



Painting by Matt Klarwein

Some Consequences of the LSD Revolution

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Will the transcendent experience produce the better-adjusted individual or the revolutionary man?

At the recent conference on LSD and related drugs held in San Francisco under the auspices of the University of California at Berkeley, Dr. Richard Alpert, one of the more vocal advocates of the controlled introduction of these substances into society, touched on one aspect of the psychedelic experience that has been generally overlooked in the torrid press accounts of the past several months. LSD is now widely available from black market and other unsanctioned sources and Dr. Alpert ventured the opinion that the Mafia, sensing a new source of profit, would soon involve itself in the operation. He concluded that it would then be merely a matter of time before these businessmen of the underworld decided to try their own product. This comment brought forth a roar of delighted laughter and applause from an admittedly partial audience composed largely of users of illicit LSD. Their delight, however, stemmed not from the prospect that the drug might become more readily available if organized crime were to champion it, but rather from an appreciation of the ethical paradox that Dr. Alpert had propounded. For the psychedelic experience is, among other things, an ethical revelation of the most personal and intense nature. Dr. Alpert further conjectured that a single LSD experience could be so overpowering that an individual

would subsequently reorient his life in accordance with ethical and transegoistic guideposts. This concept is by no means new among those who are strongly committed to the psychedelic experience, but if it is, in fact, true we are faced with an incipient ethical revolution. Such a life could hardly be lived in the nether world of crime, but can it be lived within the framework of organized, competitive society of which most of us are a part? And will this transcendent experience produce the better adjusted individual or the revolutionary man? A few state legislatures, presuming the latter, have already enacted repressive laws against some of the psychedelic drugs while the federal government, more responsive perhaps to the ghost of the Volstead era, shuffled the problem to the Food and Drug Administration which prudently enacted barriers against the traffic in these drugs but did not involve itself in the sticky areas of private possession and use.

It is a commonplace that morals cannot be legislated. Laws directed toward the prohibition of LSD miss the mark because it is not the drug which is revolutionary but the experience induced by it. Whether LSD is psychologically addictive or harmful is irrelevant to the person who feels that it has significantly altered his life



for the better. When the experience itself is felt to be valid, other means — chemical, mechanical, or physiological — can be found to reproduce it. And, as an important consequence of the dedication to the drug, an individual will proselytize. The legal problem is somewhat analogous to that met in the control of nuclear armaments: The types and quantities of weapons produced are superfluous as long as nuclear technology is generally understood and no advances are made toward lessening the tensions that might result in their use. The sociological problem takes precedence over the technical. Once more the mystical jinni is out of the bottle and will not be put back in. The psychedelic experience, like the Hiroshima bomb, is loose. It is appreciated, if not understood, and is desired, or desired again, by enough people to make repression impossible. This should not be as alarming as it has been made out to be, but it does present a situation to be structured and resolved rather than ignored through repressive legislation.

It is futile to hope that LSD can be stamped out, but the immediate arrival of the psychedelic millennium, as some of its devotees fervently wish, is equally impossible. The new jinni may be out of the bottle but he will not be given free rein. The effects of the drug can be too disastrous. On the personal level LSD might induce psychosis in potentially unstable personalities that have achieved a permanent working relationship with society. On the social level it is already inducing psychosis: A schizophrenia of pro and con opinion which is rapidly reaching

a point where it will no longer constitute a valid dialectic. At the LSD Conference Dean Lohman of the University of California School of Criminology strove to find a workable middle ground. Realizing the impossibility of completely repressing the drug, he hoped to shift the controversy to questions concerning the form and degree of controls necessary as LSD becomes even more widespread, and thus remove the problem from the strictly legal-criminal nexus in which it now hovers. The question of controls, he maintained, should be resolved by competent professionals in affected fields.

If such a shift in emphasis should actually occur the first priority in the business will concern the discovery of who is professionally competent to devise the required controls. For example, is a doctor or psychiatrist, by virtue of medical degrees and a series of clinical observations of reactions to psychedelic drugs, able to speak authoritatively on all aspects of an experience which is essentially non-academic, non-professional, and thoroughly non-hierarchical in its effects? On the other hand, should a poet who has a great deal of subjective experience with these states of consciousness and given them a certain coherence and feeling in his writing be excluded from those designated as professionally competent? The LSD Conference implied an answer by officially disinviting the poet Allen Ginsberg, but speaker after speaker voiced strong disagreement from the rostrum with this action of the University, and the Conference Director, Richard Baker, admitted at the onset that the

decision had been made without his knowledge in an echelon above his in the hierarchy. Consequently an impasse seemed to be reached between the affected professionals and the official structure which relates them to society at the very beginning of the search for a rational method of dealing with the psychedelic revolution. Perhaps Berkley, whose last few years have been a series of nightmares for its public relations people, should not be blamed too strongly for playing down the controversial in an extremely volatile subject. But by attempting to keep the proceedings as professional and clinical as possible the University left itself open to a valid criticism. The academic and medical professionals are possibly capable of devising more effective and timely controls among themselves, but they represent such a small minority of those who are vitally interested in these issues that the excluded ninety per cent will continue on their own way, undirected, disorganized and probably hostile to official efforts except to the extent that they render the drugs more readily accessible.

A very broad spectrum is needed to represent the opinions and aspirations that have sprung up around LSD. Doctors and psychologists, pharmacologists, both academic and unaffiliated philosophers, professors from practically every branch of academic life, theologians and ministers, writers, artists, poets, musicians, cultists, students — high school as well as college — and, very probably, most of their parents, have either been vitally interested in psychedelic phenomena

for a long time or only recently alerted to their more sensational aspects. Some are as strongly opposed to the drug and its associated experiences as are others proponents of it. Most, however, including many of those who deal with the effects of the drug without ever having taken it themselves, admit that the experiences are ineffable. LSD is a mental explosive whose extraordinary power can carry an individual to states of consciousness which previously he could not even imagine. The mind erupts in a fantasy of color and sensuous form, of crawling horrors or feelings of great intellectual clarity and capacity and, beyond these, it can meld itself into the cool clear light of perfect ecstasy. The psychedelic experience, for all of its individuality, is primarily a relational phenomenon. A person feels himself interacting with other individuals, with small, coherent groups, with aesthetic experiences, with intellectual constructs which seem to grow or happen rather than being thought in a logical, rationalistic way, with states of psychotic terror and visceral revulsions, and, conversely, with states of mystical sublimity. A vast sensation of belongingness and unity is achieved through an appreciation of an infinitely complex but experientially simple relationship between all objects, concepts and living processes. Distinctions caused by separateness, which is the basis for our usual definitional world, evaporate and the most insignificant things take on as much value as the most cherished because they are seen as equally indispensable. Finally this indispensibility becomes the criterion of a new reality which is

founded no longer upon the objective world as validated by our cultural upbringing but upon this relational world of totally interdependent significances. During the weeks following the psychedelic experience this new insight is remembered, not kept, and objective reality as we always knew it remains. But the old reality is conditioned by the remembered experience which is integrated into the personality over time and emerges as the basis for the newly discovered ethical relationship to the world.

Strangely enough even the deeply mystical experiences do not provide a rational justification for the new morality which results from them. The new orientation is merely felt to be the best possible, though not the only and certainly not the eternal one. The ethical life has no purpose except that it is lived and this living itself transforms the ethical concepts upon which it is founded. Life is not justified, as in Christianity, by life beyond death nor, as in Existential thought, by life in the teeth of death. Since the individual has suffered a more or less traumatic ego death during the LSD experience, the usual concept of death as simple negation is unacceptable. Life and death are felt as analogues in an absolute relationship to existence and both become an indispensable part of the new reality.

The first consequence of the psychedelic experience is a deep feeling of individuality and freedom. This is true historically as well as personally. The first experimenters with the drug were those whose individuality is unquestioned; men such as Aldous Huxley, Timothy Leary and

Alan Watts. They were followed by others on the intellectual edge of academic society and then by professors and students. It now appears that LSD has been pre-empted by the younger middle class wherein it can be said that feelings of individuality and freedom are strongly conditioned. After a successful LSD experience the individual returns to a world transformed by the magic of the interior countries he has traversed, but the initial sense of wonder is soon lost and he finds his actual relationship to his world little changed. Since few are in the position to make a drastic break with the past they soon succumb to the established routine and the old diversions. But within them extensive changes may well be taking place as the psyche weaves the experience into its value system.

As the LSD experience becomes more commonplace and an ever larger number of individuals come under its influence, the cumulative impact on social norms will certainly be dramatic. This can already be sensed in contemporary art. Paintings and sculptors of vivid color and liquid form, the rhythmic sensuousness of post rock 'n roll music, and much of the avante garde writing draws obvious inspiration from the psychedelic world. Social arrangements which are held moderately sacred by the older middle class, but which have been under attack by civil rights and other liberalizing tendencies of the post war years, may have yet to suffer a still more intense assault from within not because they are seen as intrinsically wrong but rather for being uninspired, colorless, and dreadfully conventional.

The locus for this critique is among LSD in-groups which have already been formed at some universities, in artistic circles, and among developing psychedelic elites. These tend to emphasize the intellectual, aesthetic or religious aspects of the LSD experience and to condition subsequent life within the group in conformity with the insights obtained. These groups are highly efficacious for a user of LSD and some such arrangement will probably evolve and become more widespread in the future. At present, however, the in-group norms are often seen as somewhat anti-social and a definite cleavage exists between them and those which are more generally accepted.

This cleavage makes it difficult for the academic professionals and the leaders of the in-groups to cooperate in surmounting the problems associated with the LSD revolution. For example, the psychedelic consequences for religion could be severe and roughly comparable to the shock that Christianity sustained at the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. If the primary religious experience as encountered under LSD is valid and not specifically dependent on historical Christianity, churches will be forced to reconstitute themselves into organic rather than authoritarian organizations and those hierarchies that remain will have to be manifestly spiritual rather than political in orientation. This is, at any rate, the substance of the challenge implicit in organizations such as the Neo-American Church which utilize LSD as a sacrament, but it seems unlikely that there will be much theological intercourse

between them and the more traditional faiths.

One of the more important developments which will affect our society is the impact of the psychedelic experience on political morality and orientation. Among people unassociated with the psychedelic movement there is the tendency to group all LSD users with the far left in politics and with radical organizations of all sorts. To a degree this is true for liberalizing tendencies are often interrelated and do draw support from each other. But this is not to conclude that psychedelic revelations destroy or necessarily upset conservative traditions and institutions on which a society is founded. To the contrary, an LSD experience can instill a very profound and reverent feeling for these things. The actual growth of political values and mores can be experienced under LSD and, in a Burkean sense, the overawing complexity of societal processes is revealed as the substance of our freedoms and the necessary framework within which we orient our lives. It is nonetheless true that the impression generally held is that LSD and radicalism are synonymous. On the one hand this stems from the radical claims of the psychedelic experience itself, though not from the consequences of that experience; and, on the other, from the fact that radical groups are far less reticent in associating themselves publicly with LSD than are more moderate elements.

In the contemporary world in which these moderate elements operate the technological revolution expresses itself humanistically in the managed society. The counterattack on the new

myth of the computerized man, easily classifiable by a battery of true-false quizzes, is already underway and can only be accelerated by the appearance of psychedelic man and his unlimited capacity, nostalgia and intuition. During the LSD experience such a tremendous array of possibilities present themselves that the mind is staggered by the overwhelming potential inherent in man and his world. Impatience with traditional ways and values is always an attribute of ambitious youth but now that attribute, rather than giving way finally to the logic and security of bureaucratic experience or the mild cynicism of permanently repressed rebellion, will be bolstered by a consciousness of continuous creative change. The social revolutions of the post war years are, in a sense, balancing the great power accumulations caused by the centralization of economic and government authority, but these revolutions themselves become bureaucratized as they encompass ever larger sectors of our national life. Psychedelic drugs can free the minds of future administrators from the hypnotic advance of this Brave New World of controlled society and offer them the possibility of developing truly creative personalities. The patterns of hierarchical authority within which they function can be invigorated and the determinants of success within the bureaucratic framework can be made more relevant to the good life. The organizational developments of the past hundred years will not be overturned by feelings of ethical egalitarianism but the more mechanical and inflexible features of the apparatus can certainly be softened. Since the great

majority of those who are now experimenting with LSD will be moving into positions of leadership in our complex society we can expect the self-transcending experience to be a pertinent factor in new cultural innovations.

It is not only the young and the healthy, however, and those who have an exciting future to look forward to who can benefit from the psychedelic experience. A paper, written by Dr. Eric Kast, which dealt with LSD as a psychologic aid to terminal cancer patients was discussed at the Conference. Dr. Kast concluded that not only was LSD able to reconcile dying patients to their own deaths, but also to give them new joy in life and to lessen the physical distress associated with their disease. Other experiments with criminals and mental patients indicate that the psychedelic experience and its ethical revaluation have a definite role to play among those who have lost their healthy orientation to the rest of society. Another paper, presented by Dr. Claudio Naranjo, a young psychotherapist from Chile, concerned the therapeutic value of the drug ibogaine. While under the influence of the drug patients were able to vividly relive past experiences and to bring problem areas into a balanced perspective with the whole of their mental lives. It is conceivable that a general program of preventive medicine based on the psychedelic experience will eventually be as common as is sanitation today.

Looking more to the future it is certain that psychedelic drugs will offer part of the solution to the problems of increased leisure that lie ahead.

When the fulfillment of life is realized in self development and serenity rather than straight monetary security our economic capacity will be directed toward complementing the good life rather than catering to the purely acquisitive one. LSD is very inexpensive and the materials needed to take advantage of the intellectual and aesthetic insights obtained from it are among the most widespread blessings of our American civilization. Libraries and museums are usually free and the tools for artistic expression, including most musical instruments, are abundant and of little cost. With a general awakening to the creative arts it is even possible that the wasteland of television will blossom and that methods for developing a creative interchange between audience and actor will be pioneered.

In all of this speculation LSD and the other psychedelic drugs must be seen in perspective as the forerunners of a host of other mind conditioning substances. A few years from now they will constitute only one class in an open ended cornucopia of such chemicals. Already pharmacologists have been able to develop substances which enhance memory and increase intellectual capacity even though our physiological knowledge of the brain and its functions is still terribly limited. It may be truly fortunate that LSD and other drugs which foment an ethical personality restructuring are the first to become widely available. Perhaps only psychedelic preconditioning will make tolerable to society the use of yet undiscovered drugs which will greatly magnify the will or the intellect or the persistency of man.



Participants in Berkeley LSD Conference: Timothy Leary, Rolf von Eckartsberg, Michael Harner, Gard Stern, Paul Lee, Joel Fort, Huston Smith, Sidney Cohen, Abram Moffer, Sterling Bunnell, Richard Alpert

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