362.
77. *Ibid.*, 333.
78. *Ibid.*, 338.
79. *Ibid.*, 343–349.
80. *Ibid.*, 348.
81. Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty, “The Post-Vedic History of the Soma Plant,” in Wasson, *Soma*, 95–147.
82. Brough, “Soma and *Amanita muscaria*,” 331.
83. Mike Jay, *Blue Tide: The Search for Soma* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1999), 172.
84. O’Flaherty, “Post-Vedic History,” 147.
85. Brough, “Soma and *Amanita muscaria*,” 331.
86. See R. Gordon Wasson et al., *Persephone’s Quest: Entheogens and the Origins of Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).
87. Weston La Barre, “Hallucinogens and the Shamanic Origins of Religion,” in Peter T. Furst, ed., *Flesh of the Gods: The Ritual Use of Hallucinogens* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1972), 261.
88. McKenna, *Food of the Gods*, 110.
89. *Ibid.*, xviii–xix.
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91. Albert Hofmann, "The Message of the Eleusinian Mysteries for Today's World," in Robert Forte, ed., *Entheogens and the Future of Religion* (San Francisco: Council on Spiritual Practices, 1997), 32.
92. See "The Homeric Hymn to Demeter," trans. Danny Staples, in Gordon Wasson, Albert Hofmann, and Carl Ruck, *The Road to Eleusis: Unveiling the Secret of the Mysteries*, 30th anniv. ed. (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2008), 69–84; Hofmann, "Message of the Eleusinian Mysteries," 31–41; Carl Ruck, "Hindsight," in Wasson et al., *Road to Eleusis*, 13–14.
93. Ruck, "Hindsight," 12.
94. "Homeric Hymn to Demeter," 83.
95. See Michel Pharand, "The Mythophile and the Mycophile: Robert Graves and R. Gordon Wasson," *Gravesiana: The Journal of the Robert Graves Society* 1, no. 2 (1996): 205–215.
96. Robert Graves, *Difficult Questions, Easy Answers* (London: Cassell, 1972), 106 (emphasis added).
97. *Ibid.*, 107.
98. Wasson, "Persephone's Quest," 28.
99. Hofmann, "Message of the Eleusinian Mysteries," 35.
100. Ruck, "Hindsight," 13.
101. This quotation is taken from Hofmann's revised "Message of the Eleusinian Mysteries," in Amanda Fielding, ed., *Hofmann's Elixir: LSD and the New Eleusis* (Oxford: Beckley Foundation, 2008), 28.
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104. Ralph Metzner, "Introduction," in Ralph Metzner, ed., *The Ecstatic Adventure* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), 1.
105. Richard E. Schultes, "An Overview of Hallucinogens in the Western Hemisphere," in Furst, ed., *Flesh of the Gods*, 3.
106. Leary, *Flashbacks*, 91.
107. Andrija Puharich, *The Sacred Mushroom: Key to the Door of Eternity* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1959), 10.
108. Aldous Huxley, quoted in Sybille Bedford, *Aldous Huxley: A Biography*, vol. 2: 1939–1963 (London: Chatto and Windus, 1974), 199.
109. See Puharich, *Sacred Mushroom*, 56–57, 69–70.
110. *Ibid.*, 57.
111. *Ibid.*, 118–119.
112. John M. Allegro, *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1970), xv.
113. *Ibid.*, xiv.
114. *Ibid.*, 6.

115. See, for example, McKenna, *Archaic Revival*, 151–152; see also Jan Irvin and Andrew Rutajit, *Astrotheology and Shamanism: Christianity's Pagan Roots*, 2nd ed. (Crestline: Gnostic Media, 2009); Jan Irvin and Martin Ball, "Gordon Wasson, John Allegro, and the Holy Mushroom," in Martin Ball, ed., *Entheologues: Conversations with Leading Psychedelic Thinkers, Explorers and Researchers* (Raleigh: Lulu/Kyandara Publishing, 2009), 65–84. There has since been a number of highly speculative popular discussions of the use of psychoactives in early Christianity, such as the argument that Jesus used incense containing a cannabis extract: Chris Bennett, "Was Jesus a Stoner?," *High Times*, February 10, 2003, 68; see also Benny Shanon, "Biblical Entheogens: A Speculative Hypothesis," *Time and Mind: The Journal of Archaeology, Consciousness and Culture* 1, no. 1 (2008): 51–74.
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117. *Ibid.*, 6.
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122. Mick Brown, "Foreword: Life Before Death—A Brief Introduction to Carlos Castaneda," in Martin Goodman, *I Was Carlos Castaneda: The Afterlife Dialogues* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2001), xi.
123. Charlotte Hardman, "'He May Be Lying but What He Says Is True': The Sacred Tradition of Don Juan as Reported by Carols Castaneda, Anthropologist, Trickster, Guru, Allegorist," in James Lewis and Olav Hammer, eds., *The Invention of Sacred Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 51.
124. See particularly Jay C. Fikes, *Carlos Castaneda: Academic Opportunism and the Psychedelic Sixties* (Victoria: Millennia Press, 1993); Yves Marton, "The Experiential Approach to Anthropology and Castaneda's Ambiguous Legacy," in Andrei Znamenski, ed., *Shamanism: Critical Concepts in Sociology* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2004), 3:17–39; Richard de Mille, *Castaneda's Journey: The Power and the Allegory* (London: Abacus, 1978); Richard de Mille, *The Don Juan Papers: Further Castaneda Controversies* (Santa Barbara: Ross-Erikson, 1980); Daniel Noel, ed., *Seeing Castaneda: Reactions to the "Don Juan" Writings of Carlos Castaneda* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1976).
125. See de Mille, *Castaneda's Journey*, 28–35.
126. See Robert Hughes, Sandra Burton, and Tomás Loayza, "Don Juan and the Sorcerer's Apprentice," *Time*, March 5, 1973, 33–34.
127. Carlos Castaneda: "Don Juan the Sorcerer: Carlos Castaneda Interviewed by Theodore Roszak." Broadcast: KPFA, January 30, 1969 (BB2038 Pacifica Radio Archives): <https://archive.org/details/DonJuanTheSorcerer-CarlosCastanedaInterviewedByTheodoreRoszak> (accessed December 19, 2016).

128. See Sabina, "The Life," 63–65.
129. William Madsen and Claudia Madsen, for example, argue that "Castaneda's work . . . cannot be judged as ethnography, because it is not placed in cultural context. He does not actually describe the Yaqui Indian way of life or the Yaqui philosophy of life It is unfortunate that Castaneda does not provide any anthropological framework for his material. Anthropology traditionally deals with shared beliefs, but Castaneda does not." "The Sorcerer's Apprentice," *Natural History* 80, no. 6 (June–July 1971): 80.
130. R. Gordon Wasson, "Book Review: *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge*, Carlos Castaneda," *Economic Botany* 23, no. 2 (1969): 197.
131. R. Gordon Wasson, "Book Review: *A Separate Reality: Further Conversations with Don Juan*, Carlos Castaneda," *Economic Botany* 26, no. 1 (1972): 98–99; R. Gordon Wasson, "Book Review: *Journey to Ixtlan: The Lessons of Don Juan*, Carlos Castaneda," *Economic Botany* 27, no. 1 (1973): 152.
132. Wasson, "Book Review: *Journey to Ixtlan*," 152.
133. Wasson, "Book Review: *A Separate Reality*," 98–99.
134. Wasson, "Book Review: *Journey to Ixtlan*," 152.
135. Wasson, "Book Review: *Tales of Power*," 52.
136. Ibid.
137. Brown, "Foreword," xvi.
138. Quoted in de Mille, *Castaneda's Journey*, 26.
139. Cleargreen, "About Us": <http://www.cleargreen.com/about-us> (accessed January 29, 2017).
140. "Although anthropologists have occasionally shown an unabashed interest in *psi*, or paranormal phenomena, in primitive cultures since the days of Andrew Lang, it was not until the appearance of Castaneda's work that anthropologists were forced into making some concerted effort to understand the paranormal aspects of culture." Joseph Long, "Parapsychology in Anthropology (or, Don Juan's Separate Reality Revisited)," in Joseph Long, ed., *Extrasensory Ecology: Parapsychology and Anthropology* (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1977), 1. See also Mark Schroll, "Castaneda's Controversy and Methodological Influences," in Mark Schroll, ed., *Transpersonal Ecosophy*, vol. 1: *Theory, Methods and Clinical Assessments* (Llanrhacadr-ym-Mochant: Psychoid Books, 2016), 203–216.
141. Alan Watts, we have seen, was a good example of this turn away from psychedelics. See also Ram Dass, Joan Halifax, Robert Aitken, and Richard Baker, "The Roundtable," *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review* 6, no. 1 (1996): 101–109; Hanegraaff, "Entheogenic Esotericism," 399.
142. Carlos Castaneda, *Journey to Ixtlan: The Lessons of Don Juan* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974 [1973]), 7–8, 13.
143. Castaneda, "Don Juan the Sorcerer."
144. Castaneda, *Journey to Ixtlan*, 17–18.
145. Castaneda, *Teachings of Don Juan*, 13.
146. Castaneda, *Journey to Ixtlan*, 19.

147. Castaneda, *Teachings of Don Juan*, 18.
148. Harner, *Way of the Shaman*, xxiii.
149. Humphry Osmond, quoted in Horowitz and Palmer, eds., *Moksha*, 107.
150. Janet Siskind, "Visions and Cures Among the Sharanahua," in Harner, ed., *Hallucinogens and Shamanism*, 28–29.
151. Walter Goldschmidt, "Foreword," in Castaneda, *Teachings of Don Juan*, 9.
152. *Ibid.*, 10.
153. Castaneda, "Don Juan the Sorcerer."
154. Michel Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," in Luther Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick Hutton, eds., *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 16–49.
155. Castaneda, *Teachings of Don Juan*, 19–20.
156. See *ibid.*, 190–198.
157. *Ibid.*, 19.
158. Castaneda, *Separate Reality*, 260.
159. Castaneda, *Teachings of Don Juan*, 198, 199.
160. *Ibid.*, 200.
161. See Dawson, *Santo Daime*; Dawson, "Brazil's Ayahuasca Religions," 233–252; Beatriz Caiuby Labate, Clancy Cavnar and Alex K. Gearin, eds., *The World Ayahuasca Diaspora: Reinventions and Controversies* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017).
162. Chris Kilham, *The Ayahuasca Test Pilots Handbook: The Essential Guide to Ayahuasca Journeying* (Berkeley: Evolver Editions, 2014), 4. For a good collection of essays on the use of ayahuasca and the issues raised, see Beatriz C. Labate and Henrik Jungaberle, eds., *The Internationalization of Ayahuasca* (Zurich: Lit Verlag, 2011).
163. Castaneda, *Teachings of Don Juan*, 199.
164. See *ibid.*, 208.
165. See *ibid.*
166. See *ibid.*
167. Castaneda, quoted in Hughes et al., "Don Juan and the Sorcerer's Apprentice," *Time*, March 5, 1973, 33.
168. Castaneda, *Teachings of Don Juan*, 208–209.
169. *Ibid.*, 209.
170. *Ibid.*, 210.
171. Carlos Castaneda, *The Second Ring of Power* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979 [1977]), 7.
172. Castaneda, *Tales of Power*, 140.
173. *Ibid.*, 173.
174. David L. Krantz, "Carlos Castaneda and His Followers: Finding Life's Meaning in Your Local Bookstore," *Journal of Popular Culture* 39, no. 4 (2006): 580; Daniel Noel, "Taking Castaneda Seriously: Paths of Explanation," in Daniel Noel, ed., *Seeing Castaneda: Reactions to the "Don Juan" Writings of Carlos Castaneda* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1976), 16.

175. Art Kleps, "Letter to the Editor," *New York Times*, February 4, 1973, 343.
176. Krantz, "Carlos Castaneda and His Followers," 578.
177. *Ibid.*, 589.
178. *Ibid.*, 579.
179. Noel, "Taking Castaneda Seriously," 16.
180. Krantz, "Carlos Castaneda and His Followers," 579.
181. *Ibid.*, 584–585.
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183. Krantz, "Carlos Castaneda and His Followers," 580.
184. "Some years ago I ran across a reference to the use of a *Datura* ointment by the Yaqui Indians of northern Mexico, reportedly rubbed on the stomach 'to see visions.' I called this to the attention of my colleague and friend Carlos Castaneda," who subsequently wrote about it in *The Teachings of Don Juan*. Michael Harner, "The Role of Hallucinogenic Plants in European Witchcraft," in Michael Harner, ed., *Hallucinogens and Shamanism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 140.
185. Castaneda, *Teachings of Don Juan*, 128–129.
186. *Ibid.*, 216.
187. *Ibid.*, 89–90.
188. Theodore Roszak, "Uncaging Skylarks: The Meaning of Transcendent Symbols," in Daniel Noel, ed., *Seeing Castaneda: Reactions to the "Don Juan" Writings of Carlos Castaneda* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1976), 145.
189. Theodore Roszak, "Gnosis and Reductionism," *Science* 187 (March 7, 1975), 792.
190. Theodore Roszak, *Sources: An Anthology of Contemporary Materials Useful for Preserving Personal Sanity While Braving the Great Technological Wilderness* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1972), 39–52.
191. This is possibly the most discussed passage from Castaneda's work. For example, from the perspective of transpersonal psychology, see Charles Tart, "Did I Really Fly? Some Methodological Notes on the Investigation of Altered States of Consciousness and Psi Phenomena," in Roberto Cavanna, ed., *Psi Favourable States of Consciousness* (New York: Parapsychology Foundation, 1970), 3–10; and, from a thoughtful conservative Christian perspective, James Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Guide World Views* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1977), 183–197.
192. Roszak, "Uncaging Skylarks," 145.
193. *Ibid.*, 146.
194. *Ibid.*, 147.
195. Roszak, in *ibid.* makes a similar point about fundamentalism, which is so detached from the root meaning of vision-flight that it defends the "absurdly literal proposition which seems to locate God in physical space above the clouds."
196. "I don't know whether I was a precocious kid or what, but I was very early into the New York literary scene, and even though I lived in a small town in Colorado, I subscribed to the *Village Voice*." David Jay Brown and Rebecca McClen Novick, with Terence McKenna, "Mushrooms, Elves and Magic," in Jay Brown and

- Rebecca McClen Novick, *Mavericks of the Mind: Conversations for the New Millennium* (Freedom: Crossing Press, 1993), 11.
197. Dennis McKenna, quoted in Alexander Price, "Immanentizing the Eschaton: An Interview with Dennis McKenna": http://realitysandwich.com/13139/interview_dennis_mckenna/ (accessed December 30, 2016).
 198. McKenna, *Archaic Revival*, 238.
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 200. Terence McKenna, *True Hallucinations*, in the combined volume *True Hallucinations and The Archaic Revival: Tales and Speculation about the Mysteries of the Psychedelic Experience* (New York: MJF Books, 1993), 55; see also Brown and Novick, "Mushrooms, Elves and Magic," 9–24.
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 205. Brown and Novick, "Mushrooms, Elves and Magic," 11.
 206. Zuvuya and Terence McKenna, *Shamania* (Delerium, 1994); Terence McKenna and Zuvuya, *Dream Matrix Telemetry* (Delerium, 1993).
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 210. Michael Lindemann, "Highlights of a Swiss UFO Conference": http://deoxy.org/t_swiss.htm (accessed December 21, 2016). For example, Fraser Clark, one of the key movers and shakers of rave culture, is explicit regarding his indebtedness to McKenna: "The Final Word on Drugs," in Antonio Melechi, ed., *Psychodelia Britannica: Hallucinogenic Drugs in Britain* (London: Turnaround, 1997), 185–204.
 211. Andrei Znamenski, *The Beauty of the Primitive: Shamanism and the Western Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 138.
 212. McKenna, *Archaic Revival*, 7; Brown and Novick, "Mushrooms, Elves and Magic," 11.
 213. McKenna, *Food of the Gods*, 12; see also McKenna, *True Hallucinations*, 70–71; McKenna, *Archaic Revival*, 85.
 214. Dennis McKenna, quoted in Price, "Immanentizing the Eschaton."
 215. While little scholarly attention has been devoted to the study of McKenna's thought, this situation has begun to change in recent years. See particularly Erik Davis, "The Weird Naturalism of the Brothers McKenna: Esoteric Media

- and the Experiment at La Chorrera," *International Journal for the Study of New Religions* 7, no. 2 (2016): 175–198; Jeffrey Kripal, *Esalen: America and the Religion of No Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 368–376; Wouter Hanegraaff, "And End History. And Go to the Stars: Terence McKenna and 2012," in Carole Cusack and Christopher Hartney, eds., *Religion and Retributive Logic: Essays in Honour of Professor Gary W. Trompf* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 291–312; Hanegraaff, "Entheogenic Esotericism," 392–409; Christopher Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West: Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture and Occulture* (London: T. & T. Clark International, 2005), 2:113–120; Graham St John, *Mystery School in Hyperspace: A Cultural History of DMT* (Berkeley: Evolver Editions, 2015); Graham St John, "Techno Millennium: Dance, Ecology and Future Primitives," in Graham St John, ed., *Rave Culture and Religion* (London: Routledge, 2004), 214–218; Graham St John, "The 2012 Movement, Visionary Arts and Psytrance Culture," in Joseph Gelfer, ed., *2012: Decoding the Countercultural Apocalypse* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2011), 144–162; Graham St John, "The DMT Gland: The Pineal, The Spirit Molecule, and Popular Culture," *International Journal for the Study of New Religions* 7, no. 2 (2016): 153–174.
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Index

- 2012, 329–330, 431, 433, 392
- A.:A.:, 183, 185, 389
- Aaronson, Bernard, 416, 422
- Abbey of Thelema, 171–172, 177
- Aberle, David, 417
- Abhayananda, Swami. *See* Haines, William
- Abramelin Operation, 179–180
- Abrams, Meyer H., 45, 47, 353, 356
- Abremalin Operation, 179–180
- Absolute, the, 9, 17, 81, 209, 220–221
- Adams, Ken, 430
- Adamski, George, 322
- Adamson, Raoul, 348
- addiction, 2, 7, 30–31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 41–42, 47, 55, 56, 101, 103, 107, 109, 125, 145, 146, 152, 166–167, 168, 170, 171–173, 176, 180, 186, 199, 200, 228, 264, 274, 299, 343, 352, 353, 372, 382, 383, 390
- adrenochrome, 204
- Afari, Yasus, 271, 417
- Aiken, John, 270, 416
- Aiken, Louisa, 270
- Aitken, Robert, 274, 413, 428
- Alamantrah Working, 179
- Albanese, Catherine, 359
- alchemy, 135, 174, 177, 179, 324–327
- alcohol, 137, 141, 145–147, 151, 178, 200, 210, 222, 228, 272, 274, 300, 378, 382, 383
- Aldrich, Michael, 94, 367
- Aldridge, David, 371
- Alekseev, Anatoly, 434
- Alexander, Anna, 343
- Alford, Norman, 386
- aliens. *See* extraterrestrials
- alkahest. *See* dowameskh
- alla-chichi. *See* dowameskh
- Allegro, John, 305–307, 425–426
- Alpert, Richard (Ram Dass), 19, 21, 181, 235, 247, 252, 253, 254, 258, 259, 260, 278, 280, 290, 319, 349, 406, 407, 408, 412, 413, 416, 417, 418, 419, 421, 427
- Althusser, Louis, 405
- Amanita muscaria*, 290, 294, 298–301, 303, 305, 331
- Ambosia, 39, 40, 183
- Ananda Ashram, 258
- Anderson, J. A., 377
- anesthesia, 60–87
- Anger, Kenneth, 188
- anhalonium lewinii*, 177
- animal magnetism, 129–131, 148, 202, 293, 378
- animism, 20

- Anquetil-Duperron, Abraham
 Hyacinthe, 49
 Anslinger, Harry J., 101, 370
 anti-vaccination, 146
 apocalypse, 40, 114, 189, 207, 296, 301
Arabian Nights, 54–55, 88, 98, 100–101,
 102, 107–109, 111–112, 121, 139–140,
 141–142, 174, 276, 373
 archaic revival, 289, 321, 332–333
 Artaud, Antonin, 293, 339, 422
 Aryans, 298
 asceticism, 25, 43, 49, 73, 105, 106, 148,
 152, 213, 217, 218, 224, 279, 337
 Asiatic Society of Bengal, 49
 Asprem, Egil, 74, 344, 347, 362, 363,
 395, 420
 Assassins, 95–102, 121, 127, 140, 269
 Assembly of the Church of the
 Universe, 270
 Atwell, Allen, 282
 Aubert-Roche, Louis Rémy, 93, 100, 367
 Augoeides invocation, 78
 automatic writing, 78
 Avalon, Arthur, 283, 324, 419
 awakening, 13, 18, 113, 177, 236, 270
ayahuasca, 286, 291, 295, 298, 300, 313,
 323, 325, 327–328, 336, 337–338, 348,
 401, 421, 423–424, 427
 Ayton, William Alexander, 160, 386
 Ayurvedic medicine, 94
 Aztecs, 294–295
- Bache, Franklin, 352
 Bachrach, Bernard, 25, 351
 Badiner, Allan Hunt, 413, 414
 Baez, Joan, 185
 Bakalar, James B., 90, 207, 209, 353, 358,
 366, 367, 386, 401
 Baker, Richard, 275, 413, 427
 Balaban, Judy, 398
 Balázs, János, 294, 422
 Baldick, Robert, 385
- Balfour, Arthur, 74
 Balfour, Gerald, 74
 Ball, Martin, 426
 Balzac, Honoré de, 100
 Bangertus, Henricus, 97
Banisteriopsis caapi, 327
 Bare, John, 373
 Barlow, John Perry, 273, 417
 Barnard, Mary, 331–332, 434
 Barr, Belle, 413
 Barrett-Browning, Elizabeth, 33
 Barrett, William F., 74
 Barron, Frank, 230–231, 232, 235, 238
 Barthes, Roland, 405
 Bascom, John, 373
 Basilov, Vladimir, 335, 434
 Bataille, Georges, 9, 345
 Bates, Albert, 416
 Batilly, Denis Labey de, 97
 Battley's Sedative Solution, 31
 Baudelaire, Charles, 26, 36, 88, 100,
 102–108, 122, 133, 136, 140, 156, 167,
 180, 186, 187, 189, 213, 214, 233, 343,
 351, 354, 356, 358, 369, 370, 371, 381,
 388, 402
 Beardsley, Aubrey, 108
 Beat Generation, 108, 184, 186, 207, 225,
 249, 278, 319
 beatific state, 5
 Beatific Vision, 5, 39, 208, 217, 218, 220
 Beatles, The, 188, 191, 259, 273, 292
 Beauchamp, Cari, 398
 Becker, Helmut, 346
 Becker, Howard, 3, 19, 344, 349
 Beddoes, Thomas, 37, 62, 64, 359, 360
 Bedford, Sybille, 182, 213, 351, 393, 399,
 400, 402, 407, 425
 beer, 111, 183, 303,
 belladonna, 132
 Benjamin, Walter, 88, 123, 366, 375
 Bennett, Allan, 161, 173–174,
 176, 178–180, 187, 192, 391

- Bennett, Chris, 368, 393, 426
 Berger, Peter, 2, 13, 20, 344, 347, 349
 Bergson, Henri, 205, 211, 220, 344, 347, 349
 Beringer, Kurt, 192, 396
 Berke, Joseph, 366, 368, 375
 Berkeley, George, 63, 64, 79, 80, 84
 Berman, Wallace, 184
 Bernard of Clairvaux, 307
 Bernays, Martha, 126
 Berne, Eric, 236–237, 408
 Bernhard-Smith, Arthur, 177, 392
 Bernheim, Hippolyte-Marie, 77–78
 Berquist, Laura, 398
 Berridge, Edmund William, 159
 Berridge, Virginia, 386
 Besant, Annie, 150, 151, 384
bhang, 90, 141
 Black Mass, 274
 Black, Joseph, 62
 Blackwood, Algernon, 108
 Blair, William, 41, 107, 371
 Blake, Peter, 188, 191
 Blake, William, 44, 207, 230, 240, 278, 356, 405
 Blavatsky, Helena P., 88, 152–153, 163, 187, 327, 380, 384
 Bloch, Ernst, 88, 123, 366, 375
 Blood, Benjamin Paul, 71–74, 80, 82, 86, 361, 362, 364, 365
 Bloodlet, 144
 Bloom, Harold, 354
 Boccaccio, Giovanni, 97
 Böhme, Jakob, 134, 379, 387
 Bön, 319
Boo Hoo Bible, 266, 269, 413, 414, 415, 416
 Boon, Marcus, 7, 34, 64, 102, 107, 345, 353, 359, 360, 367, 370, 371, 396
 Booth, Martin, 167, 187, 366, 389, 391, 392, 395
 Bopp, Franz, 48
 Bowen Michael, 184
 Bowker, John, 24, 28–29, 194, 351, 352
 Bradshaw, David, 400
 Brahma, 52, 53
 Brahman, 55, 221, 222
 Brahmananda Sarasvati, 258
 Braun, Gerhart, 231
 Braunstein, Peter, 411
 Breeze, William, 184–185, 187, 394
 Brevitt, James, 147, 382
 Brierre de Boismont, Alexandre, 91, 193
 Britten, Emma Hardinge, 138, 148–149, 377, 380, 383
 Broad, Charlie Dunbar, 211, 212, 216, 401
 Brockmeier, Jens, 347
 Brontë, Bramwell, 41
 Brotherhood of Eternal Love, 270
 Brough, John, 299–300
 Brown, David Jay, 412, 429–430
 Brown, David, 27–28, 352
 Brown, Mick, 426, 427
 Brown, Robert, 272, 417
 Brunner, Emil, 362
 Brunton, Lauder, 78
 Bucke, Richard Maurice, 181, 241, 409
 Buddhism, 162, 173, 201, 224, 255, 259, 279, 280, 340, 419
 Burge, Brad, 345
 Burke, Edmund, 52, 53, 357
 Burns, Dylan M., 381
 Burns, James, 145, 147, 382
 Burress III, Lee A., 359
 Burroughs, William S., 30, 101, 103, 166, 173, 186, 207, 224, 251, 352, 369, 390, 401, 404
 Burton, Richard D. E., 158, 385
 Burton, Richard, 49, 174
 Burton, Robert, 90
 Burton, Sandra, 426
 Burwick, Frederick, 354
 Byron, Lord, 33, 47, 356

- Cahagnet, Louis-Alphonse, 5, 93, 126–135,
 136, 137, 139–140, 142, 144, 165, 186,
 187, 291, 364, 377, 378, 379, 382, 421
 Calabrese, Joseph, 417
 Calvert, Robert, 101, 369
 Cameron, Marjorie, 184–185
 Campbell, Colin, 250, 274, 275, 276, 358,
 373, 403, 411, 418, 419
 Campion, Nicholas, 395, 411
 Campos, Don José, 350, 421
 cannabis, 2, 3, 7, 11, 47, 61, 78, 80, 88–124,
 125, 126–144, 140, 149, 150,
 152–154, 156, 161, 163, 164, 165, 166, 167,
 169, 174–176, 179, 180, 181, 184, 187,
 189, 193, 197, 217, 227, 258, 264, 265,
 266, 268, 270, 271, 275, 300, 356, 366–382,
 388, 389, 391, 405, 426
 Caporael, Linnda, 396
 Capra, Fritjof, 276–278, 418
 Caputo, John, 355
 Carlyle, Thomas, 41, 355
 Carpenter, Frank, 115, 374
 Carter, John, 393, 394
 Castalia Foundation, 254, 270
 Castaneda, Carlos, 21, 278, 288, 290, 291,
 308–318, 320, 321, 337, 339, 348, 350, 351,
 421, 426, 427, 428, 429, 436
 Cavnar, Clancy, 428
 Cela, Camilo José, 297
 Center for Research in Personality, 231
 Certeau, Michel de, 9, 346
 Chadwick, Owen, 365
 chakras, 152, 283
 Chaldean Oracles, 390, 391
 Chambers, Robert, 365, 376, 381, 395
 Chandler, Arthur, 201
 Chanel, Christian, 385
charas, 90
 Chardin, Pierre Teilhard de, 211
 Charing Cross Spirit Circle, 136
 chemical generation, 7
 Chermak, Stephen, 352
 Chesterton, G. K., 33, 46, 353, 356
 Chief Boo Hoo. *See* Kleps, Art
 Children, the, 184
 Christianity, 13–14, 25, 26, 27, 28, 46,
 48, 78, 84, 96, 106, 109, 115, 109, 115,
 116, 117, 118, 122, 139, 150, 158, 161, 189,
 210, 213, 216, 217, 218, 221, 222, 240,
 247–248, 251, 265, 271, 272, 274, 280,
 295, 296, 306, 307, 333, 335, 358, 375,
 426, 429
 Church of Satan, 274
 Church of the Awakening, 270
 Church of the Golden Rule, 268
 Church of the Tree of Life, 270
 Churton, Tobias, 393
 Cioppa, Mary Della, 228
 Clark, Fraser, 430
 Clark, Ron, 402
 Clark, Walter Houston, 234, 240–241,
 246, 337, 406, 407, 408, 409, 410, 416,
 417, 419
 Cleargreen, 311, 427
 Club des Hachichins, Le, 100, 102, 127,
 133, 138, 140, 159, 275, 369, 381
 Club of the Assassins. *See* Club des
 Hachichins, Le
 cocaine, 2, 125–126, 166, 168–169, 170,
 171–172, 173, 174, 176, 178, 180, 183
 Cocteau, Jean, 36, 354
 Cohen, Margaret, 366
 Cohen, Sidney, 198–199, 212, 397
 Coil, 185
 Colebrooke, Thomas, 49
 Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, 31, 32, 34–35,
 37–38, 49, 53–59, 61, 64, 67, 86, 109,
 231, 275, 352, 353, 354, 357, 358, 360, 365
 Collins, Wilkie, 33, 38, 46, 128, 377
 Combe, William, 68, 361, 365
 Confucius, 135
 Connor, Steven, 364
 Connors, Peter, 405
 Conze, Edward, 283

- Cooke, John, 184
 Cornow, Robert, 183, 394
 Corpse Garden, 145
 Corson, Kate, 136
 Cosmic Mind, 328
 Cotton, Walter, 41
 Cottrell, 225
 Cottrell, Robert C., 225, 404
 counterculture, 13, 27, 89, 95, 182,
 188–189, 191, 200, 201, 225, 227, 236,
 250–252, 253, 270, 273, 274, 275, 278,
 284, 287, 304, 411
 Courtwright, David, 56, 358
 Cox, Harvey, 274, 340, 403,
 417, 418, 435
 Crabbe, George, 33
 Crabtree, Adam, 130, 378
 Craig, Lyman, 195
 Crockford, Susanna, 378
 Crookes, William, 74
 Cros, Edward, 172
 Crowley, Aleister, 38, 101, 108, 161,
 166–188, 191, 192, 210, 226, 368, 387,
 388, 389, 390, 391, 392, 393, 394, 395
Crypto-Rap, 324–325
 Cunningham, Andrew, 84, 359,
 360, 365
 Cup of Libation, 177–178
 Cupitt, Don, 18, 349
 Current, 93, 185

 d'Assier, Adolph, 128, 377
 d'Espérance, Elizabeth, 145
 Daftary, Farhad, 96, 98, 368
 Dahab, F. Elizabeth, 369
 Dalby's Carminative, 31
 Dana, Joe, 413
 Dante, 97
 Daoism, 255, 259, 280
 Dark Interpreter, 43–44, 65, 340, 355
Datura, 312
 Daumier, Honoré, 100

 Davenport-Hines, Richard, 7, 345, 352,
 354, 389
 Davidson, Arthur F., 381
 Davidson, Peter, 160
 Davis, Adelle. *See* Dunlap, Jane
 Davis, Erik, 324, 431, 432
 Davis, Wade, 431
 Davy, Humphry, 37, 56, 61–68, 79,
 92, 136, 159, 162, 195, 340, 358, 359,
 360, 397
 Dawson, Andrew, 291, 421, 423, 428
 De Quincey, Florence, 43, 355
 De Quincey, Thomas, 30–32, 34, 36,
 38–46, 47, 50, 51, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58,
 59, 65, 91, 92, 102, 103, 107, 108, 109,
 111, 156, 186, 193, 231, 275, 340, 352, 353,
 354, 355, 356, 357, 358, 369, 370, 399,
 401, 435
 de Ropp, Robert, 11, 100, 181, 202, 346,
 369, 399
 de Sacy, Sylvestre, 90, 95, 97, 98, 367
 Dead Sea scrolls, 306–307
 Debord, Guy, 405
 Dec, John, 186
 degeneration (Nordau), 155–156
 DeKorne, Jim, 336, 356, 433, 434, 435
 Delacroix, Eugène, 100
 Deloria, Philip, 250, 411
 Demeter, 301–303
 Denisoff, Dennis, 158, 385
 dentistry, 68, 70–72, 87, 267
 dephlogisticated nitrous air. *See*
 nitrous oxide
 Derrida, Jacques, 405
 Deveney, John Patrick, 127, 363, 376, 377,
 380, 381, 385
 Devereux, Paul, 292, 353, 421
 Devil. *See* Satan
 Dharma Sangha, 275
 Dharmapala, Angarika, 150
 Dianetics. *See* Scientology
 Dickens, Charles, 32, 353

- Dicksee, Frank, 49
 Dionysus, 302, 307, 329
 Ditman, Keith, 279
 DMT, 6, 16, 256, 301, 319, 321–322,
 325–327, 331, 333, 337, 339, 345, 435
 Dobkin de Rios, Marlene, 345, 351, 410
 Doblin, Rick, 247, 345, 435
 Doniger O’Flaherty, Wendy, 298–300,
 423, 424
 Donoghue, Denis, 162, 386, 387
 Doore, Gary, 350, 421
 Douglas, Mary, 338, 382, 435
 Dover’s Powder, 31
 dowameskh, 136–144
 Dowden, Edward, 387
 Dowson, Ernest, 161
 Doyle, Michael William, 411
 Dr. John Collis Brown’s Chlorodyne, 94
Dr. Syntax in Paris, 68–70, 71, 87
 dreams, 21, 22, 34–38, 42, 43, 51, 52,
 53, 55, 56, 59, 63, 64, 70, 72, 76, 79,
 93, 97, 99, 99, 101, 104, 105, 106, 108,
 120, 121, 122, 126, 133, 140, 150, 152,
 153, 154, 159, 164, 165, 186, 195, 236,
 266, 291, 304–305, 314, 318, 320, 354,
 366, 415
 Dreiser, Theodore, 177
 Drew, John, 357
 du Potet, Baron Jules, 127
 dualism, 12, 14, 25, 76, 77, 81, 119, 120, 212,
 220, 222, 223, 239, 263, 275, 276, 279, 315
 Dublin Hermetic Society, 163
 Dulchinos, Donald, 108, 115, 372, 374
 Dumas, Alexandre, 99–100, 111, 121, 137,
 140–141, 369, 375, 381
 Dummett, Michael, 402
 Dunaway, David King, 393, 399, 418
 Dunbar, Ernest, 80
 Duncan, Michael, 416
 Dunlap, Jane, 23, 222, 351, 401, 404
 Dyck, Erika, 397
 Dylan, Bob, 185
 Earleywine, Mitch, 366, 369
 Easternization, 218, 235, 259, 273–283,
 373, 402
 Eblis, 109, 117, 374
 Ecclesia Gnostica Catholica, 184
 Eckhart, Meister, 117, 208
 ecstacy, 9, 15, 19–23, 28, 76, 83, 97, 100,
 102, 119, 130, 131, 134, 141, 150, 163, 166,
 168, 177, 178, 184, 213, 214, 222, 228, 230,
 238, 240, 246, 260, 289–291, 292, 301,
 305, 315, 329
 ego death, 285
 Eiland, Howard, 375
 Eisner, Betty G., 397
 ekatvam, 285
ekstasis. *See* ecstacy
 Eleusinian Mysteries, 154, 177–178,
 301–304
 Eliade, Mircea, 9, 19, 283, 289–290, 329,
 349, 392, 420, 421
 elixir of immortality. *See* elixir of life
 elixir of life, 135, 139, 153, 154, 174, 177, 179
elixir vitae. *See* Elixir of Life
 Ellis, Havelock, 161–162, 165, 176, 177,
 192, 293, 386, 422
 Ellwood, William, 352
 elves, 322
 Embree, Ainslie T., 423
 Emerson, Ralph Waldo, 61, 71, 72,
 359, 374
 Emrich, Hinderk, 397
 entheogen, 4–6
 Entheogenic (musicians), 144
Ephedra, 300
 ergotism, 396
 Esalen Institute, 273–274, 278, 280,
 304, 417
 eschaton, 328–329
 Eshleman, Clayton, 435
 Esquirol, Jean Etienne Dominique,
 91, 193
 Eternal Now, 24

- ether, 100, 126, 132, 148, 168, 174
 etheric body, 384
 etheric web, 151
 ethyl oxide, 166, 388
 Eucharist, 145, 222, 272, 282
 Euclid, 210
 Evans-Wentz, Walter, 21, 322, 324, 350
 Evans, C. C., 403
 Everett, Ruth Fuller, 278
 extraterrestrials, 202, 262, 334, 340

Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers, 338
 Fachner, Jörg, 371
 Fadiman, James, 410, 420
 Faflak, Joel, 42, 355
 Fahey, John, 185
 fairies, 161, 322
 Faivre, Antoine, 378
 Falconet, Étienne Maurice, 97
 Fall, the, 84–85
 Farm, The, 270–271
 Faudree, Paja, 423
 Faust, 213–214
 Ferguson, Maynard, 253
 Fichte, Johann Gottlieb, 72, 73, 104, 113
fidai's, 96
 Fielde, Adele M., 148–150, 383
 Fikes, Jay C., 426
 fin de siècle, 126, 128, 131, 133, 138, 139,
 149, 155–166, 170, 182, 184, 186–187,
 189, 192, 225
 Finley, Lana, 136, 380
 Flannery, Mary Catherine, 164, 386
 Flattery, David., 424
 Flaubert, Gustave, 106, 371
 flight (soul, magic, vision), 20, 109, 229,
 238, 290, 295, 296, 317–318, 335, 429
 Fludd, Robert, 185
 fly-agaric mushroom. *See Amanita*
 muscaria
 flying Saucers. *See* UFOs
 Folger, Abigail, 417
 Ford, Jennifer, 354
 Forman, Robert K., 349
 Fornet-Batancourt, Raúl, 346
 Forte, Robert, 413, 417, 418
 Fortune, Dion, 384–385
 Foster, George, 422
 Foster, Robert Fitzroy, 386, 387
 Foucault, Michel, 9–12, 18, 48, 57, 58, 106,
 123, 346, 358, 371, 405, 428
 Fox, George, 232
 Foxcroft, Louise, 31, 352
 Frank, Priscilla, 394
 Frecska, Ede, 355, 434
 Freud, Sigmund, 76, 125–126, 270, 376
 Friedman, Harris, 287, 420
 Fulford, Tim, 358
 Fuller, John F. C., 175, 389, 391
 Fuller, Margaret, 60, 71, 359
 Fuller, Robert C., 256, 337, 345, 356,
 413, 435
 Furst, Lilian, 44, 356
 Furst, Peter T., 290, 392, 421, 424

 Gabriel, Joseph M., 70, 360, 361
 Galbreath, Robert, 347
 Gale, John, 403
 Galen, 90
 Galland, Antoine, 101, 370, 373
 games of truth, 10–11
ganja, 90, 150, 152
 Gaoni, Yechiel, 89
 Garcia, Jerry, 185
 Garrett, Eileen, 216
 Gaskin, Stephen, 270–271
 Gauld, Alan, 362, 377, 378, 379
 Gauthier, J. D., 346
 Gautier, Théophile, 88, 100, 102–103, 126,
 137, 140, 154, 186, 233, 369, 370, 378, 381
 Gayatri Devi, 281
 Gearin, Alex, 337–338, 428, 435
 Geekie, Jim, 403
 genie. *See jinn*

- genius of being. *See* Genius, the
- Genius, the, 65–67, 71, 72, 73, 84,
179–180, 340, 360
- Gestalt therapy, 254, 283
- Gilbert, Davies, 62
- Gilbert, Robert A., 160, 386
- Gillespie, Bobby, 29
- Ginsberg, Allen, 1, 12, 13, 108, 224, 226,
234, 235, 251, 252, 253, 280, 343, 346,
369, 401, 404, 405, 407, 408, 412, 415
- Giudice, Christian, 387
- glossolalia, 326
- gnosis, 1, 7, 12–17, 18, 20, 22, 24, 30, 35,
36, 37, 38, 40, 41, 44, 46, 47, 49, 55, 59,
64, 65, 66, 71, 72, 73, 80, 83, 85, 86, 87,
105, 106, 114, 115, 119, 120, 122, 132, 135,
142–143, 144, 154, 158, 174, 184, 200,
203, 205, 207, 210, 211, 212, 218, 239,
243, 257, 260, 274, 279, 282, 284, 285,
297, 313, 315, 316, 320, 324, 332, 333, 334,
335, 337, 338, 341, 346
- gnostic impulse, 1, 12, 20, 64, 218
- Gnosticism, 12, 14, 19, 142, 184, 218, 282, 337
- God(s), 2, 4, 5, 12, 17, 24, 26, 27, 28, 32, 33,
38, 43, 45, 52, 72, 79, 83, 85, 86, 87, 97,
104, 113, 115, 116, 117, 118, 122, 132, 135,
137, 142, 143, 147, 150, 153, 161, 164, 172,
178, 180, 186, 193, 194, 214, 220–223,
232, 236, 239, 240, 246, 247–248, 256,
258, 262, 266, 274, 281, 282, 284, 294,
298, 301, 302, 304, 307, 317, 331, 332, 333
- Goddess, 270, 281, 301, 302, 332
- Godfrey's Cordial, 31
- Godwin, Jocelyn, 127, 376, 385
- Goldschmidt, Walter, 312–313, 428
- Gomez-Müller, Alfredo, 346
- Gonne, Maude, 159–166, 169, 187, 189,
192, 387, 395
- Good Friday experiment. *See* Marsh
Chapel experiment
- Goode, Erich, 352, 419
- Goodman, Martin, 426
- Goodman, Paul, 250, 411
- Goodrick-Clarke, Nicholas, 377
- Gorski, William, 386
- Gould, Alan, 362
- Gould, Warwick, 387
- Govinda, Anagarika, 278, 324
- Graboi, Nina, 252, 412
- Grant, Cary, 201, 398
- Grant, Kenneth, 181
- Graves, Robert, 290, 299, 303, 421, 425
- Greenfield, Robert, 395
- Gregory, William, 130, 378
- Grey, Alex, 413
- Griggs, John, 270
- grimoires, 179
- Grimstad, Kirsten, 346
- Grinspoon, Lester, 90, 207, 209, 353, 358,
366, 367, 386, 401
- Grob, Charles S., 396
- Grof, Stanislav, 2, 16, 273, 287, 343,
348, 358
- Gross, David M., 372
- ground of being, 2, 44
- Guenther, Herbert, 324
- Gurdjieff, George Ivanovich, 254, 384
- Gurney, Edmund, 71, 74
- Gysin, Brion, 186, 368
- hachisch. *See* cannabis
- hachishin. *See* Assassin
- Hades, 302
- Haines, William (Swami Abhayananda),
258–259, 261, 266, 268–269, 413, 416
- Haining, Peter, 207, 400
- Halbfass, Wilhelm, 357
- Hales, Stephen, 61, 62
- Halifax, Joan, 413, 427
- Halpern, John, 397
- Hammer-Purgstall, Joseph von, 98, 369
- Hanegraaff, Wouter, 4, 13, 14, 15, 26, 27,
324, 344, 346, 347, 348, 349, 351, 352,
413, 420, 426, 427, 431, 432, 433

- Hardman, Charlotte, 308, 426
 Harman, Willis W., 410
 Harnack, Adolf von, 338
 Harner, Michael, 20, 21, 22, 23, 289, 312, 316, 325, 340, 349, 350, 420, 428, 429, 432, 436
 Harris, Oliver, 401
 Hartman, Mortimer, 201
 Harvey, Graham, 20, 350, 420
 Ḥasan Ṣabbāḥ, 95–102, 121
 hasheesh candy, 94
 hasheesh. *See* cannabis
 hashish. *See* cannabis
 hashish. *See* cannabis
 ḥashīshīyya. *See* Assassins
 Hawkwind, 101, 102
 Hayter, Alethea, 35, 37, 38, 41, 352, 353, 354, 355
 healing, 22, 95, 129, 146, 236, 237, 271, 282, 288, 291, 296, 329, 335–339
 Heard, Gerald, 184, 199, 201, 202, 235, 275, 279, 397, 399
 Heelas, Paul, 237, 257, 408, 413
 Heffter, Arthur, 176, 192, 293, 396
 Hegel, Georg W. F., 17, 71, 72, 73, 82–84, 86, 104, 113, 348
 Hegelian experience, 17
 Heim, Roger, 299
 Hell's Angels, 249–250
 Belmont, Jan Baptist van, 61
 henbane, 132
 Hendrix, Jimi, 292
 Herder, Johann Gottfried von, 50, 53
 Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor (H.B. of L.), 159–160, 187
 Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, 159, 160, 162, 163, 166, 170, 173, 176, 180, 183, 389
 Hernton, Calvin, 366, 368, 375
 heroin, 170, 171, 172, 173, 176, 180, 186
 Herrigel, Eugen, 278, 284
 Herschel, Frederick William, 67
 Hertz, Uri, 339, 435
 Hervieu-Léger, Danièle, 334–335, 434
 Hesse, Hermann, 254–255, 284, 308, 347
 heterotopia, 57–58, 64, 75, 102, 112, 133, 158
 Hick, John, 212, 401
 Hickok, Laurens Perseus, 112–114, 373, 374
 Higgs, John, 406, 408
 Hikori, 161
 Hilton, Frank, 370
 Hinde, Jules, 377
 Hinderk, Emrich, 397
 Hinduism, 50, 78, 216, 221, 224, 231, 235, 253, 254, 255, 259, 277, 280–281
 Hintzen, Annelie, 397
 Hirschman, Ada E., 373, 376, 405
 Hirsig, Leah, 388
 Hitchcock, Peggy, 253
 Hitchcock, Tommy, 253
 Hitchcock, William (Billy), 253, 259, 261, 265, 269
 Hoch, Paul, 197
 Hocking, William Ernest, 199
 Hockley, Fred, 377
 Hodson, Geoffrey, 150–151, 383, 384
 Hoffer, Abram, 203
 Hoffman, Nicholas von, 411, 419
 Hofmann, Albert, 194–197, 199, 200, 297, 299, 301, 303, 304, 392, 397, 423, 425
 Hollingshead, Michael, 234, 254–255, 407, 412, 419
 Holmes, Richard, 62, 67, 360, 361
 Holmstedt, Bo, 91, 367
 hologram, 327
 Holy Grail, 307
 Home, Daniel Dunglas, 381
 homeopathy, 78
 Homer, 101, 370
 Hoog, Armand, 394
 Houston, Jean, 2, 23, 192, 344, 351, 396, 405, 419

- Hruby, Paula, 409
 Hubbard, Alfred M., 199–201, 398
 Hubbard, L. Ron, 201
 Hübbe-Schleiden, Wilhelm, 150
 Hubble, Edwin, 202
 Hubble, Grace, 202
 Hughes, Robert, 426
 Hughes, Trevor, 369, 370
 Hugo, Victor, 100
 humanistic psychology, 236–237, 239, 258, 259, 280, 284, 285, 287
 Hume, David, 112, 113, 262, 263, 264, 278
 Hunt, Chandos Leigh, 146, 342
 Hutton, Ronald, 420
 Huxley, Aldous, 1, 4, 11, 13, 14, 17, 24, 27, 45, 73, 122, 175, 181, 182, 184, 187, 191, 192, 198, 199, 200, 201–224, 225, 226, 227, 228, 229, 230, 232–238, 242, 244, 246, 247, 248, 259, 262, 271–276, 278–281, 283, 284, 287, 304, 305, 308, 320, 333, 344, 346, 347, 348, 351, 375, 393, 396, 398, 399, 400, 401, 402, 403, 404, 405, 406, 407, 417, 418, 419, 425
 Huxley, Andrew, 202
 Huxley, Francis, 182, 202, 393, 399
 Huxley, Julian, 202
 Huxley, Laura, 211, 273, 401, 402
 Huxley, Maria, 206
 Huysmans, Joris-Karl, 126, 158, 166, 186, 385, 388
 Hyams, Joe, 398
 Hyde, Robert, 197
 hypnotism, 77, 126, 129–130, 150, 211–212, 363
I Ching, 259, 278, 321, 323, 328–329
 Ian, Marcia, 358
 Iblis. *See* Eblis
 Idealism, 18, 49, 54, 56, 63–64, 72, 80, 85, 86, 93, 106, 112, 113, 122, 132, 150, 159, 199, 201, 226, 275, 280, 324, 328, 374
 Illuminati, 135
 illumination, 15, 71, 74, 84, 88, 124, 135, 141, 167, 192, 225, 232, 243, 260, 261, 272, 285, 297, 336, 366
 ineffability, 2, 14–15, 17, 38, 72, 114, 115, 128, 141, 169, 175, 230, 242, 244, 284, 304, 315, 318, 320
 Ingres, Jean-Auguste-Dominique, 49
 International Federation for Internal Freedom (IFIF), 251, 252, 253, 254
 Irvin, Jan, 426
 Irwin, Robert, 111, 372, 373
 Iseli, Markus, 355
 Isherwood, Christopher, 201, 398
 Islam, 91, 95, 96, 98, 109, 112, 220, 221, 222
 Isma'ilis, 96–97
 Iversen, Leslie L., 1, 343, 366, 368
 Jacobs, Walter, 195
 James, Henry, 358
 James, Tony, 91, 367
 James, William, 2, 9, 14–17, 24, 40, 44, 45, 56, 57, 59, 60, 71, 73, 74, 80, 81, 82, 84, 86, 104, 106–108, 181, 189, 193, 232, 234, 235, 241, 243, 244, 245, 318, 344, 346, 347, 348, 355, 358, 359, 360, 361, 362, 364, 365, 370, 373, 401
 Janiger, Oscar, 24, 345, 351, 410
 Janischevsky, Dmitri Erastovich, 89
 Jardine, Nicholas, 365
 Jay, Mike, 61, 68, 353, 359, 360, 361, 424
 Jeffares, A. Norman, 387
 Jefferson Airplane, 61, 227
 Jenkin, Leonard, 373
 Jesus Christ, 72, 102, 116, 117, 118, 119, 213, 214, 247–248, 265, 282, 295, 296, 307, 310, 338, 373, 423, 435, 438
jinn, 102, 109, 111, 122, 176
 Johnson, Charles, 163
 Johnson, Jean Bassett, 294, 422
 Johnson, Paul C., 349, 420
 Johnson, Raynor, 181
 Jones, George Cecil, 173

- Jones, Nick, 367
 Jones, William, 49
 Jung, Carl, 325, 326, 328, 333, 433, 434
 Jungaberle, Henrik, 423, 428

 Kabbalah, 333
 Kaczynski, Richard, 171, 187, 388, 390,
 391, 392, 394
kairos, 15
 Kakko, Tommi, 373, 374
 Kane, Harry Hubbell, 33, 88, 353, 365, 366
 Kant, Immanuel, 45, 49, 65, 72, 86,
 113–114, 115, 122, 155, 360, 373, 374
 Karr, Alphonse, 100
 Katz, Sidney, 198, 397
 Katz, Steven, 348, 359
 Keats, John, 33, 72
 Keenan, David, 394
 Keiden, Bill, 383, 384
 Keleus (king of Eleusis), 302
 Kelly, Emily Williams, 75, 362
 Kelly, Rose, 174
 Ken Kesey, 15, 253
 Kendal Black Drop, 31–32
 Kerouac, Jack, 108, 224, 225
 Kesler, Karl, 413
 ketamine, 337
 Kety, Seymour, 28
kief, 100, 105
 Kilham, Chris, 313, 428
 King, Francis, 187, 384–385
 King, Karen, 365
 King, Richard, 50, 357
 Kleps, Art, 188, 255, 259, 261–271, 315, 395,
 412, 413, 414, 415, 416
 Kleps, Wendy, 415
 Klüver, Heinrich, 192–193, 396
 Koestler, Arthur, 229–230, 232, 244,
 406, 409
 Kohn, Marek, 353
 Kontou, Tatiana, 376
 Kornfield, Andrew, 420
 Kornfield, Jack, 259, 413
 Kramrisch, Stella, 392
 Krantz, David, 315–316, 428, 429
 Krassner, Paul, 418
 Kripal, Jeffrey, 76, 215, 216, 273, 278, 304,
 363, 402, 403, 407, 413, 417, 418, 409,
 425, 431
 Krippner, Stanley, 412
 Krishnamurti, Jiddu, 201
 Krishnan, Sanjay, 357, 369
 Kroll, Jerome, 25, 351
 Kuch, Judith H., 268
 Kundalini yoga, 281, 282, 283
kykeon, 303

 La Barre, Weston, 299, 301, 424
 La Chorrera, experiment at, 322–329
 Labate, Beatriz Caiuby, 423, 428
 Lacan, Jacques, 405
 Ladd, George Trumbull, 373
 Laing, Ronald David, 229, 253, 400, 412
 Lamarck, Jean Baptiste, 89
 Lampshire, Debra, 403
 Lancaster Black Drop, 31
 Lander, Devin, 416
 Lane, Edward William, 98, 368
 Lane, George, 369
 Lang, Andrew, 427
lapis philosophorum. *See*
 philosopher's stone
 Lardas, John, 404
 Lattin, Don, 228, 236, 397, 405,
 406, 408
 laudanum, 32, 35, 38, 41, 55, 94
 laughing gas. *See* nitrous oxide
 LaVey, Anton, 274
 Lawrence, Christopher, 359
 Lazar, Seymour, 259
 Leadbeater, Charles W., 151–152, 384
 League for Spiritual Discovery, 236,
 256–258, 261, 270, 272
 Leary, Marianne, 228

- Leary, Timothy, 11, 13, 14, 19, 21, 28, 45,
 73, 180–181, 186, 188, 215, 225–228,
 230–240, 244–261, 263–270, 274, 275,
 280–283, 290, 305, 315, 319, 320, 332,
 343, 346, 347, 349, 350, 351, 395, 397,
 402, 404, 405, 406, 407, 408, 409,
 410, 411, 412, 413, 414, 415, 416, 417,
 418, 419, 421, 425, 434
 Led Zeppelin, 188
 Lee, Martin A., 197, 200, 366, 375,
 397, 398
 Lefebure, Molly, 64, 67, 360
 Lélut, Louis-Françisque, 91, 193
 Lennon, John, 414
 Letcher, Andy, 345, 353, 422
 Levere, Trevor H., 360
 Lévi, Éliphas, 125, 179, 376
 Lévi-Strauss, Claude, 299, 405
 Lewin, Louis, 176, 182, 192–94, 293,
 391, 396
 Lewis, Bernard, 96, 97, 368
 Lewis, Ioan M., 20, 291–292, 349,
 420, 421
 Lewis, John Frederick, 49
 Lilly, John C., 186
 Lindemann, Michael, 430
 Linnaeus, Carolus, 89
 Loayze, Tomáz, 426
 Locke, John, 112
 Long, Crawford W., 70, 361, 365
 Long, Joseph, 427
 Lopez, Donald, 414
 Lorenz, Konrad, 238
 Lovecraft, H. P., 108
 Lowes, John Livingstone, 353
 LSD, 6, 11–12, 16, 24, 61, 98, 151, 181–182,
 194–201, 212, 234–235, 238, 239, 249,
 251, 254, 255, 256, 257, 258, 263, 265,
 266, 268, 270, 273, 274, 275, 276, 279,
 281, 282, 283, 284, 285, 286, 303, 215,
 216, 323, 324, 337, 398
 Luck, George, 301
 Luckmann, Thomas, 13, 347
 Ludlow, Fitz Hugh, 107–121, 122, 126,
 134, 137, 139, 140, 150, 159, 167, 175, 180,
 186, 187, 231, 356, 371, 372, 373, 374, 375,
 380, 381, 388
 Luke, David, 340, 435–436
 Lumholtz, Carl Sofus, 292–293, 422
 Lumsden, Charles, 331, 433
 Luna, Luis Eduardo, 434
 Lytton, Edward Bulwer, 38, 147, 179, 354,
 382, 392
Macbeth, 36–37
 Macey, David, 11, 346
 machine elves, 321, 322, 339
 Mack, Robert, 370
 Mackintosh, Hugh Ross, 26–27, 351
 MacLean, Mary Ann, 274
 MacMartin, Daniel Fredrick, 356
 Madsen, Claudia, 427
 Madsen, William, 427
 Maginot, Adèle, 130–131, 133
 magnetic sleep, 129–130
 Mahomet. *See* Muhammad
 Maimonides, Moses, 307
 Maimonides, Obadyah, 307
 Majercik, Ruth, 390
 Makdisi, Sarec, 357, 373
 mandragora, 132
 manna, 39, 305, 307
 Mansfield, Katherine, 177
 Manson, Charles, 250
 Marcuse, Herbert, 405
 Marett, Robert Ranulph, 185
 marijuana. *See* cannabis
 Marincolo, Sebastián, 366, 386
 Markel, Howard, 126, 376
 Markoff, John, 405
 Maroukis, Thomas, 417
 Marsh Chapel experiment, 240–249
 Martin, Heather, 386
 Martin, Joseph, 415

- Martinism, 163–164, 387
 Marton, Yves, 426
 Marzolph, Ulrich, 373
 Maslow, Abraham, 167, 181, 237, 285–287, 389, 419
 Masters, Robert, 2, 23, 192, 344, 351, 396, 405, 419
 Mathers, Samuel Liddell MacGregor, 160, 162, 163, 170, 179
 Matús, Don Juan, 308–318
 Maupassant, Guy de, 86, 365
 Mauriac, Claude, 11
 McClelland, David, 231–232
 McGinn, Bernard, 116, 117, 374
 McKenna, Dennis, 304, 319–29, 420, 425, 430, 431, 432, 433, 434
 McKenna, Terence, 4, 16–17, 273, 288, 289, 301, 304, 318–334, 336, 339, 344, 348, 420, 421, 424, 425, 426
 McKim, Robert H., 410
 McLean, Wilson, 308
 McLeod, Hugh, 225, 251, 404, 411
 McLuhan, Marshall, 321, 323–324, 432
 McMunn's Elixir, 31
 Mecca, 135
 Mechoulam, Raphael, 89
 Medical and Physical Society of Calcutta, 94
 Medical Pneumatic Institution, 62, 64, 67
 Merkur, Dan, 305, 307, 396, 404, 410, 426
 Merry Pranksters, 15
 mescal ceremony, 293
 mescaline, 6, 13, 161–162, 165, 176–177, 182, 186, 192, 196, 199, 202–208, 210, 212, 216, 218–220, 226, 262, 272, 279, 293, 340. *See also*, peyote
 Mescalito, 312, 315, 317
 Mesmer, Franz Anton, 129, 293
 mesmerism, 93, 125, 126–136, 151, 159, 270, 377
 Metzner, Ralph, 19, 21, 22, 181, 191, 235, 239, 252, 253, 256, 259, 260, 269, 273, 275, 286, 290, 304, 319, 340, 348, 349, 350, 395, 405, 406, 407, 408, 412, 413, 414, 416, 417, 419, 421, 422, 425, 435
 Micale, Mark, 155, 385
 Michal, Victor, 127
 Mickel, Emanuel, 368, 370
 Middle Earth, 292
 Mill, John Stuart, 75
 Millbrook, 252–261, 263–266, 268, 270, 273–274, 282, 286
 Mille, Richard de, 426
 Miller, James, 11, 346
 Miller, Jeffrey (Surya Dass), 275, 418
 Milligan, Barry, 53, 55, 356, 357
 Mills Harper, George, 386
 Mills Harper, Margaret, 386
 Mills, James H., 366, 367
 Mind-at-Large, 211–212, 219, 313
 Mingus, Charles, 253
 Mitchell, Joni, 324
 Mitchell, Leslie, 354, 382
 Mitchill, Samuel Latham, 62
 Mogar, Robert E., 254, 410
 Moller, Mary Elkins, 359
 monism, 14, 17, 54, 73, 86, 145, 218, 220–222, 263, 275, 276, 328, 339
 Mooney, James, 293, 422
 Moore, Virginia, 386
 Moreau de Tours, Jacques-Joseph, 91–94, 100, 126, 127, 133, 140, 159, 193, 197, 367, 368, 381
 Moritz, Maria, 383, 384
 Morning Glory Lodge, 265
 Morpheus, 38
 morphine, 38, 95, 125, 171, 173, 183
 Morrison, Mark, 359
 Morrison, Robert, 41, 355, 356
 mortification, 25, 240
 Morton, William, 70
 Moses, 307

- Muhammad, 100, 107, 135
- Murphy, Michael, 273, 274, 280, 417
- Murray, Nicholas, 201, 393, 398, 399
- Murry, John Middleton, 86, 365
- mushrooms, 14, 230–232, 235, 236, 246, 248, 251, 273, 281, 283, 290, 294–309, 312–313, 321, 323, 327–328, 330–336, 407, 423
- music, 3, 6, 12, 27, 45, 66, 92, 104, 110, 118, 150, 154, 161, 162, 170, 178, 184, 185, 205, 224, 227, 250, 253, 258, 271, 275, 284, 320, 371, 395
- Myers, Frederic W. H., 74–77, 79–81, 84, 362, 363, 364
- mystical experience, marks of (William James), 14–17
- mysticism, 9, 14–19, 25, 27, 45, 57, 70, 73, 85, 106, 110, 116–118, 122, 126, 130, 134–135, 136, 138–139, 150, 153, 158, 160, 162, 167, 169–170, 173–176, 179, 180, 181, 185, 187, 189, 190, 191, 192, 193, 194, 195, 196, 198–200, 208–224, 226, 229–231, 233, 235, 240–249, 250, 251, 254, 255, 258–259, 272, 273, 276–280, 282, 285, 291, 293, 315, 318, 333, 334, 339, 341, 348, 393
- nagual* realm, 315
- Nahas, Gabriel, 367, 368
- Narby, Jeremy, 323, 432
- narcotic mirror, 131
- narcotic pomade, 131
- natemä*, 325
- Native American Church, 7, 161, 185, 222, 256, 258, 271–272, 286, 293, 337
- Needham, Joseph, 299
- Nelson, Christopher, 365
- Neo-American Church, 261–272
- Neoplatonism, 122, 132, 136–144, 164, 179, 301, 324
- Neo-Psychopathic Character Test, 263
- Nerval, Gérard de, 100
- Neuberg, Victor Benjamin, 178
- neuropharmacology, 1
- New Age, 189, 311
- New York's League for Political Education, 149
- Nezâris. *See* Ismaʿilis
- Nieli, Russell, 229, 406
- Nietzsche, F., 1, 343
- Nihil Nocturne, 145
- nirvana, 285
- Nishio, Tetsuo, 373
- nitric oxide, 62
- nitrous oxide, 2, 15, 17, 56, 60–87, 112, 148, 154, 167, 360, 363
- Noel, Daniel, 315–316, 349, 420, 426, 428, 429
- nondualism. *See* unity, perception of
- nonordinary reality, 21–23, 43, 290, 291, 314, 316, 328, 340–341
- Nordau, Max, 139, 156–157, 189, 380, 385, 395
- Norden, Eric, 432
- noumenon, 2, 113
- Novak, Steven, 197, 397
- Novalis, 48
- Novick, Rebecca McClen, 429–430
- Nusa'iri, 138
- Nussbaum, Felicity, 373
- Nutt, David, 343
- O'Shaughnessy, William Brooke, 94, 367, 372
- Obeah, 355
- occulture, 3–4, 6, 20, 69, 111–112, 131, 149, 157, 185, 186, 187–188, 189, 201–202, 235, 272, 180, 184, 288–289, 290, 296, 305, 307, 308, 315, 320, 321, 322, 332, 340, 435
- odic force, 372
- Ohlmarks, Åke Joel, 293–294
- Olcott, Henry Steel, 128
- Old Man of the Mountains. *See* Ḥasan Šabbāḥ
- Oman, John, 18
- One Thousand and One Nights*. *See* *Arabian Nights*
- oo-koo-hé*, 321
- Oracle of Delphi, 301

- Ordo Templi Orientis, 183
- orientalism, 32–33, 35, 36, 46–56, 64, 69, 88, 89, 96, 97, 98, 100, 105, 107, 109–112, 121–122, 128, 138–142, 148, 152, 159, 174, 231, 255, 258, 259, 261, 275–276, 278, 283, 296, 319, 377
- Original Kleptonian Neo-American Church. *See* Neo-American Church
- Osborn, Catherine, 103
- Osborn, Edward, 216, 403
- Osburn, Judy, 393
- Osburn, Lynn, 393
- Osmond, Humphry, 4, 182, 198–200, 202–206, 210, 216, 234, 273, 344, 400, 416, 422, 428
- Osto, Douglas, 285, 395, 411, 419
- Other World, 14, 174, 205, 305, 335
- Ott, Jonathon, 4, 6, 344
- Otto, Rudolf, 241, 243, 409
- Ouspensky, Pyotr O., 241
- Over-Soul, 142
- Overmind, 322, 333
- Owen, Alex, 145, 159, 160, 382, 385, 386
- Pacheco, Gustavo, 423
- Page, Irvine, 194, 396
- Page, Jimmy, 188
- Pahnke, Walter, 19, 240–249, 349, 408, 409, 410, 416
- Paleo-American Church, 270
- panenhenism, 221
- panspermia theory, 330
- pantheism, 48, 104, 113, 150, 221
- Papper, Emanuel M., 365, 361
- Paracelsus, 32
- paradise bag, 63
- Parkes, Samuel, 360
- Parsons, John Whiteside, 182–184, 394
- Parssinen, Terry, 32, 352, 353
- Partridge, Christopher, 344, 345, 346, 347, 377, 380, 386, 388, 394, 395, 399, 403, 411, 419, 431, 434
- Pasi, Marco, 390, 392
- Passie, Torsten, 397
- Patterson, Stephen, 375
- peak experiences, 167, 285–286
- Pearlman, Gerald, 254, 412
- Peganum harmala*, 300
- Pendle, George, 393, 394
- perennialism, 17–19, 22, 23, 83, 201, 209, 211, 214–217, 241, 242, 243, 259, 275, 288, 319
- Periploca*, 300
- Perkins, David, 35, 37, 354
- Pernety, Antoine-Joseph, 134
- Persephone, 301–302
- Peter Connors, 405
- Peters, Hélène, 93
- peyote, 161, 164, 176–178, 183–185, 188, 192, 193, 222, 235, 252, 256, 266, 271, 272, 286, 293–294, 312, 315, 317, 339, 386, 435
- Pharand, Michael, 425
- philosopher's stone, 135, 327
- Pike, Eunice, 295
- Pike, Nelson, 404
- Pinchbeck, Daniel, 433
- Plant, Sadie, 7, 12, 102, 106, 110, 345, 346, 370, 371, 372
- Plato, 93, 208, 317
- Platonism, 93, 113, 119, 132, 142, 164, 179, 179, 208, 297, 381, 415
- Plotinus, 49, 210, 226
- pluriverse, 73, 87
- Plymouth Brethren, 388
- Podmore, Frank, 127, 376, 377, 380
- Poe, Edgar Allan, 128
- Poller, Jake, 401
- Pollexfen, George, 162
- Polo, Marco, 95, 97, 98, 99, 101
- P-Orridge, Genesis, 185, 394
- Powell, Gloria, 398
- Prabhavananda, Swami, 201
- pragmatism, 82, 84
- Pratt, James, 241
- Previati, Gaetano, 121
- Price, Richard, 273
- Priestly, Joseph, 62

- Primal Scream, 27–29
 Prince, Morton, 232
 Process Church of the Final
 Judgment, 274
 profane illumination, 88, 124, 366
 prosthetic technology, 210, 335
 Protestantism, 26, 213, 247, 338, 362
 psilocybin, 6, 11, 13, 98, 211, 233, 235, 236,
 237, 240–241, 246, 251, 263, 272, 279,
 285, 300–301, 303, 322, 323, 324, 325,
 330, 331, 333
 psychedelic (terminology), 4–6, 206–207
 psychedelic sacrament, 24, 271–272
 psychedelic shamanism, 288–341
 Psychedelic Temple, 282
 Psychedelic Venus Church, 270
 psychiatry, 2, 4, 6, 88, 89, 91, 93, 133, 182,
 193, 196, 197, 198, 200, 201, 203, 204,
 206, 212, 227, 230, 235, 279
 Psychic TV, 185
 psychoanalysis, 42, 199
 psychofluid, 326
 psychosis, 193, 197, 205, 218–220, 244
 Puharich, Andrija, 305–306, 425
 Purchas, Samuel, 353
 Puritanism, 27, 213
 Puységur, Marquis de, 129, 130
 Pythagoras, 107, 135, 371

 Quaker's Black Drop, 31
 Quakerism, 232, 388
 Quinn, John, 415

 Radclyffe, Raymond, 178
 Radhakrishnan, Sarvepalli, 215
 Ram Dass. *See* Alpert, Richard
 Ramakrishna, 281
 Ramsay, William, 71, 79, 80–84, 96, 364
 Randal, Patte, 403
 Randolph, Paschal Beverly, 125, 127–129,
 131, 134–135, 136–144, 152, 159, 165, 186,
 187, 189, 376, 377, 378, 379, 380, 381,
 382, 383, 384

 Rapsomatioti, Georgia, 403
 Rastafarianism, 7, 271
 Rawlinson, Andrew, 413
 Rawson, Albert, 152, 384
 Read, John, 403
 Reardon, Bernard, 86, 112, 365, 373
 Redgloom, 144
Reefer Madness, 101
 Regardie, Israel, 169–170, 175, 180–181,
 187, 189, 389, 391, 393, 394
 Reichenbach, Karl von, 372
 Reko, Blas Pablo, 294–295
 Reps, Paul, 283
 Reynolds, John Russell, 94, 368
 R̥gveda, 210, 298, 299, 300, 301
 Richards, William A., 365
 Richardson, Allan, 296
 Rimbaud, Arthur, 100, 220, 369
 Rinkel, Max, 197
Rites of Eleusis, 177–178
 Roberts, Andy, 351, 398
 Roberts, Mark, 343
 Roberts, Thomas B., 358
 Robson, Michael, 403
 Rogers, Carl, 237
 Rogers, Matthew, 391
 Rolling Stones, The, 250
 Roman Catholicism, 106, 126, 156,
 213, 214, 216, 217, 282, 295, 335, 338,
 402, 435
 Ronnell, Avital, 343
 Roof, Wade Clark, 337
 Rosicrucianism, 38, 160, 179
 Roszak, Theodore, 20, 188, 225, 226, 236,
 237, 249, 317–318, 337, 349, 395, 398,
 404–405, 407, 408, 411, 426, 429,
 431, 435
 Rowlandson, Thomas, 68
 Roy, Louis, 344
 Royal Society, 61
 Rubin, David, 410
 Ruck, Carl, 4, 6, 302, 304, 344, 349, 392,
 420, 422, 425

- Rudgley, Richard, 292, 353, 421
 Russell, George, 161
 Russell, Jeffrey Burton, 374, 402
 Rutajit, Andrew, 426
 Rzepka, Charles, 355

 Sabina, María, 281, 296–297, 309–310,
 335, 423, 427, 434
 Sacks, Oliver, 191, 395
 Safford, William Edwin, 294–295, 422
 Said, Edward, 47–49, 138, 350, 380
 saint children, 296–297, 335
 Saint-Martin, Louis Claude, 379
 Salem witch panic, 396
 Saler, Michael, 385
 Samadhi, 175
 Sandison, Ronald, 200, 398
 Sandoz Pharmaceutical Company, 195,
 197, 200, 234, 397
 Santo Daime, 7, 295
Sarcostemma, 300
 Sartre, Jean-Paul, 108
 Satan, 30, 41, 47, 83, 109, 117, 156, 158, 213,
 232, 304
 Satanism, 158, 166, 274
 satori, 285
 Sayre, Nora, 282
 Schaffer, Simon, 65
 Schimmel, Paul, 410
 schizophrenia, 197–198, 203–204, 218,
 219, 220, 396
 Schlegel, Friedrich, 47–48
 Schleiermacher, Friedrich, 44, 356
 Schneider, Elisabeth, 353
 Schou, Nicholas, 416
 Schultes, Richard Evans,
 294, 299, 305, 321–322, 422,
 425, 431
 Schwartz, Martin, 424
 science fiction, 310, 324, 327, 334
 Scientology, 201–202, 274
 Scott, Walter, 33
 Seeger, Pete, 185
 Segal, Robert, 346
 Self, Will, 430
 Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile
 Delinquency, 265
 Sender, Pablo, 383
 Senzak, Nyogen, 283
 Serra, Raimundo Irineu (Mestre
 Irineu), 423
 Sertürner, Friedrich, 38
 Sessa, Ben, 349, 420
 set and setting, 4, 19, 23, 24, 28,
 118, 121, 122, 198, 199, 222, 235,
 240–249, 252, 273, 275, 282, 296, 303,
 322, 336
 sex, 136, 141, 155, 156, 157, 158, 179, 184,
 186, 187, 232, 250, 258, 266, 282, 283,
 325–326, 333
 Shackelford, Jole, 359
 Shaffer, Howard, 376
 Shaivism, 90
 shamanism, 5, 6, 19–23, 44, 57, 249, 273,
 278, 286, 287, 288–342, 434
 Shamen, 320
 Shanon, Benny, 423–424, 426
 Shea, Robert, 369
 Shelley, Percy Bysshe, 33
 Shipley, Morgan, 345, 416
 Shiva Fellowship, 270
 Shlain, Bruce, 197, 200, 397, 398
 Shulgin, Alexander, 206
 Shyne, William, 267–268
 Sidgwick, Eleanor, 74
 Sidgwick, Henry, 74
 Siegel, Ronald, 378, 405
 Siff, Stephen, 398
 Sika Redem, 344
 Singh, Rani, 394
 Sinnett, Alfred Percy, 162–163, 387
 Siskind, Janet, 312, 428
 skunk cannabis, 89, 366
 Sleep of Sialam, 159
 Slick, Grace, 227
 Slotkin, James, 222, 271, 272, 417

- Small, Ernest, 366
 Smedley, Alfred, 145, 382
 Smith, Donald, 416
 Smith, Edward Sutton, 152
 Smith, Harry, 184–185, 253, 409
 Smith, Huston, 226–227, 232, 236, 240,
 246–247, 248, 280, 345, 400, 405,
 409, 410, 411, 412, 420
 Smith, Wilfred Talbot, 183
 Smollett, Tobias George, 359
 Smythies, John, 203–204, 206, 216,
 400, 403
 Smythies, Vanna, 400, 403
 Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia, 160
 Society for Psychical Research, 74–84,
 149, 163, 189, 211, 216, 363, 364, 372
 Solhdju, Katrin, 92, 367
 Solomon, David, 181, 191, 396, 408, 412
soma, 148, 153–154, 160, 210, 298–302
 somnambulism, 126–136, 148, 377
sooka, 152
 soul, 1, 4, 10, 20, 30, 42, 54, 61, 69, 70, 72,
 78–79, 97, 105, 113, 114, 116, 117–121,
 122, 126, 128, 129, 131, 132, 133, 134, 135,
 136, 137, 138, 141–145, 147, 148, 154, 162,
 164, 170, 172, 175–176, 177, 179, 180,
 189, 191, 206, 214, 219, 220–222, 226,
 229, 234, 238, 280, 289, 290, 296, 304,
 332, 335, 339, 376–377, 390, 391, 402
 soul-world, 142
 Southey, Robert, 61, 64, 68, 69
 Spanos, Nicholas, 396
 Spare Austin Osman, 185–186
 Späth, Ernst, 176, 192
 Spinoza, Baruch, 54–55
 Spiritualism, 5, 74, 78, 79, 93, 122,
 126–155, 158, 159, 186, 202, 227, 290,
 293, 335, 363, 377, 378
 Squire, Peter, 94
 Sri Ram Ashrama, 258
 St John, Graham, 240, 325, 345, 431,
 432, 435
 Stace, Walter T., 17, 24, 209, 241, 348,
 351, 401
 Stafford, Peter, 368, 414
 Staples, Danny, 4, 6, 344, 425
 Starr, Martin P., 183, 394
 Stevens, Helen Norton, 383
 Stewart, Omer, 417
 Stichtenoth, Dirk, 397
 Still, Andrew Taylor, 359
 Stirling, James Hutchison, 71
 Stoeber, Michael, 24, 351
 Stoker, Bram, 38
 Stolaroff, Myron J., 410
 Stoll, Arthur, 397
 Stoll, Werner, 196, 397
 Stone, Harry, 305–306
 Strassman, Rick, 16, 339, 348, 349, 434, 435
 Strutt, John William, 74
 Stuart, R., 416
 subliminal Self, 75–81, 85, 348, 363
 Sufism, 282, 333
 Surya Das. *See* Miller, Jeffrey
 Suster, Gerald, 180, 182, 389
 Sutin, Lawrence, 177, 387, 390, 391, 392
 Suzuki, Daisetsu Teitaro, 278
 Swain, Fred, 280–281
 Swedenborg, Emanuel, 127, 131, 134–135,
 163, 374
 Swensen, Andrew, 85, 365
 Swine Overlord, 145
 Sydenham, Thomas, 32, 352
 Symonds, John Addington, 61, 87, 161,
 171, 172, 178, 179, 186, 365, 388, 390,
 391, 392, 394
 Symons, Allene, 399
 Symons, Arthur, 157, 161, 163, 385, 386
 sympathetic link, 110–111
 synaesthesia, 203
 synchronicity, 328
 Tale of the Hashish Eater, 111
 Taliaferro, Charles, 375

- Tantra Shastras, 324
 Tantra, 282–383, 324, 335
Tao Te Ching, 178, 239, 284
 Taoism. *See* Daoism
 taraxicum, 143
 Tart, Charles, 286, 419, 429
 Tate, Sharon, 417
 Tave, Stuart, 50, 357
 Taves, Ann, 244, 351, 409
 Taylor, Bayard, 107–108, 111, 137, 140, 152, 348, 371
 Taylor, Charles, 434
 technique of ecstasy, 4, 9, 19–23, 25, 27, 28, 37, 130, 170, 254, 274, 286, 289–291, 315
 technologies of domination, 9–11, 313
 technologies of power, 10–11
 technologies of the self, 9–12, 123
 technologies of transcendence, 4, 9–29, 45, 55, 56, 58, 59, 65, 67, 69, 70, 71, 72, 77, 85, 88, 95, 99, 106, 110, 111, 114, 121, 122, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 141, 142, 147, 152, 155, 161, 166, 167, 68, 169, 170, 173, 175, 177, 183, 189, 192, 193, 196, 200, 202, 207, 209, 210, 212, 216, 231, 238, 257, 260, 284, 285, 286, 289, 311, 314, 324, 335, 336
 temperance, 144–150
 Temple of Set, 187
 Tennyson, Alfred, 71, 73
teonanacatl ('flesh of the gods'), 294, 295
 Teresa of Ávila, 116–117, 118
 Thee Temple ov Psychick Youth (TOPY), 185
 Theon, Max, 160
 Theosophical Society, 78, 150, 159, 163
 Theosophy, 150–155, 159, 162
 theurgy, 301
 Thompson, Francis, 33, 41
 Thoreau, Henry David, 60–61, 71, 359
 Thurman, Howard Washington, 240
Tibetan Book of the Dead, 21, 219, 230, 235, 259–261, 284–285, 290, 319
 timewave theory, 329
tonal realm, 314–315
 Townsend, Joan, 22, 350, 421, 436
 trance, 16, 20, 21, 36, 63, 66, 73, 75, 76, 88, 93, 115, 129, 130, 136, 143, 148, 153, 154, 159, 216, 229, 230, 289, 290, 292, 298, 305
 Transcendentalism, 60–61, 113, 114, 150, 374
 translanguistic matter, 327
 transpersonal psychology, 287, 429
 Traugot, Michael, 416
 tree of knowledge, 86, 154
 Tromp, Marlene, 144–145, 376, 377, 382
 tulpas, 340
 Tussman Experimental College, 319–320
 Tussman, Joseph, 319
 Tyrell, George, 338

 UFOs, 202, 321–322, 333–334
 Ultimate Authority of the Clear Light, 272, 417
 Underhill, Evelyn, 15, 181, 209, 211, 241, 347, 401
unio mystica, 17, 209
 unity, perception of, 14, 17, 42, 43, 51, 52, 53, 55, 56, 59, 63, 64, 70, 72, 76, 79, 93, 97, 99, 101, 104, 105–106, 108, 120, 121, 122, 126, 133, 140, 150, 152, 153, 154, 159, 164, 165, 186, 195, 236, 266, 291, 304–305, 314, 318, 320, 354, 366, 415
 Unknown, the, 65, 340
 Upanishads, 47, 49, 278
 Urban, Hugh, 136, 379
 utopia, 49, 57–58, 85, 158, 191, 211, 324

 Vallée, Jacques, 322, 431
 van den Broek, Roelof, 346
 van Luijk, Ruben, 417
 Vatican, 233, 402
 Vedanta Society of Southern California, 201
 vegetable television, 323–324

- Veissière, Samuel, 340, 436
 Vergne, Philippe, 394
 Versluis, Arthur, 18, 348, 369, 416
 Victoria, Queen, 94
 Vidler, Alexander Roper, 404
 Viereck, George Sylvester, 169, 389
Virola theiodora, 321
 Vishnu, 52, 55
 Vitebsky, Piers, 434
 Vivekananda, 278, 281
 von Stuckrad, Kocku, 426

 Waddell, Leila, 178
 Waite, Arthur E., 160, 386
 Walker, Benjamin, 143, 382, 384
 Walker, Diana J., 360
 Walker, Kenneth, 409
 Wallis, Robert, 23, 349, 350, 420
 war on drugs, 27
 Ward, Brian, 411
 Warhol, Andy, 188
 Warren, Andrew, 356
 Warren, John Collins, 70, 361
 Warren, Leonard, 383
 Wasson, R. Gordon, 4, 5, 6, 14, 231, 234, 240, 262, 271, 292, 295–305, 309–310, 319, 331, 344, 347, 392, 406, 407, 408, 421, 422, 423, 424, 425, 426, 427
 Wasson, Valentina, 295, 423
 Watkins, Matthew, 433
 Watt, Gregory, 64, 360
 Watts, Alan, 26, 181, 224, 252, 253, 254, 255, 274, 275, 276, 278–281, 284, 286, 351, 404, 412, 418, 427
 Watts, W. David, 345, 406
 Webb, Don, 187
 Webb, James, 393
 Weber, Eugen, 125–126, 155, 156, 376, 385
 Weber, Max, 26, 213, 351, 402
 Weekend Experiential Workshop (Millbrook), 254
 Weil, Andrew, 236
 Weil, Gunther, 253, 405, 412
 Weitlaner, Robert, 294
 Weizmann Institute of Science, 89
 Welsh, Irvine, 7
 Wessberg, Siggy, 182
 Westcott, William Wynn, 160, 390
 Whineray, E. P., 167, 367, 368, 388
 White, Anna MacBride, 387
 Whitehead, Alfred North, 211, 329
 Whittelsey, John, 279
 Wilde, Oscar, 32, 156, 158, 353, 385
 Wilkinson, Lynn Rosellen, 379
 Willbrun, Sarah, 376
 Williams, Harry Abbot, 223, 404
 Williams, Wendy, 265
 Wilson, Bill, 199, 200
 Wilson, Edward, 331, 433
 Wilson, Robert Anton, 101, 188, 369, 391
 wine, 30, 31, 46, 61, 132, 178, 183, 272, 302, 303
 Winkelman, Michael, 350, 420
 Winston, Ronnie, 236
 Wittgenstein, Ludwig, 229, 406
 Wojtowicz, Slawek, 355, 434
 Wolfe, Tom, 15, 16, 348, 405
 Wolff, Hannah M., 152, 384
 Wood, George, 352
 Woodhead, Linda, 257, 413
 Woodman, William Robert, 160
 Woodroffe, John. *See* Avalon, Arthur
 Woodstock Festival, 250, 324
 Wordsworth, William, 32, 33, 67, 203, 361
 Wuthnow, Robert, 251, 252, 411, 412, 418, 419
 Wyld, George, 78, 79, 147, 363, 364, 382
 Wyllie, Timothy, 417
 Wynbrandt, James, 68, 361

 Xanadu, 49, 55, 57–58

 Yablonsky, Lewis, 411
 yage, 207, 401

- Yamanaka, Yuriko, 373
- Yeats, William Butler, 155, 159–166, 176,
187, 192, 385, 387, 388
- yoga, 217, 224, 254, 258–259, 278, 281,
282, 283, 285, 388, 393
- Zacny, James P., 360
- Zachner, Robert C., 213–224, 233, 241, 242,
247, 248, 369, 402, 403, 404, 409, 410
- Zen Buddhism, 57–58, 215, 224, 258–259,
275, 278, 280, 283, 284
- Zend-Avesta, 47
- Zeus, 302
- Zieger, Susan, 356, 371
- Ziegler, Robert, 385
- Zimmer, Heinrich, 283
- Zinberg, Norman, 349, 375
- Zuvuya, 320, 430

