

# AMID

IN LATE OCTOBER, THE DRUG ENFORCEMENT Agency summoned its specialists in intelligence, analysis and enforcement from outposts around the country to Washington headquarters for an unpublicized internal session at which they charted the federal response to the nation's fastest-growing drug scourge—LSD.

*Whoa, hold your horses, cowboy. We interrupt this story for a reality check. This is 1987. When we talk scourge, plague, drug pestilence, we're talking heroin, cocaine, crack, methamphetamine. But LSD? You put LSD behind you forever when you threw away your last tie-dye shirt, didn't you, amigo? Moby Grape and the grape boycott are gathering cobwebs in the attic of your mind.*

*"We're seeing a resurgence of LSD use not only in California, but in Texas, Oregon, New York, Boston, Philadelphia—an unbelievable resurgence, an escalated steady progression over the last 10 years," says*

*Michael Pavlick of the DEA's Dangerous Drugs Division, which organized the four-day conference. "LSD is the*

*No. 2 dangerous drug in the United States right now, based on DEA seizures in 1986—behind only metham-*

*phetamines. We seized 14,844,000 dosage units last year.*

*"We don't want LSD to get to epidemic proportions," Pavlick continues. "That's why we called our experts in—to get the facts and to sit together and evolve a national strategy." What the DEA is seeing on a national level, narcotics agents of the state Department of Justice have likewise observed in California. Agent Michael Barnes*

# GOES '80S

BY MIKE WEISS

## WHAT'S A WEIRD LITTLE DRUG LIKE

### LSD DOING IN THE JUST SAY NO ERA?

says the number of dosage units seized—or, in other words, hits of LSD, which nowadays are mostly quarter-inch squares of blotter paper imprinted with cartoon characters or other art—increased 200-fold between 1985 and 1986.

Doses today are much smaller than was once common; their size is regulated by mysterious, undetected underground chemists. The drug that was supposed to have turned on, tuned in and dropped out an earlier generation may nowadays be nothing more than another designer recreation.

But the Golden Triangle of LSD, the Mother Lode, still has as its apex Berkeley, the Haight Ashbury, and Santa Cruz. "Those are the three places that on any day of the week you could go and get acid," says Dave Tresmontan, a state narcotics task force commander based in Santa Cruz County. "It's been that way since the 1960s and it still is. Only more so now than ever."

**R**.U. SIRIUS IS THE PEN NAME OF KEN GOFFMAN, editor of *High Frontiers*, *The Space Age Newspaper of Psychedelics, Science, Human Potential, Irreverence and Modern Art*. He can't swallow all that the feds are biting off. And Goffman, who coined the word Yummy (young upwardly mobile mutant), is as close to the new psychedelic scene as it is possible to get. "I think there is a small movement; I think there's a certain amount of trending in that direction," he says. "We're shifting to an accelerated information and quantum reality culture and psychedelics seem to be relevant to that kind of experience. But I think we've passed the point of having a zeitgeist around psychedelics or the counterculture. I do have to wonder who's taking all this acid they've busted. You go out and look people in the eye," he says, motioning toward Telegraph Avenue near the Berkeley campus, "and most of them look like they're thinking about a slice of pizza."

Well, I see his point. But then some of the human flow along Telegraph probably looks a good deal more hallucinogenic to me than it does to Goffman, who has below-shoulder-length hair, wears a worn fedora with an Andy Warhol button, and looks like a roadie for Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band. He is an incarnation of that very '60s observation that the medium is the message, to wit: R.U. Sirius?

So what we seem to have here is the narcs saying there is a bull market in LSD and the heads saying "bull." But maybe the different perspectives are not as mutually exclusive as they seem at first glance. The narcotics agents may be issuing a timely warning of a bad moon rising, but a newly discovered drug "epidemic" wouldn't impact negatively on their budget requests. As for the people involved with nouveau psychedelia, such as the smiling and personable Ken Goffman, he is aware that many high-profile acid mavens from the '60s ended up doing time once the media began to hype LSD. So, in dealing with a reporter, R.U. Sirius has every reason not to be incautious.

**W**HEN TALKING ABOUT LSD—LYSERGIC acid diethylamide 25, a potent psychedelic that forever should be held responsible for foisting Timothy Leary on an unsuspecting public—it's important to remember that not only is it a clear, odorless, illegal liquid a few millionths of a gram of which can blow your mind to kingdom's come, but that along with race track touts, criminal defense attorneys, and television news teasers, it falls into that group of pharmacological substances known as *exaggerants*. It is best when considering the entire subject to anchor one's perspective firmly in Missouri.

The effect of the drug itself, which is a chemical synthesis derived from ergotamine tartrate, a parasitical fungus that grows on common grains like rye, is to cause deep and prolonged states of altered perception, some would say enhanced perception, which is what *psychedelic* means. It is not uncommon when tripping for your sensory and intellectual capacities to be on a roller-coaster ride. At one and the same time, everything you see or hear may seem both entirely original and as old as creation. Ordinary distinctions can seem to disappear: Music can sometimes be seen as dancing colors; spoken language and silent thoughts move so fast that it seems impossible to tell which is which; your inner state may seem to join and run together with someone else's. These profound alterations can be either exhilarating or horrifying. They also seem to encourage a messianic frame of mind; back in the '60s it wasn't unusual to hear someone say that if enough people tripped, or if there was only a way of

dosing Nixon's cola, you could save the world.

The LSD state lends itself to grandiose claims as participants become frustrated by the limits of ordinary language to encompass such a singular and stunning state. For instance, after ingesting a psychedelic in 1953, Aldous Huxley wrote: "I was seeing what Adam had seen on the morning of creation. . . . Words like grace and transfiguration came to mind."

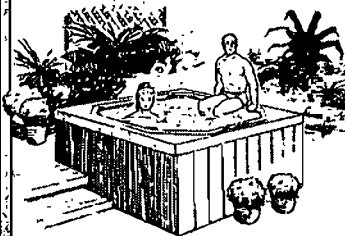
Of course, not everyone trying LSD finds the prelapsarian Garden. The drug is powerful enough to injure, and has. Jerome Smith, special agent in charge of the California Bureau of Narcotic Enforcement's San Francisco office, says that the people experimenting with LSD today are too young to remember the "horror stories," or have forgotten them. "They don't remember that their first experiment may be a lifetime experiment they never get over. There was a young lady going to San Diego State back in the 1960s that took one dose and as far as I know never got over it. She may still be institutionalized. It's a drug not to be trifled with; it's mind-altering."

Why did Smith reach all the way back to the 1960s for his horror story? If so many people are tripping these days, why aren't there current horror stories? Why aren't medical people at places like the Haight Ashbury Free Clinic seeing an outbreak of bad trips? And, even more tantalizing, what does it mean that so many people are evidently experimenting with LSD again? Does it have a social significance? Is it a harbinger? And if it is, of what?

**B**UT FIRST, A MORE IMMEDIATE QUESTION, why now? Why should LSD be making a comeback after all but disappearing from public notice for a decade or more? Nobody knows for sure, *continued*



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## LSD

but there are a few theories to choose among. Nostalgia has been rife—witness the celebrations of the 20th anniversaries of the Summer of Love and of the release of the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper* album. There is a vogue, too, for what *Newsweek* recently called neopsychedelia—tie-dyes, paisleys, granny glasses, trappings of hippie style.

Of course, mass nostalgia is usually about style and seldom about substance. Another possible reason is suggested by Randy Daar, a San Francisco lawyer who has defended about a dozen accused LSD dealers in courtrooms from Tennessee to Wyoming to California in the past two years. "It's cheap," he says. "That's why." In fact, the cost of a single hit of acid may be the only thing in America to be no more expensive in 1987 than it was in 1967, between \$1 and \$4 on the street. Over the same two decades, the price of a lid of good marijuana went from \$10 to \$300, and the cost of a bottle of Scotch quadrupled.

Others say that there has been too little education about the drug's dangers, or that taste in drugs, as in so many other things, moves in ever-repeating cycles.

But none of these explanations captures, or borrow R.U. Sirius' word, a zeitgeist, a feeling for the spirit of the age in regard to LSD. It seems an anomaly that, in a numb and conformist age, such an electric experience should be gaining in appeal. But maybe that's why.

Paul Krassner, who as the founding editor of *The Realist* and the man who first used the word yippies, played an important role in those tumultuous years when the indwelling and privatistic 1950s were zapped by the '60s, sees certain similarities in conditions today.

"What's similar now to the 1950s is the awareness of the repression and dullness, and what came as a response in the 1960s was an explosion. This time it'll be different. But what we're really seeing is the old battle between cynicism and hope. I have a share of optimism," Krassner says, "because I have damaged chromosomes."

**I**F LSD'S QUIETLY COMING BACK INTO vogue in the twilight years of the Reagan era is an incongruity, a seeming oxymoron (nothing personal, Mr. President), the question of who is manufacturing the supply is an outright mystery.

There are people in law enforcement and outside it who think that supply is leading demand, and not the other way round. That not long ago somebody started to make a very high quality of low-cost LSD designed for the 1980s. That they have cultivated and cornered a sizable market. And that they have gone undetected and unapprehended.

No question, somebody somewhere is churning out great batches. The nearly

15 million hits seized last year by the DEA don't include separate state and local seizures. In San Jose, for instance, 64 street arrests were made for LSD possession in 1986. And in late August, state narcotics agents in Berkeley and San Francisco made their biggest haul in many years, 24 liquid ounces, enough to make 6 million hits.

And seizures themselves are only indicative of much larger amounts in circulation. Neither the feds, nor the state cops, nor the local nars know who is cooking the LSD. They know where cocaine, heroin and speed all come from, but not LSD. It is like a drug from elsewhere. In 1986, the DEA had a hand in busting 672 illegal drug labs of one kind or another. Not one of them made LSD. Zero. Nor did any of the hundreds of labs busted in '85, '84, '83... all the way back to 1981 in Seattle, which was the last time a cop saw the inside of a real honest-to-goodness LSD laboratory.

Police agencies in California have busted wholesalers, even large-scale wholesalers only a step or two beneath the people at the apex of the LSD trade: the chemist and the manufacturer, the scientist and the businessman who usually team up to produce and distribute LSD. "These are the most fascinating people I've ever chased," says Dave Tremontan, a clean-cut 36-year-old drug agent whose Santa Cruz task force assignment is the latest in a 16-year career. "They're very worthy opponents. You would think that just by chance somebody would snitch. Every week somewhere in the country the Mafia, the Colombians, speed labs, PCP labs get taken down. Yet not one LSD lab."

Robert Sager, who heads the DEA's Western Laboratory, thinks the LSD chemists have successfully remained at large in part because there are so few of them. "I'd say there's very few of them, and that they're very cautious people. I sort of wonder if it isn't a networking thing, an insider's thing, a club almost."

The probability is that these will-o'-the-wisp chemists are close by. "I know of only one geographic region producing this stuff in the United States," says the state Bureau of Narcotic Enforcement's Jerry Smith. "We have heard of a lab in existence here for years and we've never gotten to them. If LSD shows up in Ohio, New York, Florida, Texas, it always comes back to the Bay Area; that's where they trace it back to. The San Francisco Bay Area is to LSD what Miami is to cocaine."

Once you know how difficult it is to make LSD, it's not surprising that there would be only a handful of illicit labs and underground alchemists. To begin with, you need ergotamine tartrate, which is not readily available. Though it isn't a controlled substance, its purchase

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by other than established pharmaceutical firms who use it in migraine remedies and some other medicines is suspect. Therefore it is often necessary to go to Eastern European or African countries to acquire the ergotamine without raising eyebrows.

Once you've smuggled it into the States, converting it to lysergic acid is a delicate and demanding chemical process. "If you look at it cross-eyed it tends to fall apart," says an experienced acid chemist from the '60s. LSD isn't like angel dust, which can be produced in a bathtub, or cocaine paste, which is made by South American Indians in rude tin drums; it takes a real chemist and a sophisticated lab. The alkaloid, for instance, is lost if exposed to heat above room temperature. So you can't use hot water as a heat source the way you do with most chemical manipulations. If you want a good yield you have to build a vacuum flash evaporator to boil off highly toxic solvents at low temperatures without the lysergic acid compounds disintegrating.

"Making it," says the same underground chemist, "requires very good technique. Purifying it is more complicated than that." You need more than a high school chemistry course to follow his explanation of how the purification process utilizes preparative column chromatography, the isomers fluorescing as they pass through alumina at different speeds. And that's before you racemize the isomers. Not too many chemists who can racemize isomers are seeking a life outside the law.

But what is really remarkable, considering the clandestine and potentially dangerous circumstances under which LSD is being made, is that law enforcement agencies from coast to coast agree that virtually all the acid they have seen in the past few years is well-made and comes in uniform doses of between 50 and 80 micrograms. This is a real contrast to the LSD of the late 1960s and early 1970s, when doses varied wildly from pill to pill, but a typical hit was several hundred micrograms. This uniformity is the most telling clue that virtually all the LSD being cooked is coming from very few people.

It may also indicate how desirous the chemists are to remain unnoticed. Smaller doses minimize bad trips and ostentatious displays of druggie behavior, thus diverting both police and media attention elsewhere.

"Over the years, the quality control got better and better and better. We're seeing more sophistication through experience. They're aiming for doses of 50 micrograms and they're hitting it pretty good," says Robert Sager, the DEA lab chief.

Why isn't there more bad acid around, like cut cocaine? Randy Daar, the San Francisco attorney whose clients have included a number of accused drug dealers, thinks that the LSD subculture is different from the usual drug world. "What distinguishes LSD from all the other drug cases I see is there's never any guns; there's no underworld types; the profit seems to be little to nil because money isn't the primary motivating factor; and most importantly, they don't snitch each other off.

They tend to be the most loyal people who traffic in drugs."

Though even some police agree with Daar about the absence of weapons, hoods and snitches, if whoever is making and distributing millions and millions of doses of LSD isn't making big money, then they differ from at least some of the people who dealt acid in the past. Take Waldron Norhees (his real name), who once upon a time in the Haight Ashbury was known as Captain Clearlight. He says he distributed 250 million hits of 250 mcgs. each between 1968 and 1975. At 6 feet, 4 inches, with flowing white hair and a beard, he looks like a shrewd biblical prophet. Back when he was applying mass marketing techniques to what had been a hippie cottage industry, he claims to have collected about \$500,000 a month in cash. He gathered the money in shopping bags, enough money to have bought four airplanes, about 30 luxury cars and trucks, and numerous homes.

Captain Clearlight liked the ladies and usually had one or more in tow on his rounds. He remembers fondly that at the end of a long day they would rent a luxury hotel room with a king-size bed. Clearlight would upend the shopping bag, flooding the bed with \$100 bills. And they would dive in. "If it was especially hot or we worked up a good sweat, the green dye would come off on our skins and tint us."

Clearlight acid came in doses of 250 mcgs., three or four times as powerful as what is on the market today. With prices unchanged since the '60s, current profits could be 300 percent as great. It strains his credulity to hear that huge profits aren't being taken.

Waldron Norhees' explanation for why no labs have been busted since 1981 is that after you've taken enough acid you "kind of know everything the other side is thinking and doing," an explanation which would be more impressive if he hadn't been busted three times, losing most of the wealth he accumulated to the IRS along the way.

Probably the most intriguing idea about the labs comes from the Santa Cruz Task Force's Dave Tresmontan, who believes there is only one Superlab. He can't prove it, but he says there are plenty of indications. Even drug labs that have been secreted in legitimate institutions like DuPont or the Jet Propulsion Laboratory were sooner or later found. He makes note of the uniform doses nationwide. And the low prices unaffected by 20 years of economic fluctuations. "I think if there were more suppliers, there'd be more competition and the price would fluctuate. That's the American way, right? Someone's got a stranglehold on it."

Jerry Smith, the state narcotics agent whose office engineered the multimillion dollar bust in Berkeley and San Francisco in late August won't quite buy into the Superlab theory. But he does say, "There's somebody out there of the caliber of Owsley or Sand."

Smith is referring to two legendary chemists from long ago, Augustus Owsley Stanley III and Nicholas Sand. Owsley—as Stanley is always called—was the prototypical acid alchemist, the man about whom it was said that he did for LSD what Henry continued

Ford did for the automobile. Nowadays Owsley is reported to be living in Australia, where he fled to escape what he fears is a coming Ice Age in the Northern Hemisphere. In the late '60s in San Francisco, he met and trained another brilliant chemist, Timothy Scully. Like Owsley, Scully was eventually busted and did time. Now he is a legitimate and respected businessman who won a Junior Chamber of Commerce Young Man of the Year award, albeit while he was incarcerated in a federal pen.

In 1974 Scully was arrested at his laboratory along with a partner, somebody whom he had helped to train, Nicholas Sand. Sand, like Scully, was convicted on several counts. He was sentenced to 15 years, but in 1977 Sand jumped bail and became a fugitive. And a fugitive he has remained.

Nicky Sand was thin, intense, egotistical, daring and a fast talker. A Brooklynite, he would open a seemingly innocent business—in Brooklyn it was a perfume company, later in San Francisco a "custom research firm"—and when he was questioned about those funny chemical smells he would sling polysyllabic gobbledeygook. Oh, we're working on polynuclear-isomeric-hydrocarbon-helix solutions. Few who asked ever bothered to listen closely to his rambling explanations.

As a chemist, say people in both law enforcement and the chemical underground, he was not in a class with Owsley or Scully. But he cared enough to learn, hiring a Case Western University chemist to tutor him. He learned how to read and understand chemical abstracts in which academic and clinical research results were published. Throughout the early 1970s, Sand was closely associated with an LSD distribution network called the Brotherhood of Eternal Love. Members of the Brotherhood perfected a system of acquiring false identification to mask their moves.

In 1984, two investigative journalists from the *Times* of London wrote a book about the Brotherhood in which they described Nick Sand as "the prohibition bootlegger reincarnated . . . he sought nothing else in life but to make chemicals and money. . . . There are those who say that Sand to his dying day will be working somewhere in a laboratory."

To which Gary E. Elliott, the DEA agent who arrested Sand, adds today: "He loved to make dope, no question about that. I wouldn't doubt that Sand was still involved in the manufacture of LSD. But I've got nothing to base that on except my knowledge of the man going back 13 years and the fact he's still a fugitive."

Whether Sand or somebody he trained has a hand in making the low-price, uniform-quality LSD that is in circulation today, the mystery chemist or chemists are resourceful and creative. Not only have they evaded capture, but by gearing their product to changing tastes and exercising quality control, they may very well have created a market in tune with the '80s.

**Zarkov says he personally knows 'a large number of people who are very creative and successful in Silicon Valley who are using psychedelic drugs to develop analyses and isomorphic solutions to hardware and software problems.' He says he is talking about perhaps 200 people spread among a number of different concerns. Impossible to say just what it is about Zarkov that makes him seem truthful but not wholly reliable. His attitude seems to imply that he knows something terribly important that the rest of us haven't figured out, an attitude that in the '60s was called heavy.**



**S**O WE RETURN TO THE QUESTION OF who is taking all this LSD. Some people say that LSD never went away but the media and even the cops lost interest when flower power withered and people on bad trips stopped jumping out of windows.

The never-been-away crowd isn't hard to spot any day of the week along the mall in Santa Cruz or Haight street: bikers, Dead-heads, aging hippies.

Gracie and Zarkov (not even close to their real names, but their chosen *noms de pharmaceutique*) never stopped taking drugs. They are psychedelic devotees who live a secret life unknown to their colleagues at the investment and banking firms where they earn six-figure salaries. They are part of a network of like-minded psychedelic Trekkies, the ones Ken Goffman of *High Frontiers* calls Yummies.

Gracie and Zarkov would not tell me their real names, nor where they lived, nor their telephone number, so I have no way of checking what they said about their above-ground lives. Zarkov, 38, wore a creaking new black leather suit; Gracie, 34, was in a dominatrix black leather dress, spike heels and black stockings. Zarkov is tall, erect but loose-jointed, intense, commanding. He took his *nom* from a character in Flash Gordon.

"I'm a principal partner in a prominent investment banking firm. I'm not talking about mergers and acquisitions, I mean cutting-edge high-tech investments," says Zarkov. Gracie is also said to be a successful banker.

Before they went into banking, they say, they ran a sex club in Chicago. Now, in their spare time they collaborate on experimenting exotic designer drugs and recounting their experiences in a privately circulated newsletter. Recent titles have included *Gracie's Visible Language Contact Experience* and *A High Dose 2CB Trip*. 2CB is a designer drug said to enhance telepathic communication.

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Then there are people who tripped out in the '60s and have since moved on to jobs, families, responsibilities, only to find they are once again curious about their unforgettable LSD experiences.

"It had been 10 years since the last time I tried it, 1977, and the last time before that had been 10 years too," says Gregory (not his real name). Gregory is a 40-year-old author and consultant

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### LSD

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in computer communications. He is married, has a toddler, and lives in a nice home in Marin County. "A friend had some and it came up spontaneously, why not try it? See if it still works?" Gregory smiles. "It still does."

What did he get out of his trip? "Communion. A state where there are no distinctions. Where the whole state is God. It's definitely spiritual in a way you wouldn't call a martini spiritual, or a joint. You know the world isn't the frightening, turbulent place it was when I was young either. You'd drop acid, turn on the television, and there was Detroit burning, Vietnam, draft protests, men walking on the moon, the six-day war live and in color. Just thinking about the world was enough to freak you out. The world's calmer now, and after a certain amount of experience over the years I've acquired more self-confidence. So I wasn't as likely to freak out; it was easier to just let go."

"Having checked it out after a 10-year interval, I don't feel it's a false god. I think there's a whole lot of truth in the LSD experience. I think it's a good idea to take it once

a year and I'll probably do that."

Gregory is reasonably typical of the people in their 30s and 40s, usually bright, educated people, who have recently wanted to see if LSD was all they remembered it to be. I came across more of them researching this story than I would have thought. They are a minority among those of their generation and their social strata, but then of course they were in 1967 too. LSD has never been the majority's choice of drug, not even among drug takers.

Would Gregory want his daughter to take LSD? "Yes."

When she was how old? "I probably couldn't stop her much longer than 16."

Perhaps he's right and he couldn't stop her. If not, he wouldn't be alone. According to law-enforcement agencies, a lot of middle-class young people are dropping acid again, some of whom you probably would not have guessed. In 1984, the *Ladies' Home Journal* reported that among its readers between the ages of 21 and 25, 11

**A lot of middle-class young people are dropping acid again. In 1984, the Ladies' Home Journal reported that 11 percent of its readers between the ages of 21 and 25 had tried acid.**

percent had tried acid; these women were between 4 and 9 years old in 1970. Add to them "middle-class kids in Los Gatos and Sunnyvale," says a state narc. "Yuppie kids between 15 and 20 in San Jose," adds another. Then there are some gays who have discovered LSD enhances sexual experience. And a few therapists who find it helps some patients open up. And toss in some investment bankers and Silicon Valley computer designers, if you are ready to believe a grown man who calls himself Zarkov.

**W**HEN JUDGE DOUGLAS GINSBURG admitted he had smoked marijuana, the reaction put the *nouvelle* acid phenomenon into a generational context. Newspapers and news departments disgorged features about Drug Use Then and Now. It began to seem that the 1988 election might resemble what happened in 1960.

1960 was the last time a man in his 40s, John Kennedy, replaced a man in his 70s, Dwight Eisenhower, as president. In his inaugural address Kennedy gave notice of

change arriving: "Let the word go forth from this time and place, to friend and foe alike, that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans."

In the decade that followed, upheaval seemed commonplace: assassination, a man walking on the moon, the inner cities burning, drugs, the war in Vietnam. Opportunity often includes an element of risk, and the '60s seemed a dangerous time.

Most of the candidates to succeed President Reagan are in their 40s or early 50s, so the election of 1988 may bring the most dramatic generational shift of power since Kennedy spoke for a generation, "born in this century, tempered by war, disciplined by a hard and bitter peace, proud of our ancient heritage."

Only a minority of the generation about to assume power dropped acid, just as most of them didn't fight in Vietnam. But they were all affected by the times in which they grew up. One of them may soon replace a president old enough to be his father, and lead the country toward the 1990s.

The increased interest in the '60s

—its music, its war, its styles—is probably connected to that impending change. Whatever is coming may resemble the 1960s in terms of generational evolution, but its content and detail are certain to be very different. The increase in LSD use after a decade's hiatus is part of this anomaly: One way of anticipating what's coming is to look back at the last time something similar happened.

Because its use strongly affects the psyche and poses real risks, LSD has always been the hippie macho drug. You passed the acid test or you didn't; you were on the bus or you weren't. For a few people, taking LSD again now is a way of checking out if they're still on the bus. For younger people in their teens and 20s, it's mostly an experiment, a way to see for themselves what their parents, or a teacher, or a magazine article told them was a pretty fantastic ride.

If you want to draw a conclusion, it's that what's past is always present but the future is outta-sight. □

**MIKE WEISS** is a staff writer for West.



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