

From “Dare to Know,” to
“Think for Yourself:”
Timothy Leary and the Psychedelic
Enlightenment

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Introduction

The European Enlightenment is historically associated with the rise of reason, democracy, freedom of religion – and, fundamentally, with freethinking. It was a watershed era in which Western society broke free from its dogmas and illusions, opening up the path towards an enlightened civilization. Some theorists, however, such as the Frankfurt School philosophers, have debunked the purported virtues of the Enlightenment, including its promise of liberated minds. Rationalism, they say, to the exclusion of other perspectives, has been established as a new dogma which is just as widespread as that of religion before it. More damningly still, Dr. Timothy Leary – scientist and prophet of the LSD generation – indicated that, until the 1960s psychedelic revolution, freethinking was in fact *impossible* in the West. His theories imply that no one was enlightened, either in intellect or in spirit.

Dr. Timothy Leary, in a nutshell, was a controversial scientist who tried psychedelics, had an extremely positive reaction to them, and wanted to spread their benefits. He was, as it were, *given* enlightenment by psychoactive chemicals: in *The Politics of Ecstasy* and elsewhere, he describes how they had an ecstatic effect on him, and liberated his thinking from established patterns and dogmas. He enlightened his language, his beliefs, and his perception. Leary developed the idea that to think for yourself is actually a spiritual affair. It requires an expansion of consciousness as offered only through specific neurochemical changes, or, for rare individuals, through advanced forms of meditation, fasting, etc. This, he said, is spiritual, or religious, because it entails the opening up of the mind – or ego – to a vastly larger experience of one's own being than is commonly partaken of.

Still, public knowledge on the subject of psychedelic enlightenment is limited, and when Leary is put in the spot light, he is often dismissed through character assassination.¹ Decades earlier, government authorities persecuted the psychedelic movement by forbidding all research and incarcerating Leary. Regardless of the incentive behind his suppression – be it a distrust of the 'irrational,' 'esoteric' message of the counterculture, or otherwise – Leary reiterated many Enlightenment ideals. Investigating his ideas on freethinking and enlightenment should propel us beyond the common biases, and may even serve to explain them; moreover, it will reveal that Leary was an Enlightenment figure of the twentieth century – an inspired scientist and challenger of the status quo. A brief review of the Enlightenment project, and its status shortly before Leary's entry, will set the stage for a history and discussion of Leary's reinvention of freethinking. In turn, this approach will allow for an analysis of the relationship between the psychedelic Counterculture and the Enlightenment project.

Getting to Know the Robot

In Buckminster Fuller's words, we, average humans, are commonly conscious of less than *one percent* of what is going on in our brains; the rest is automated.² The remaining ninety-nine percent, however, can at times flood into consciousness through intense chemical alterations in brain operation. This overwhelming experience is often referred to as ecstasy, divine madness, or Gnosis; a vision of – or becoming one with – 'God'.³ Thus modern science, through men like Leary, revisits the challenges of the Enlightenment by entering the religious realm. We may think of it also as addressing

¹ See, for instance, Cave, Cloud, Kimball, Self, and Valiunas in bibliography

² Leary, *Politics of Ecstasy*, p.26

³ *Ibid.*, p.287. Note: the term God is used quite broadly and inclusively in this paper.

the perennial challenge posted at the temple of Apollo at Delphi: How can you think for yourself unless you truly “Know Yourself”? Put differently, how can you expect to Operate Your Brain⁴ if you are habitually on auto-pilot, disconnected from most of your body? You can't. The answer, says Leary, is to pursue and engage that automated 99%, the robot, and attain identity with one's own freedom and divinity through ecstatic self-realization.

Leary's slogans, such as “Think for yourself, question authority,” recall the rebellious attitude of the Enlightenment, summed up by Immanuel Kant's *Sapere Aude*, “Dare to Know.” It is a call for the active use of the intellect, to reach individually towards greater truth. But until the advent of modern psycho-pharmacology, the study of brain-changing chemicals, Leary believed, there was little conceivable way for humans to truly think for themselves. In partaking of this chemical alteration of consciousness, he went beyond words, logic, and beliefs; he went farther than Kant and others *could* have gone without psychedelics, or other deeply religious experiences to launch them beyond the confines of their culture and biology.

Leary thus became a spokesman for the mental, spiritual, and social benefits of psychedelics, and he remained so well after LSD was made illegal on October 6, 1966.⁵ Ironically, Leary is often blamed for LSD's criminalization over forty years ago – his quest for fame and his enthusiastic proselytizing are said to have put LSD in the hands of the wrong people.⁶ Indeed, even the writer Aldous Huxley, who was indirectly responsible for Leary's introduction to psychedelics, thought Leary was a “silly ass;”⁷ however, populist and naïve though his approach may have been, Leary made an enormous cultural impact – an impact reminiscent of the Enlightenment, centuries before.

The Enlightenment

The European Enlightenment, best remembered for its upstart philosophers and the French and American revolutions, was, just as the cultural revolutions of the 1960s were, a major Countercultural event in Western history. Reason and logic, freedom of thought and religion, democracy; these were all intended to enlighten society, to lighten the load that was imposed on it and its individuals by religious and monarchic dogma. Surely this was not an easy process, and as freethinkers, these reformers were a threat to the established order, just as Socrates, Bruno, Galileo, and others had been before them.

Enlightenment Dogma

The Enlightenment, as a cultural movement, had great success in changing political and social norms. In the positivist backlash of the Enlightenment, however, Reason was placed at the summit of human mental development. It took the place left vacant by the revealed doctrine of religion, and became the central dogma⁸ of Enlightenment society and of modern science – as a supreme source of knowledge, it went from liberating rebel to established authority. To understand the nature of this bias we turn to one of the principal voices from the Enlightenment, Immanuel Kant.

⁴ See Leary, *How to Operate Your Brain*, video montage, 1994

⁵ This made Leary a frequent resident in prisons around the world, but, to this author's knowledge, never for having or having used psychedelics

⁶ See Leary, *The Man Who Turned On America*, BBC documentary

⁷ Quoted in Self, Will, *A Teen for Eternity*

⁸ Dogma; or grand narrative, doctrine, creed, belief, etc. A dogmatic thought, even an Enlightened one, is based more in faith than reason.

According to Kant, “Enlightenment is man's release from his self-incurred tutelage. Tutelage is the incapacity to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another. Such tutelage is self-imposed if its cause is not lack of intelligence, but rather a lack of determination and courage to use one's intelligence without being guided by another.” Kant saw the religious human, in his dependence on the 'false' dogmas of religion, as psychologically immature; indeed, “religious immaturity,” he believed, “is the most pernicious and dishonorable variety of all.”⁹ *Sapere Aude* – “Dare to Know,” his motto encouraging the independent search for knowledge – therefore accompanied science as a means toward individual maturity or intellectual 'enlightenment.' Observation, rational analysis, and unbridled curiosity became tools for the modern production of knowledge; together they aimed to empower the individual and undermine irrationality and dogma.

To accomplish the Enlightenment project, so that all members of society would be enlightened and could thus rule themselves, Kant believed Reason must have the freedom to be used publicly in all matters. This dream of the liberating universality of the Enlightenment has since been debunked: the philosophers from the Frankfurt school – such as Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Erich Fromm – noted several pitfalls in the planned enlightenment of mankind through Reason. They observed that the universal faith in Reason would essentially lead everybody to *one* final objective truth, a similar state of affairs to the doctrine of the *one* Church. The structuring of thought through logic and rationality – while (perhaps) removing fear of the unknown through the complete control of our own nature – actually leads to the 'end' of individual thought.

In essence this means that the Enlightenment, with its onslaught of questions, could not question itself. The mechanism of denial, as in religion, is faith; in this case, the *faith in Reason*. Witness that, since all criticism of Reason is deemed irrational – whether it be from scientists or advocates of religion – Reason triumphs by 'virtue' of being rational. This limiting of thought, the Frankfurt philosophers said, created masses prejudiced towards different, and especially non-rational thought.¹⁰ The Enlightenment principle of free thought therefore has atrophied into an institutional memory. In essence then, in the Frankfurt School philosophy, people do not have to think for themselves under Enlightenment science any more than they did under irrational Religion.

Backlash

To Leary, scientific research and technological innovation meant intelligence and independence. He believed that the common concept of 'reality' is an arbitrary construction, and not the product of a mental faculty enlightened by reason: reason, the apex of our civilization, he thought, is by itself incapable of making sense of the chaotic, fractal, non-linear world which we inhabit.¹¹ The first Enlightenment, originally another generation's genuine experience, therefore no longer applied in the twentieth century experience. Indeed, it had gone from genuine experience to rehearsed creed. For Leary and others, LSD, a laboratory-created chemical, opened the way to a *new* experience, and thus a new Enlightenment.

Criminalization and persecution of psychedelic use, coupled with secret Army and CIA testing

⁹ Op. cit. Kant, *What is Enlightenment*, 1784

¹⁰ We may go further in this analysis, and surmise that the prejudice of mass thought was *maintained* by the Enlightenment, instead of being created by it. The dominant episteme or paradigm changed in content, but in form it maintained a hierarchy.

¹¹ Ruthofer, p.5, 108

on unaware subjects (to Leary, “psychological rape”¹²), led Robert Anton Wilson, philosopher and friend of Leary's, to complain that Voltaire had announced the Age of Reason two centuries too soon; that in fact “we are still in the Dark Ages.”¹³ Two hundred to four hundred years before, Enlightenment Europe was, in Leary's own words, the “genetic frontier” in terms of intelligence and technology. By the 1960s however, the frontier had moved to the West Coast of North America; the hippie heartland, where religion and science were commingling in novel expressions.¹⁴ Leary can be placed within this context as a recent iteration of the Socratic corrupter. This is not to claim that Leary spoke some transcendental truth. But Leary, like Socrates, Kant, and others, asked questions, encouraged people (especially the youth) to ask questions themselves, and supplied an accessible method for doing so. With this as our background, we will now turn to Leary's theories themselves.

Being Stuck

Who are we? In Leary's conception of post-Enlightenment society, where institutionalized psychology has become the “secular state religion,” normal people answer this question by identifying themselves with “shallow, artificial social roles.” According to Leary, they answer from a TV stage-set defined by “mass-media-social-psychology-adjustment-normality.”¹⁵ In other words, who we are is mostly imposed by mainstream society.

Most people are said to follow static reality-maps which were imprinted on their neurons by education, religion, and authorities when they were naïve children.¹⁶ They are 'programmed' to think, believe, and behave in certain established ways, both consciously and unconsciously. It is a process of sensory conditioning, an acculturation into accepted 'reality' patterns. These patterns are instilled by our parents - “themselves blind, frightened slaves” - and by the TV, newspapers, and magazines that determine what they believe, like, dislike, desire, and value. These patterns can never be fully revoked.¹⁷

Consensus reality is thus a fabricated feedback loop, a self-induced brainwashing according to the dominant social themes. In Leary's words, it is a “consensual paranoia fabricating its own illusions.”¹⁸ This makes it sound like the most terrible sci-fi projection of a technocratic dictatorship, without even a hint of original thought. Put more succinctly, however, “the present is the future of the nervous system: it takes only ten years for a liberal to become a conservative, and another ten to become reactionary.”¹⁹ By spreading fixed beliefs, which seemed liberal at some point, institutions such as those heralded by the Enlightenment therefore have long since stunted the intellect.

However, the idea of confronting a reality beyond common beliefs can be terrifying in any age. Leary observes that the majority of people are satisfied with the “distractions, illusory protection, and

¹² Politics of Ecstasy, p.122. Government-sanctioned research on drugs with unprepared individuals (by Army and CIA psychiatrists) aimed not at stimulating free thought or religious experience, but aggressive mind-control, and is reported to have caused the death of at least one victim. See, for example, Marks, John, *The Search for the Manchurian Candidate*, Times Books, New York, 1979 p.72. The government research referred to is known as Project MKULTRA. See Marks, John, *CIA, Memorandum for the Record, Subject: Project ARTICHOKE*, January 31, 1975

¹³ Leary, *Neuropolitics*, p.90

¹⁴ Leary, *The Intelligence Agents*, p.177

¹⁵ Politics of Ecstasy, p.30

¹⁶ Wilson, R.A., interviewed by Neal Wilgus for SFR

¹⁷ Politics of Ecstasy, p.29, p.142

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.142

¹⁹ *Neuropolitics*, p.104-5

narcotic comfort” of the church and laboratory.²⁰ The only illusions (or hallucinations) that they trust are those shared by the institutionally imprinted majority. Falling into the delusions of our grandparents therefore seems an easier path than asking questions. But what does this complacency lead to? According to Leary, the middle-aged are confronted with their own neurosis: the meaninglessness of life, the breakdown of marital communication, and the feeling of emptiness and being a fake.²¹ They have spent their entire lives following predetermined paths. And apart from existential loneliness in its individuals, society itself is led into classical reactionary behavior; Nixon's “counterreformation,” the Drug War, was one such reaction.²² Leary reflected on this mentality: American leaders, he believed, were moved to “hunt down the same people, in the same way, that communist, socialist, and right-wing dictatorships do.”²³ The freethinker, therefore, is perceived as a threat in any setting, 'enlightened' or not.

The largely automated existence of the majority, while seemingly predominant, is not the only state in which the brain functions: in Leary's view, the brain is in fact designed to design realities.²⁴ Well before experimenting with psychedelics, he was “convinced that drastic limitations on human intellectual and emotional function were caused by inflexible states of mind, static imprinted and conditioned neural circuits which created and preserved artificial and malfunctioning states of perceived reality.”²⁵ His interest in changing the destructive patterns of the conditioned brain were what led him to psychedelics in the first place.

Leary came into the limelight through the LSD controversy in the Sixties, warning people that there is a danger in deferring the question of 'Who we are' to social institutions. That there is a danger in not questioning mass-produced reality, because it is very well possible that everything we are being taught in it “*is dangerously wrong*” – that our history books are merely “self-preserving fabrications.”²⁶ This challenge was heard by thousands, threatening the status quo, and prompting then-President Nixon to call Leary 'the most dangerous man in America.'

Leary took several cues from Marshall McLuhan. To let go of your programs, to change your mind, he found, you have to change the *medium*: your words, your mode of communication, your brain chemistry.²⁷ It is not simply a matter of being a devout believer or a total skeptic, but of completely altering your normal perception of truth. Our mental states are basically defined by the chemicals we consume; and since most people consume the same drugs – downers or uppers, alcohol and amphetamines – they tend to think similarly. It did not help Leary's cause that part of the design of “reflex social conventions” is to induce fear for consuming *different* chemicals like psychedelics in the first place.²⁸ But for those who did, bringing the two sides of the brain together through chemical ecstasy brought chaos and order together – intuition and reason, imagination and fact.²⁹

So who is trapped? Who, centuries after the Age of Enlightenment, can not think for

²⁰ Politics of Ecstasy, p.19

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.178

²² Neuropolitics, p.6

²³ *Ibid.*, p.32

²⁴ *How to Operate Your Brain*, video montage

²⁵ Neuropolitics, p.1. (Neurologic, a later development in Leary's theories, is said by R.A. Wilson to be a way “to detach from all maps – to have the freedom to use any map where it works and drop it where it doesn't work”. Wilson, R.A., interviewed by Neal Wilgus for SFR)

²⁶ Neuropolitics, p.41

²⁷ *How to Operate Your Brain*, video montage

²⁸ Neuropolitics, p.4

²⁹ *How to Operate Your Brain*, video montage

themselves? Harvard University, which fired Leary for his unorthodox research? President Nixon, who called him the most dangerous man in America? The easiest answer, says Leary, is government and its law enforcement branch. It is “their job to turn us off;” even though psychedelics users form no threat to property or person. They did not engage in bloody revolts, or a Reign of Terror. “What is the threat that attracts the police?”, Leary asked. “Perhaps it is the danger of new ideas. Is our government afraid of internal freedom?”³⁰ Such postulations paint a picture of a true 'martyr,' a pariah in his own generation. And indeed, Leary generally found that most people, who like himself, were born before 1930, hated the Sixties, felt alienated, and left behind; and that they were too stuck to adapt to radical social changes.³¹

How did Leary see through the traps of his own aging mind? In 1959, at the age of thirty-nine, his “joy in life, sensual openness, and creativity were all sliding downhill.”³² His life had been dedicated to the established order. But, as he recounts in his autobiography, *Flashbacks*, his first psychedelic experience changed everything:

“In four hours by that swimming pool in Cuernavaca I learned more about the mind, the brain and its structures than I did in the preceding 15 years as a diligent psychologist. I learned that the brain is an underutilized biocomputer containing billions of unaccessed neurons. I learned that normal consciousness is one drop in an ocean of intelligence. That consciousness and intelligence can be systematically expanded. That the brain can be reprogrammed. That the knowledge of how the brain works is the most pressing scientific issue of our time. I was beside myself with enthusiasm, convinced we had found the key [for behavior change] we had been looking for.”³³

The reality he had been living in until that moment was but an act, a tragi-comic farce.³⁴ And he wasn't the only one to have this experience. But while millions were trying to enjoy their new-found perspectives, leaders cried out that “ecstasy is bad, ecstasy is escape, ecstasy is dangerous!” According to Leary, the government knew that the ecstatic could not be led.³⁵ And the problem wasn't just with the leaders; *anyone* who hadn't tripped, couldn't think freely about tripping. The revolution of the Sixties was a radical departure from this situation; it was an “alchemical renewal, a time trip. Alexandria. Eleusis.”³⁶

Letting Go in the Sixties

One of the reasons that the first Enlightenment is said to have been unable to free the minds of the average person was that it couldn't be shared or communicated directly. It was a top-down endeavor, restricted to an erudite elite; what messages the masses received were, as ever, largely confined to slogans and battle-cries. LSD on the other hand, rather suddenly, was everywhere and direct and personal. As such, the psychedelic experience was both a religious awakening for the masses and a psychological tool for the individual researcher.

After eating mushrooms, in a sudden flash referred to as “turning on,” Leary had “awakened from a long ontological sleep...to discover that the human brain possesses infinite potentialities.” He prepared to make the insights of revelatory potentiality – the new means to Enlightenment – available to

³⁰ Politics of Ecstasy, p.273

³¹ Neuropolitics, p.32

³² Politics of Ecstasy, p.102

³³ Leary, *Flashbacks*, p.33

³⁴ Politics of Ecstasy, p.29

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.64

³⁶ Neuropolitics, p.28

the world,³⁷ and so he bridged the gap between academic intellectual and popular figure.

But caution was the word; there were many factors to be considered in turning on, including intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and social imprints. Where one would be ready for a dramatic mind-opening experience, another would shrink back. One thing was clear to Leary from the beginning: the youth were much more open to a positive psychedelic experience.

The Sixties turned into a confluence of biology, atomics, electronics, counterculture and psychedelics. Leaps and bounds in knowledge sped people up towards a new choice: the choice, says Leary, to “be a Robot or become Buddha.”³⁸ Psychedelics, rock music, and Eastern religion, to some a “nauseating goulash of pseudo-spirituality,” were to others a driving part of this cultural revolution. By the mid-Sixties, Leary boasted, he had become “a nationally recognized symbol of change.”³⁹ The Sixties generation, now remembered as flower-toting, grass-smoking and idealistic youths, were to Leary the “holiest generation that the human race has ever seen.”⁴⁰ As he writes, “*the kids today are different*. This is not a sociological trend. It's an evolutionary lurch.” Electronics and psychedelics changed the flow of consciousness and social continuity. Leary uses television as a metaphor: “Alcohol turns off the brightness, methadrine jiggles and speeds up the image, LSD flips on 87 channels at once.”⁴¹ With the flick of a knob, channels or programs in the mind could be changed.

In *The Politics of Ecstasy*, an early and important publication of Leary's researches and ideas, Leary recounts the effects of the spread of LSD. “The word got out – LSD produces ecstasy. It helps you see through the game veil.”⁴² An upper-middle-class underground revolution began. Seeing through the veil – a common metaphor for ecstatic experience – is a prerequisite in Leary's theories for freethinking. It happens momentarily in a psychedelic trip, when one “obtain[s] release from the neurological prison. We can come to our senses, turn off the conditioning and experience afresh the hardly bearable ecstasy of direct energy exploding on our nerve endings.”⁴³

LSD allowed something of a genetic imperative to become manifest. What Leary calls “Neurological politics,” the making of new forms of Self-government, became the duty of the young – to salvage the human race from the old, who were becoming too destructive.⁴⁴ So, after the turn on, the option presented itself to “drop out.” After “sanitizing yourself internally, you drop out, not as an act of rebellion, but of harmony. The drop out phenomenon is the most hopeful, and unique in human history.” It was a revolutionary symptom, a peaceful noncommittal to the ways of the past. Leary asked kids to quit school, quit their job, not to vote, to avoid all politics. As long as one stopped playing the robot games that their forefathers – even those framers of the Enlightenment – had sustained, one could step outside of the insanity and destructiveness of Western society.⁴⁵ Before LSD, people were wont to get educated to get new opportunities; now, for the first time, the popular call went out to let go the ways of the past, including education.

However, after the early limited exploration and psychotherapeutic application of psychedelics – as researchers were apprehensive of the expected shock and reaction of society at large – research gave way to recreation. It seems a valid complaint against Leary and other psychedelics promoters that they

³⁷ *Politics of Ecstasy*, p.13

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.141-142

³⁹ Kimball, *The Project of Rejuvenalization*, n.p.

⁴⁰ *Politics of Ecstasy*, p.103

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.135

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.83

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.29

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.294-295

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.177,185

let go of too much; that mass use was detrimental to scientific and respectable research. But Leary defends himself against such “puritan” opinions: “We're such robots that we think the only thing we should do in life is work, get power, and use this power to control other people.” Taking LSD for kicks is for ecstasy; it means “going beyond, confronting God, getting out of your mind.”⁴⁶ It is this path, and this path only, which leads to what Leary called *Neurologic*: the understanding and control of one's own nervous system, with consciousness-altering chemicals as the key.⁴⁷

Tripping

Before LSD hit the proverbial shelves in the early Sixties, America and the West were already a “heavy, hard drug culture.” Difference was, their drugs were not *defined* as drugs.⁴⁸ The change was thus from one class of drug to another, and even then, it occurred on a relatively minor scale (see Fig.1). As with Leary, when people were 'turned on' by psychedelics, many discovered that the world was divided into those who had had the new experience (or were eager to have it) and those who had not (and shuddered at the possibility.)⁴⁹ This is not to say that everyone who sought the experience had the same intentions; for this essay, however, we will focus on the ideal psychedelic trip as evoked in Leary's work.

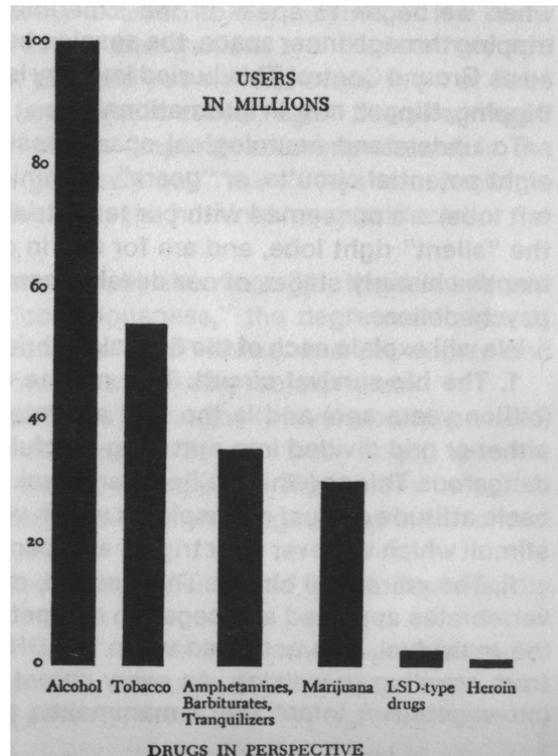


Fig. 1: Neuropolitics, p.83

The psychedelic experience, says Leary, is not meant to be escapist, but “pursuitist;”⁵⁰ a pursuit

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.242

⁴⁷ *Neuropolitics*, p.2

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.83

⁴⁹ Kimball, *The Project of Rejuvenalization*, n.p.

⁵⁰ *Neuropolitics*, p.95

of ecstatic vision, freedom of thought, learning, and experience. As Leary explains, different levels of perception “compel us to confront the nature of reality and the nature of our fragile, subjective belief systems. We discover abruptly that we have been programmed all these years.”⁵¹ Does this mean the psychedelic hallucinations are more real? Leary admits you can't be sure.⁵² And, though not commonly programmed for use, psychedelics themselves are “a tradition” going back through all the world's history.⁵³

They are, however, a tradition for dismantling other traditions. As Leary warns, “nobody should take LSD unless they're prepared to have all their certainties and social securities shattered.”⁵⁴ Leary recognized the fundamental risks of true freethinking: all of a sudden, people are whisked out of the security of the “static symbolic ways in which they think.”⁵⁵ The challenge to a psychedelic tripper is to “go out of their minds so they can come to their senses.”⁵⁶ The mind in this sense is a storage house for learned behavior, or programs. In friend, colleague, and spiritual teacher Dr. Richard Alpert's experience, what Leary means by “going out of your mind” is quite simply having a dissociative experience from everything one has learned; all that one becomes then, is pure awareness. Like a bomb exploding in the head, one goes through psychological death; one ceases to exist, momentarily, as the diminutive package of programs that one normally defines as one's identity.⁵⁷

What is the 'danger' here? Is it the drug, the chemical? When someone says LSD is dangerous, Leary says “ah, consciousness is dangerous.”⁵⁸ LSD is simply a key.⁵⁹ The ontological confusion that a trip can bring upon an unprepared person is a result of having to use their brain anew. You are launched out of your conditioned patterns, and become aware of processes – in body, cell, and mind – that you were never tuned in to before – the unconscious 99%.⁶⁰

The 'death' that occurs is, according to media theorist Douglas Rushkoff, “one of acid's core truths. It could take you into all kinds of deaths – deaths of ego, deaths of misconceptions – and you could then walk back alive.”⁶¹ The so-called bad trip is therefore the reluctance to “go with the rhythm” of death-rebirth. A successful mystic simply goes with it. Some people try hard to stick to their sense of self – in order to “keep up the pretense that you are you and that your level of reality is really reality.”⁶² But this requires constant feedback from people around you, as in normal consciousness, reminding you that you are you. Ideally, the tripper has been immersed in a 'sensory deprivation zone' – free not just from religious dogma, rationalist dogma, but *all* dogma – often without signals 'out there' by which to differentiate their self. Indeed, this isolation from distraction is one of the aims of meditation; and since it is increasingly difficult to be isolated in the modern world, psychedelics are to Leary an obvious alternative.⁶³

⁵¹ Flashbacks, p.33

⁵² Politics of Ecstasy, p.116

⁵³ Moseley *interview* Leary. *And Politics of Ecstasy*, p.187

⁵⁴ Politics of Ecstasy, p.212

⁵⁵ Leary *in* The Man Who Turned on America (Documentary)

⁵⁶ Leary, *quoted in* Illuminatus Trilogy, p.81, by R.A. Wilson

⁵⁷ Richard Alpert *in* The Man Who Turned on America (Documentary)

⁵⁸ Timothy Leary *in* The LSD Crisis (Documentary)

⁵⁹ Politics of Ecstasy, p.179

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.114

⁶¹ Rushkoff, *Leary's last trip*, n.p.

⁶² Politics of Ecstasy, p.203

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.204

While a tripper finds that “there is no death, there is nothing to escape, nothing to fear,”⁶⁴ there *are* things to be changed in one's normal programming. Since the psychedelic experience “can release the learning blocks” of the trained mind, there are possibilities for self-programming.⁶⁵ This is the most important aspect of the psychedelic trip. Referred to as the moment of imprinting and reimprinting, one steps outside of one's mind – suspending “the symbolic chessboard which you have built up over the long years of social conditioning” – to take a new, self-generated picture of reality.⁶⁶ As Leary writes, “I always go through a process in which the space game comes to an end, the time game comes to an end, and then the Timothy Leary game comes to an end. This is the peak, and at this point a new neurological imprint can be made, because all the old imprints are suspended for a while then.”⁶⁷ This ability applies to the entire hippie movement, with its 35 million pot-smokers, which “can, in fact, be viewed as an enormous, amateurish experiment in *self-induced* brain change. And,” Leary continues, “this is exactly why conservatives dread dope.”⁶⁸

As Robert Anton Wilson writes: “Leary's comprehension of LSD is, I think, superior to any other scientist who has written about it; he understands it and knows how to use it constructively. He recognizes, as few others do, that LSD suspends the printed neurological programs of one's life, thereby creating imprint vulnerability, in which a new imprint can be created. This means that if one is working with someone who understands LSD, or the person himself understands it, it is possible to create an entirely new ego for oneself. On the other hand, if one is simply experimenting casually with it, one is likely to imprint anything (including delusions).”⁶⁹

Leary recognized that LSD is no panacea; if you don't want to change, you don't.⁷⁰ “The only control of LSD is self-control,” he writes, and the only benefits are those which you are willing to discipline yourself to get.⁷¹ Reimprinting is a true process of free will, the catalyst for freethinking. However, LSD does not solve the problem that “much too quickly you slip back in your patterns, your routine ways of thinking;” one needs to *keep* taking new pictures of reality to keep thinking independently.⁷²

“Be God Yourself, if you can”⁷³

Several unaffiliated, triple-blind tests with psychedelics on hundreds of religious professionals in the early 1960s determined that 75% of the subjects underwent “intense mystico-religious experiences.”⁷⁴ Another non-religious study found that 75% of the subjects believed that LSD should be used for becoming aware of oneself.⁷⁵ These experiments, says Leary, were done at a time when

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.37

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.205

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.171

⁶⁷ Leary, *quoted in* Wilson, R.A., *Cosmic Trigger I*, p.35

⁶⁸ *Neuropolitics*, p.55

⁶⁹ Wilson, R.A., *Searching for Cosmic Intelligence*, interview by Jeffrey Elliot

⁷⁰ *Politics of Ecstasy*, p.215

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.216

⁷² *Ibid.*, p.171,245

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.82

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.14

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.16

“individual religious ecstasy was highly suspect”⁷⁶ in science and society. Theologians, as the professional representatives of spiritual activity, most certainly have some sort of religious experience; but Leary notes that even for them, direct experience of divinity is denied; it is the knowledge of God (or whatever notion one has thereof) within oneself which the “imperfect, artificial, disharmonious social system systematically robs you of.”⁷⁷ As Carl Jung wrote before him, “it is one of the functions of traditional religions to protect us against the religious experience.”⁷⁸

Leary says it took him five years of LSD experimenting, engaging in expanded states of consciousness where one feels at one with God, before he could say the word 'God' out loud. He went from being an atheist psychologist to a psychedelic prophet: “teaching methods to find God; that's my profession.”⁷⁹ Under his co-direction, the Sixties became a “religious renaissance,”⁸⁰ with the Western world emerging from the darkness of world wars, the Cold War, and atomic weapons to “laugh with God at the cosmic joke.”⁸¹ He believed that “The Only Hope” at this point in human history “is Dope,” and that drugs must become the religion of the people to steer a better course.⁸²

According to Leary, “The psychedelic trip is man's oldest and most classic adventure into meaning. Every religion in world history was founded on the basis of some flipped-out visionary trip.” And religion, conveniently, is “the systematic attempt at focusing man's consciousness.”⁸³ Psychedelics, unlike organized religion, turn people directly on to God; the focus is internal.⁸⁴ The internal religion, Leary recognized, was an Eastern influence. Western religions are traditionally too keen to search in books for divinity – so he syncretized certain Buddhist, Taoist and Hindu texts into psychedelic handbooks. The objective was not to connect with Superior Intelligence *out there*, for it “may not exist as such;” instead, it was “time for us to create Superior Intelligence. In ourselves, if necessary.”⁸⁵

Leary considered himself a humanist. He assumed, “as did Emerson and every other mystic,” that divinity lies within. “You are God – but only you can discover and nurture your divinity.”⁸⁶ Furthermore, “Divinity is something you have to work at, just like you work at any other profession. It's something that requires moment-to-moment readjusting. It's your responsibility to learn how to operate your own soul. That's a new concept. You can't fall back on commandments or anything like that. It really requires that you think for yourself – make that selves, always with other people.”⁸⁷

Before LSD and the Sixties, the concept that you could make your own life a “sacramental trip” – as a God amongst Gods – was uncommon, to say the least.⁸⁸ Historiographically speaking, what is of import in its growing popularity in the Sixties is the fact that it requires great responsibility and maturity to consciously think and live as a 'God': these are exactly the virtues which Kant proclaims in the search for freedom of thought.

The point can now safely be made that to Leary, the truly freed mind is one equal (or

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.17

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.182

⁷⁸ Quoted in Campbell, Joseph, *Thou Art That: Transforming Religious Metaphor*, p.13

⁷⁹ *Politics of Ecstasy.*, p.223

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.286

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.261

⁸² *Ibid.*, p.37

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.40

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p.69

⁸⁵ *Neuropolitics*, p.154

⁸⁶ *Politics of Ecstasy*, p.186

⁸⁷ Leary, *Still Crazy After All These Years*, interview by Bill Moseley

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

comparable) to God; and that this identity is attainable only in an altered state of consciousness, made available by the most powerful psychoactive chemicals known to man. Arno Ruthofer, a Leary enthusiast, thinks that Leary's desire for us to take responsibility for our own lives "is a logical consequence of the constructivist worldview."⁸⁹ The suggestion that Leary or other psychedelics users reached this conclusion – the encounter with inner divinity – through logic seems paradoxical. It may be more accurate to concede that both constructivism and psychedelics have pointed to the responsibility and power of the individual mind, one through logic, and the other through introspective empirical investigation.

How does one go about being divinized? Leary points to LSD as the chemical key to awakening divinity, but it is not simply the chemical that gets it done. A re-writing of one's programs, beliefs and behaviors is required. Indeed, one of the tasks of a turned on person is to question authority – not to attack it, but to question it. This is the way in which one 'takes responsibility' for one's divinity. After this, Leary's advice was to "Declare your own religion." To make explicit the religious nature of your tripping. How? "Choose your own language," be unique in your rituals and costumes, rules, values, spacetime location, roles, and mythic context; engage any secular activity from higher consciousness to play "the God game."⁹⁰ Subsisting in higher consciousness like this is normally the role of the mystic. Still, Leary dissociated from being a mystic. He considered himself to be a "real realist,"⁹¹ which seems to say, that being your own divinity – with full responsibility for your own thoughts and behavior – is the most 'real' one can be. And if you don't follow this advice? "Unless you form your own new religion you are a robot."⁹²

The God game, in the sense of consciously creating one's sense of reality and self, was later organized by Leary and Wilson into a map of consciousness. In this Eight Circuit Model of Consciousness,⁹³ enriched and edited by other authors, the higher levels of consciousness – which only psychedelics and a few intense mystical techniques can evoke – are said to propel one into the state of Metaprogramming. This term, derived from research done by Dr. John C. Lilly, indicates an awareness of programming one's own programming:⁹⁴ fully opened to reimprinting the otherwise fixed elements of identity, you rise above your social and biological selves to tweak, adjust, and otherwise alter the very functioning of your brain. You transcend reason and become your own programmer. Quite literally, you begin to think like a God.

Leary was given enlightenment by chemicals; he 'saw God,' as it were, through psychedelics. This enlightenment does not seem to be an escape from or attack on religion, as the Enlightenment was before it. Instead, it is a highly individualistic, constructivist, self-empowering alternative to organized religion. It may be argued that using God as an idea is primitive, irrational, or perhaps blasphemous; and that using physical explanations *without* resorting to God is more advanced, or rational. But, by

⁸⁹ Ruthofer, p.140

⁹⁰ Politics of Ecstasy., p.186,188

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p.166

⁹² *Ibid.*, p.190. The commandment to form one's own religion so as to be free seems to counteract the very notion of freedom; furthermore, the notion of a *religion* is itself equatable to submitting to a set of beliefs. However, as made clear in *The Politics of Ecstasy*, the command is issued for political and legal purposes. Leary himself based his case for LSD publicly in the guise of 'Freedom of Religion' (itself a gift from the Age of Enlightenment), assuming it would protect him.

⁹³ See Leary, Timothy, *Info-Psychology*, 1987, and Wilson, Robert Anton, *Prometheus Rising*, 1992

⁹⁴ Neuropolitics, p.89. See Lilly, John, *Programming and Metaprogramming in the Human Bio-Computer: Theory and Experiments*, 1987

overlapping science and ecstasy, Leary reveals that they are at least reconcilable in the operation of an individual mind. To Leary the LSD trip seemed to indicate that both God and the neurosciences are essentially accessible, acceptable, and eminently useful notions. Removing the dichotomy from his language and understanding, it seems, became his modern way to Enlightenment.

Thinking for Yourself - Who can do it?

According to Leary, the mind is in a natural state of chaos, and our conditioned programs are a way of staving off disorder and confusion. Order, rules and beliefs keep us 'sane'. Leary makes the case that chaos is basically good; that you can learn how to redesign it for your own reality, to make your own order, rules and commandments (or lack thereof). This is a level of thinking for yourself that goes well beyond the first Enlightenment.

Still, Leary himself does not claim to trump any historical prophets or philosophers; he claims that he is following in their footsteps. Like Socrates, he encourages speculation, doubt, and creation of one's own opinions about reality. To "know thyself."⁹⁵ As Leary writes, "I have found better ways of understanding man's consciousness, leading to a better control of his inner environment. Far from being unconventional, I see my unfolding as highly orthodox and predictable for anyone who takes truth and knowledge seriously."⁹⁶ The true self-thinker is not a blank slate: the matrix of internal programs can be reshuffled for better control, but not fully erased.

Leary also admitted support for authorities who – whilst unconventional – informed his own ontological assumptions. He looked to Jung, not Freud; mystics, not theologians; and Einstein and Bohr, not Newton.⁹⁷ Eventually however, any background in learning is to be transcended: the goal is that "Everyone must become his own Einstein, his own Darwin,"⁹⁸ that you must "Become your own priest, doctor, researcher,"⁹⁹ and internalize their authority. For once you learn that you are the "total result of evolution," says Leary, including its stages as Einstein, Darwin, Buddha, and Galileo, you learn that you yourself can live out these potentials of your genetic being.¹⁰⁰

Richard Alpert attributes his own transformation to Leary. "I didn't expect anything creative to come out of me. And then I found [that] Timothy was freeing me from a whole set of values. He taught me how to play with life rather than be played upon by life... I think it's quite a liberating thing."¹⁰¹ Though a widely respected guru, Alpert cannot expect his views to be understood across the board. What to him is an empowered playfulness is to others the indoctrination of 'rejuvenalization': as Roger Kimball, conservative art critic and social commentator, declares, "What Leary offered was not greater intelligence, feeling, and sophistication, but a permanent holiday from those virtues for the sake of a delusion as toxic as it is widely embraced."¹⁰²

This 'toxic delusion,' presumably the expectation that freed thought automatically equaled independence, was evidenced on Haight-Ashbury Avenue in San Francisco in the late Sixties. Here George Harrison of the Beatles encountered "hideous, spotty little teenagers" begging for money. "I

⁹⁵ *How to Operate your Brain*, video montage

⁹⁶ *Politics of Ecstasy*, p.207

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.15-16

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.38

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.290

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p.132

¹⁰¹ Gilmor, *Timothy Leary*, n.p.

¹⁰² Kimball, *The Project of Rejuvenalization*, n.p.

don't mind anybody dropping out of anything,” Harrison said, but “The moment you start beggin' off somebody else to help you, then it's no good.”¹⁰³ Valiunas, another critic, states that the other visible characteristics of the Sixties – stereotypically, tie-dye, the lava lamp, and the film *Easy Rider* – were merely diversions for the “hopelessly stoned” and the “permanently lost.”¹⁰⁴ Of course, this generalization makes *invisible* the social reforms, peace protests and the artistic, musical, and sexual revolutions.

Such patterns of bias are easy enough to discern. Can they perhaps be attributed to 'those who had not had the experience and shuddered at the possibility?' Roger Kimball seems to be an extremely conservative example of the latter. He quotes the philosopher Harvey Mansfield – himself also rather conservative – saying that “Man is an animal that naturally lives by conventions, so denying his conventions is denying his nature.”¹⁰⁵ This argument sees the transcendence of one's “nature” – thinking for oneself, instead of following the automated conventions of a society – as a form of self-denial. It seems paradoxical, especially for us, the descendants of the Age of Enlightenment. But if we turn it around, it seems this 'self-denial' is itself the naturalized thought of those who have *themselves* not transcended convention. If we follow Leary's convictions, the turned-on man becomes one with his own nature, his Godliness; nature, or conventions, are thus rewritten by the individuals themselves, just as they are otherwise written by the social environment. Mansfield and Kimball have therefore confused *uncommon* with *unnatural*. That which is natural to one seems to be a constructed convention to another. In Leary's view, for example, psychedelics confronted one with that which *is* natural within oneself: the ability to create conventions.

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Who can overcome their programming, society's conventions? In multiple tests, it was found that LSD helps overcome negative patterns (self-abusive programs) in alcoholics, neurotics, criminals, disturbed adolescents, childhood schizophrenics, autistic children, and pain in terminal cancer patients.¹⁰⁶ Apart from those in dire need, those who take psychedelics – and are most likely to experience altered thought – are the “young, the racially and nationally alienated, and the creative.” They are the opposite of the “whiskey-drinking menopausal,” opposite also, says Leary, because they do not pass laws against or imprison others.¹⁰⁷ Leary himself made the jump from the one side to the other, announcing his change in front of an audience of psychedelicists, academics, and police: “I'm going to take my own advice. I'm dropping out of the university and educational setup. I'm breaking the habit – the addiction to the system.” At the same time, he announced the coining of the term “internal freedom.”¹⁰⁸

Who can't get it done? According to Ruthofer, Timothy Leary, Allen Ginsberg, Ken Kesey, and others who wanted to “turn on the whole world” were blind to the different experiences of intellectuals like Aldous Huxley, who tried to “systematically cultivate states of 'abnormal' consciousness,” and the run-of-the-mill teenager who didn't know what to expect at all. Later, in the Eighties, Leary recognized the limits of the psychedelic application and his own naivety.¹⁰⁹ In any case, until one tried for oneself, one couldn't succeed. To Leary, this is evidenced in the fact that, “if you talk to a mortician, you'll come

¹⁰³ Cave, *The Hippie Takeover*, n.p.

¹⁰⁴ Valiunas, *Bad Trip*, n.p.

¹⁰⁵ Kimball, *The Project of Rejuvenalization*, n.p.

¹⁰⁶ *Politics of Ecstasy*, p.67

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p.76-77

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p.206

¹⁰⁹ Ruthofer, p.30, 38

to the conclusion that everyone who is of any importance is dead. If you talk to a law-enforcement officer, you'll find that practically everyone is a criminal, actual or potential. And if you talk to a psychiatrist, you'll hear nothing but gloomy lexicons of psychopathology.”¹¹⁰ The average American, who watched five hours of TV per day, had their reality created, managed, and scheduled by others.¹¹¹ No self-thought there. Apart from this passive control in American living rooms, social institutions were actively weeding out difference. President Nixon's narcotics police for example, a “special police force to counter dissent,” were in fact “thought-police” who tried to silence freethinkers, including Leary – with a great amount of success.¹¹²

Leary doesn't hide his contempt for institutional ignorance. Psychiatrists, he writes, don't think for themselves: “they can't see past psychopathology and prejudices.”¹¹³ Still, institutions are needed to safeguard the freedom of psychedelics. Leary often spoke of the need for new legislation: as with the introduction of automobiles at the beginning of the century, great changes were coming. Psychedelics users would need licensing, training, demonstration of proficiency, etc.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, a new group of professionals would be trained, with the “patience of a first-grade teacher, the humility and wisdom of a Hindu guru, the loving dedication of a minister-priest, the sensitivity of a poet, and the imagination of a science fiction writer.”¹¹⁵

One of the bizarre stories about Leary, a prison tale, tells of his temporary residence next to Charles Manson. Ironically, Manson had been waiting for years to be able to ask Leary a question that disturbed him. As he told Leary, upon his release from prison in the Sixties, before his murder conviction, he encountered “millions of kids, just waiting to be told what to do. And you [Leary] didn't tell them what to do. That's what I never could figure out about you man. You showed everyone how to create a new head and then you wouldn't give them the new head. Why didn't you?” He believed that Leary's big mistake was not to recognize that “nobody wants responsibility.”¹¹⁶ Leary, who knew that Manson had spent most of his life in prison and had a fanatical interest in the Biblical apocalypse, *did* recognize that Manson was “the totally institutionalized man.”¹¹⁷ Even though he had started his own LSD-inspired Family, he was unable to use psychedelics to overcome the fear and hate which had formed his life through prison.

In the search for honest, self-generated thought, Leary prudently recognized that one must let others think as they would as well. To not impose your divinity, or “give a new head” to others. Indeed, as Leary recognizes, “who are you to say what's real” for others?¹¹⁸ There are many realities. This may be “troubling to most,”¹¹⁹ as the similarity of our programming, by maintaining one reality, or one truth, prevents self-thought in the first place. As we have seen, this was the unintended result of the Enlightenment just as it was with organized religion. Since the Sixties, however, learning to create your own sense of reality in ecstasy, or expanded consciousness, is the most powerful thing an individual can do.

¹¹⁰ Politics of Ecstasy, p.123

¹¹¹ Neuropolitics, p.7

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p.31

¹¹³ Politics of Ecstasy, p.51

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.59

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.72

¹¹⁶ Neuropolitics, p.69

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.68

¹¹⁸ Politics of Ecstasy, p.180

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.196

Learning to Share – Sharing to Learn

While LSD can liberate thought patterns, there are limitations, Leary says. Namely, *after* tripping, one may get drawn back into the programmed game, where “everyone has their own favorite state of consciousness.”¹²⁰ Many will criticize and condemn those who have returned and no longer follow their game rules, whether it be for the clothes that they wear or the beliefs that they hold: “spiritual bandits,” “soul fuckers,” and others will attempt a “Black magic reality take-over.”¹²¹ For this reason, Leary stresses that a communal or mutual respect for freethinking is imperative; to share one's self-thought with others unconditionally.

When freedom of thought, not just as principle but as social praxis, becomes a mass movement, the question comes – is it still thinking for yourself? In the traditional, Enlightenment sense, thinking for yourself is already shown to be limited, if not a delusion. But in the sense of divine thought, in the transcendence of ego,¹²² the very concept is transformed; to Leary, thinking for yourself by yourself is self-deceptive, isolating, stagnant, and defensive. At this point, Kant's 'Dare to Know' means there can be no more secrets;¹²³ free-thinkers should dare for *others* to know what they know, sharing their thought. “Yes, the courage to know, it's frightening,” says Leary, but in the uncharted margins, where chaos rules and there are no well-worn programs, learning from those who have gone before is crucial. And courage isn't taught – it comes from within. Leary, like his Enlightenment forbears, can't make anybody think for themselves. He can only invite his readers to “Take LSD and see.”¹²⁴

According to Leary, the freed, individual mind can still be trapped in a game. “A group liberation cult is required,” with a careful selection of friends, to keep updating the game rules. Every interaction with another person is a confrontation on many levels of consciousness; the people around you, and the artifacts in your environment, become external representations of your own state of consciousness.¹²⁵ By this logic, the recording of Enlightenment mantra's in history books makes traditional, intellectual Enlightenment an external game, printed in, and largely limited to, the books themselves.

“Look within – and you have to look within with other people,” Leary writes. “Religion is a team sport. Divinity is a team sport. It's got to be done eye to eye and soul to soul. Divinity requires that you think for yourself – make that selves, always with other people.”¹²⁶ In a circle of the smartest, most open-minded, well-informed people, where nobody imposes their divinity, there is a greater amount of new information coming in. Here the individual, living in a “reality bubble,”¹²⁷ must overcome the secrecy of mental isolation; secrecy, Leary says, is the original sin, and “communication fusion” is the goal of life.¹²⁸ Speaking in terms of evolution, sharing new and/or better thought means getting ahead; reaping the benefits of others' tested mutations. And unless one follows this path of sharing with similar minded people, freethinking can lead to “breakdown, confusion, prima-donna individualism, disorganized eccentricity, sincere knavery, and retreat to conformity.”¹²⁹

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.285

¹²¹ *Neuropolitics*, p.65,67

¹²² Where ego may be considered as a fraction of the 1% of usual consciousness

¹²³ *Politics of Ecstasy*, p.298

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.86

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.291-292

¹²⁶ Leary, *Still Crazy After All These Years*, interview with Bill Moseley

¹²⁷ *Neuropolitics*, p.52

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.36

¹²⁹ *Politics of Ecstasy*, p.152

Still, the idea is not to lose oneself in the “corny hippie”¹³⁰ mantra that all-is-one. The commitment of one's ego to the social game cannot be eliminated; all we can do is center our ego consciousness, and see it in proper relationship to the other 'I's' – as God amongst Gods.¹³¹ Group interaction then is a method of learning through feedback. The lesson of LSD, from contacting your own cells, says Leary, is that every generation reenacts the whole evolutionary drama;¹³² each actor plays a living, mythic role in your life, and the solutions to the drama are there in the interaction. For instance, if you want to be a good psychologist, studying the textbooks isn't going to get you there; learn by “getting right into the reality,” sharing the world of the mental hospital.¹³³ Again, engaging in secular activities with ecstatic consciousness to play the God game, together.

The medium, Leary writes, “is the evolutionary message.” When you change the medium, you change yourself and your society. Whether it be shared experience, psychedelics, or electronics, the direct and egalitarian involvement of participants brings freedom and stimulation for thought. Even in the “technological system of totalitarian mind control,” where secrecy and unanimity are the word, just one free person can jam the system by sharing with others.¹³⁴ By way of example, as an imprisoned but productive Leary himself claims, he is “the freest man in America today.”¹³⁵

Psychedelics, says Leary, are key to the sharing of intelligence. Open collaboration, with words and drugs, allows the message to be experienced, felt, and known, instead of just grasped intellectually.¹³⁶ As an ecstatic scientist, Leary was both detached and involved, sharing his experience and knowledge at the same time. The means and message of enlightenment – in the Sixties as centuries before – originated in the universities, elites, and artists; but Leary broke the rules, sharing the experience directly with the world.

A New Language

To Leary, philosophy and psychology in the twentieth century were all about linguistics. It was discovered that people are stuck in language: “We are prisoners of the cognitive continuity of history – concepts and intellectual strategies. And the stuff of it is words.”¹³⁷ The Enlightenment, liberating as it may have been, also contributed to this prison. Thus, Leary said, we need to free our nervous system from the simplicity of words, or we will stay controlled by them; and LSD is the key. Leary wanted to create a new language – i.e., a new way of thinking – that could not be controlled by those who impose the status quo through their linear thinking and linear language.

In the Metaprogramming phase, LSD and other psychedelics allow you to unhook and regroup your symbol systems.¹³⁸ Where language informs and limits our normal understanding of reality, a transcendent consciousness can oversee the effects of its own linguistic programming; in this sense, Leary considered himself a rationalist, a *real* realist, because he believed that it is man's challenge to

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.285

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p.31-32

¹³² *Ibid.*, p.162

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p.202

¹³⁴ *Neuropolitics*, p.43,45

¹³⁵ *Politics of Ecstasy*, p.129

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.54, 43

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.57

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.170

develop new languages for new levels of consciousness.¹³⁹ Through the continuing attempt to communicate the ineffable, a more harmonious message is communicated.¹⁴⁰ Communicating *is* sharing; a better language not only undoes the destructive programs of the old, but enables creativity, openness, and flexibility.

Contemporary scholarship, as evidenced by postmodernist philosophy, is focused on words – words are reality, and all there is is text. Therefore, we might deduce that the Enlightenment itself has been reduced to text. But to stay in language is to stay programmed; readers of books promising Enlightenment, intellectual or spiritual, are merely allowing alternate, authoritative programs to enter their brains. They are not themselves the authors. Thus in Metaprogramming, which seems to be a radical departure from standard methods of learning, you become the program; you become the words. Truth, meaning, and one's experience thereof can be self-determined.

Many mystics appear 'crazy' because their language and language use is disengaged from the general norm – like a shipwrecked sailor who hasn't communicated after months at sea. Leary's own language use, in *The Politics of Ecstasy* and elsewhere, is alternately direct, ecstatic, scientific, poetic, and paranoid. Kimball says this oscillation is peculiar and inconsistent,¹⁴¹ as if the authority of science should not be compromised by ecstasy. Leary lamented this prejudice after being fired from Harvard: “The term 'science,' he wrote, “has apparently become a sacred term forbidden to innovating theorists and methodologists.”¹⁴² He was trying to create a systematic language where there was none; there is simply no Western language variant for describing states of awareness, a situation which has sustained a state of “medieval ignorance and superstition.”¹⁴³ To Ruthofer, those who think exclusively in the normal, linear mode cannot understand Leary – and so they cannot control him, or predict his thought or action. If Leary achieved any goal by mixing ecstatic and scientific language then it was to be uncontrollable – free from the dogma's of both enlightened science and organized religion.¹⁴⁴

The hard sciences – physics and chemistry – had developed a highly efficient language well before man developed an understanding and control of his own sense organs and neurological conditioning; and as a result, these sciences operate mechanically, blindly, and irrationally in the study of consciousness. Leary said he did not care if his hypotheses were confirmed; they were merely the product of a freed imagination. He did care, however, that scientists – and critics like Kimball – “abandon their superstitions and their moralistic language.”¹⁴⁵ The only sure way to do this, he believed, is for scientists to use psychedelics to alter their consciousness themselves.¹⁴⁶

Human intelligence is partly a factor of receiving, remembering, and transmitting information by means of symbols and artifacts.¹⁴⁷ But, while the intellectual is “so hung up on the disease of words

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.166

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.117. Leary defines the ineffable as “the direct awareness of the energy processes that science measures.” *Ibid.*, p.20. Direct awareness precludes interpretation, as one is consciously that which is 'inter,' or in between, reality and self. Communication however does require interpretation, and Leary's support for LSD and personal religious experience hints at the responsibility of finding one's own 'harmonious message'. In Leary's case, that message is told mostly in scientific terms.

¹⁴¹ Kimball, *The Project of Rejuvenalization*, n.p.

¹⁴² *Politics of Ecstasy*, p.70

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.42

¹⁴⁴ Ruthofer, p.142

¹⁴⁵ *Politics of Ecstasy*, p.280

¹⁴⁶ *Neuropolitics*, p.85

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p.140

that nothing exists unless he writes it down,”¹⁴⁸ Leary points to the *experience* of what is symbolized, and, vice versa, to symbolize what is experienced.¹⁴⁹ Creating a language where there is none is an intelligent, creative process. The problem with the conventional understanding of language is that – unless people have learned to use their nervous systems before they learn human language, or take LSD to unlearn it – they will be “addicted to, and limited by, the artifacts of symbols.”¹⁵⁰

To Leary, the eye-opening revelations of psychedelics took language off of its pedestal. From this cynical perspective, anything anybody says is revealed to be words used to delude themselves – a self-induced brainwashing, whether through science, philosophy, conversation, fantasy, or otherwise. De-, re-, and Metaprogramming however give the freedom to determine which delusions to accept, as any and all incoming words and communications can be filtered according to one's self-imposed or constructed standards. In this way, it seems, science, a language of control over physical reality and the mind, is taken to new heights of personal power.

Body Wisdom

While LSD is the key to consciousness, the body is the lock. How can one expect to be a self-operated, self-operating machine whilst unconscious of 99% of one's body and brain? This is what Leary means by freeing the nervous system; getting in touch with the biochemical wisdom of the body. “In order to do anything new,” he writes, “you have to change your nervous system biochemically.”¹⁵¹ The aim is to “turn on not just the mind, but the senses,”¹⁵² as psychedelics trigger a sudden confrontation with your own body – on the cellular, DNA level.

In *Neuropolitics*, Leary writes that the human infant “is cellularly prepared to learn any language, master any art or science, play any sex-role,” but that it is imprinted to mimic the narrow patterns of “hive parochiality.” In so doing, our forefathers have kept the species growing, “but they lost the endowment of free choice and change.”¹⁵³ It may be an overstatement, but the repetitive nature of most of our behavior and the scarcity of genius speaks for itself.

New chemicals, when introduced to the nervous system, cause changes; and any change in the individual can lead to mutational change in the species.¹⁵⁴ However, since anything which changes consciousness is also a threat to the established order,¹⁵⁵ we are left less conscious through the prohibition of psychedelics. As Leary ominously writes, “He who controls the mind-changing chemicals controls consciousness.”¹⁵⁶

The most basic aspect of the psychedelic experience, says Leary, is the sudden centering of consciousness on the sense organs, “the real-eye-zation that this is it! I am eye! I am hear! I knose! I am in contact!”¹⁵⁷ You leave the conditioned mind and enter into harmony with the body; the search for real, unconditioned thought is not just for better words, or better logic, but a control of the senses.

¹⁴⁸ Politics of Ecstasy, p.246

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.243

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.169

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.241

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p.240

¹⁵³ *Neuropolitics*, p.110

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.* p.159

¹⁵⁵ Politics of Ecstasy, p.277

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.275

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.30

“What is within is without,” Leary writes; “in the East, systematic disciplined awareness of body function is the best sacramental method. One cannot understand the rhythms and meanings of the outer world until one has mastered the dialects of the body.”¹⁵⁸ It is hard to accept that the key to independence might be an organic molecule, and not a new word or myth;¹⁵⁹ but all psychological problems, Leary believed, are basically neuro-chemical.¹⁶⁰

Martin Mayer, writing for *Esquire* in 1963, charges that Leary's argument is that “man can become truly free only by handing over his cortex to a drug company.”¹⁶¹ However extreme this Faustian bargain may seem, Leary was convinced that it is unavoidable for the modern individual. “We are all neurogenetic robots. There is no escape until we recognize this.”¹⁶² Brainwashing is a relatively simple mechanical process which we are subjected to everyday in the simplest, most benign settings; it takes “delicate neurological engineering to remain oneself” in the flood of outside influences.¹⁶³ The only hope, according to Leary, is to learn which psychedelics engage consciousness as desired, and to subsequently start choosing your own imprints.

In the future, Leary wrote, “There's no doubt that chemicals will be the central method of education.” LSD is only the first of many to increase learning, consciousness and memory.¹⁶⁴ For those who are adult and already programmed, chemicals are probably the only means left; however, in a few generations, Leary predicted, psychedelics will have run their course and they will no longer be needed.¹⁶⁵ Needless to say, government legislation prevented this prediction from coming true. As it stands, psychiatry, which is heavily reliant on psycho-chemicals, stays well clear of psychedelics, and education is still mostly a matter of textual inculcation.

The primary assumption of Leary's theory is that consciousness is based in biology. This is a materialistic assumption, clearly traceable to the metaphysics of classical science.¹⁶⁶ Christopher Partridge, in a study of the psychedelic Counterculture across the twentieth century, finds that it constituted a challenge to the disenchanting world that materialism, rationalism and science brought about. Ironically then, the psychedelic 'sacralization' of our materialistic world is thus itself rooted in the materialistic philosophy of science and the Enlightenment.¹⁶⁷ However, this sacralization, or re-enchantment of the world, does not seem to be a *revolution*, or *return* to pre-scientific ways, but an *evolution* of the scientific world-view towards 'higher', ecstatic consciousness.

Results of the Psychedelic Enlightenment

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.27

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.47

¹⁶⁰ Flashbacks, p.50

¹⁶¹ Politics of Ecstasy, p.61

¹⁶² Neuropolitics, p.49

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.51

¹⁶⁴ Politics of Ecstasy, p.200-201

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.205

¹⁶⁶ Leary is a materialist and not a mystic. For the traditional mystic, consciousness is not based in the body, or in the mind; it is not thought. As St. Francis of Assisi summed up, consciousness is that which *watches* thought: 'What we are looking for' he said, 'is what is looking.' Expanding consciousness, like meditation, therefore expands awareness of how and what you think. I would venture to say that for freethinking, it is only the first step, which mystics have taken for centuries. Metaprogramming, created by modern empirical science, is the next step.

¹⁶⁷ See Partridge, Christopher H., *The Re-enchantment Of The West: Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture, and Occulture*, 2005

According to Richard Alpert, the change in perception of reality that Leary brought is the “coming into social consciousness of Einstein's relativity.” Everyone's reality is relative to their own nervous system and its contents. However, in his opinion, society still has no idea what this has done; in other words, society is still not ready to think for themselves on a whole.¹⁶⁸

This general ignorance is reflected in the continuing dismissal of Leary's work in mainstream media. For instance, in a *Time* magazine article entitled “*Was Timothy Leary Right?*”, journalist John Cloud answers “No” without supporting his argument.¹⁶⁹ Contemporary science is starting to pick up psychedelic research where Leary and others left off, but according to Cloud, Leary's interpretations were simply wrong. Robert Anton Wilson, a philosopher, psychologist, author, and Leary's friend, disagrees:

“A lot of psychologists I've known over the years agreed with Leary - they acknowledged in private that LSD was an incredibly valuable tool. But these same psychologists backed off as the heat from the government increased, until they all became as silent as moonlight on a tombstone. And Tim was still out there with his angry Irish temper, denouncing the government and fighting on alone. I don't want to discount that there are people whose lives have been destroyed by drugs, but are they the results of Timothy Leary's research or the result of government policies? Leary's research was closed down, and the media stopped quoting him a long time ago. Most people don't even understand what Leary's opinions were or what it was he was trying to communicate. By contrast, the government's policies have been carried out for 30 years, and now we have a major drug disaster in this country. Nobody, of course, thinks it's the government's fault - they think it's Leary's for trying to prevent it, for trying to have scientific controls over the thing. He deserves a better legacy than that.”¹⁷⁰

Leary's role in the development of psychology reflects a new social pattern. In an interview with Bill Moseley he explains; “At the present time, if you look in the Yellow Pages, there will be eight pages of self-help stuff. There's hardly one orifice of the body, hardly any kind of disease or relationship to someone with a disease where you don't get together and talk about it as individual human beings, thinking self-reliantly instead of counting on some doctor to tell you what to do. The success of this psychological revolution is staggering.”¹⁷¹

With the Sixties gone, along with its LSD-hysteria, the psychedelic community has found a niche on the internet. While prohibitions are still in place, information is being shared between young people to learn how to intelligently use brain-change drugs like LSD for personal enlightenment. According to Leary, this increase in popularity of psychedelic drugs, especially LSD, is closely linked to the fact that we are living in a world where everything is changing faster and faster.¹⁷² In this unstable situation, Leary says, society can't take care of itself, and so “It's up to us to provide the vision.”¹⁷³ The moral temper of the Sixties, it seems, has continued, with modern artists and thinkers of the counterculture sharing the aims of individual freedom and ecstasy. As with the jumps from divine revelation to pure reason to psychedelics in the Sixties, the technologies of Enlightenment have changed.

Discussion: Counterculture vs. Enlightenment

¹⁶⁸ Leary, *The LSD Crisis* (Documentary)

¹⁶⁹ Cloud, *Was Timothy Leary Right?* n.p.

¹⁷⁰ Gilmor, *Timothy Leary*, n.p.

¹⁷¹ Leary, *Still Crazy After All These Years*, interview with Bill Moseley

¹⁷² Ruthofer, p.100

¹⁷³ Neuropolitics, p.116

What is the significance of the Counterculture rebelling against the conformist, disenchanted world created in the wake of the Enlightenment? What does it mean that Leary embodied the same attitude and slogans which the Enlightenment first had in its fight against religious dogma?

Immanuel Kant and his colleagues asked questions about their dominant reality, challenging dogmas in society and culture, politics and religion. They sought to increase freedom through reason, democracy, and freedom of thought. However, by the 1960s, a new movement, asking similar questions about the reality they lived in, rebelled; this time, against the society and culture that the Enlightenment had helped establish. We may surmise that, at least from the perspective of the hippies and other Counterculture stereotypes, the first Enlightenment was a failure. It was a thing of the past, and had become a dogma of its own.

As Leary and others have said, *everything* brainwashes a person's mind; be it commercials, torture, education, or the instilling of Enlightenment ideals.¹⁷⁴ Exposure to dominant habits streamlines reality through conformity, both physically and intellectually. People repeat the words and use them in a way that has been taught since youth, but the impact, the personal meaning, dissipates over time. This is where, historically, Leary stepped up to reinvigorate the message of that first Enlightenment.

We may also see the Counterculture-Enlightenment link as an internal struggle in the Enlightenment project. Leary wrote *The Politics of Ecstasy* in 1970, having finally decided that the established routes of power – representative democracy, with all its vested interests – had to be breached for the psychedelic movement to grow. He even got the Beatles to write a song for his election campaign - “Come Together.” However, Leary was put in prison before the campaign could get going, convicted of a minor offense and put away for a much longer term than usual for that particular crime – the possession of a marijuana cigarette. Receiving thirty-seven instead of the usual two years, the judge held one of his books up high and told him “your ideas are dangerous.”¹⁷⁵

This statement is a direct clue to the relationship between the two enlightenments. The first set up a political and cultural force, a new power structure liberated from religious authority; however, it was ultimately unable to maintain or extend this freedom down the line, especially for the individual. Dissent – which is what the Enlightenment was to the powers of its time – was deliberately nixed in the Sixties; freethinking was delimited by the criminalization of psychedelics and by the imprisonment of one of the most important, if flawed, spokesmen of the Counterculture movement. Leary's imprisonment at the exact moment of entering politics – which was a challenge to the established order of the day, on its own terms – seems to reveal a level of corruption in the democratic system.

Historians may argue over the veracity and extent of these conclusions, but familiarization with Leary's work shows clearly that it is a threat to those who do *not* think for themselves, and who cannot let others do so either for fear of losing what they have helped construct. This is not to say that Leary was right, that psychedelics were truly the miracle cure of enlightenment. Indeed, his emphasis on LSD as a reliable brain-changing tool may have been too narrow. For instance, not all partakers enjoyed the same benefits that he did, and there are myriad other methods to explore. Still, LSD provided a new way of relating to truth, and can be seen as constituting a path to personal growth. Following Leary's appreciation for McLuhan, we may picture LSD as a form of media, an extension of the self. As Leary states in an interview in Folsom prison, “Drugs are the fuels of the instrument, just like tractors and jet engines extend our muscles and our legs and that sort of thing. If you want to study the nervous system, drugs are the...*one of the* major tools.” However, especially for someone who has taken LSD hundreds

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.58

¹⁷⁵ Timothy Leary, interviewed in *At Folsom Prison with Dr. Timothy Leary*, 1975

of times, 'the medium is the message'; it takes the place of and *becomes* reality. As such, it is not only a connection to a higher, freer part of ourselves, it is also a wall against alternatives; Leary's overemphasis, which comes across as dogma, is another limit to the endeavor of freethinking.

At the same time, since we are all robotic to some degree, each wall, limit, or belief is another opportunity for transcendence. Only the 'hard-wired' robots – one's that can't change their programming – are thus actually limited. Returning to the discussion of enlightenment, this inherent dogmatism in human society is a challenge which cannot be solved indefinitely. For all their contributions, Kant and the other thinkers of the Enlightenment could not have known their effect on the average mind in the twentieth century. Furthermore, enlightenment couldn't be shared and communicated except through a top-down structure, a structure which itself remained intact. They couldn't reach the youth the way psychedelics could. So while promoting free thought, the Enlightenment simultaneously restricted it.

Reality, it seems, never *really* makes sense, even if the scientific or the religious mind convince us otherwise; but our attempts at *making* sense, by thinking creatively, do evolve. The first Enlightenment attacked religious nonsense. And the psychedelic enlightenment attacked the first Enlightenment's nonsense. This, it seems, is the basic truth of revolution; the transition from one authority to another. Was the first Enlightenment greater, and freer than what came before? And is psychedelic enlightenment greater than that? The new breed of freethinkers, basing themselves in love, nature, peace, science, and spirituality, have yet to achieve the widespread change that Leary was talking about. But Leary's theory of thinking for yourself – not just intellectually, and certainly not only with reason; but as your own divinity – seems to have realized at last the demands that Kant made: the need for full responsibility and maturity towards reality and truth.

As evidenced by the uncompromising crack-down on the psychedelic movement, however, people's beliefs still deny those of others. Surmounting beliefs with the help of a chemical is a modern scientific process which Leary, as an ecstatic psychologist, only helped introduce to the twentieth century and beyond.

Conclusion

The main moral in Leary's work is that humans are living out the daily grind by following coded programs imposed on their minds by genetics, society, culture, language, etcetera. A simple analogy, where we compare the mind to the house in which we live, may serve to explain. Most of us live in man-made houses; more importantly, houses made by men other than ourselves. Moving into a new house will not change this. In this analogy, Leary's claim is that through LSD one may gain authority as contractor, architect, and builder of one's own house. Therefore, the only way for a mind to *truly* break free is to have an ecstatic experience. For this reason, Leary was an LSD pusher; it was a solution which worked for him. However, it is clear that not everybody was ready to be enlightened in this way.

According to Leary, the emergence of neurology, psycho-pharmacology, and humanistic psychologies in the Sixties empowered the modern trend of self-discovery – the search for enlightenment in its modern amalgam of East and West, science and spirit.¹⁷⁶ It was a “revolution,” in the words of a 1966 *Playboy* article, “spawned not by an idea but by a substance.”¹⁷⁷ If so, then Leary and his chemical were the right thing for the right time. The convergence of modern science and

¹⁷⁶ Neuropolitics. p.141

¹⁷⁷ Politics of Ecstasy, p.99

religious ecstasy was a twentieth century contribution to the Enlightenment, and, if we are to believe Leary, a major step beyond its limits. Psychologist, prophet, and controversial character, Leary dared people to think for themselves – not by challenging authority on the outside, but by becoming the authority of their own physical and mental selves.

However, this is a delicate issue in certain academic circles, and even though drugs are at the heart of the issue, they are rarely discussed; associating psychedelics with freedom is too suspect. Since psychedelics are said to be 'irrational' and dangerous, this is an easy bias to fall into. However, falling into dogmas and biases is a basic human prerogative, even after the Age of Enlightenment. We occasionally encode new programs, such as the Enlightenment, which then lose value over time. According to Leary, the only way to assuage this tendency is to perpetually renew and enlighten ourselves with psychedelics. From an open, psychedelic perspective then, the Enlightenment is a process, not a fixed moment in the past: a process where the mainstream, by its very virtue of being *mainstream*, helps define what it means to 'Think for Yourself' and to 'Dare to Know.'

What does the Enlightenment mean in twentieth century culture? What does Dare to Know mean? Growing up – Kant's maturation of the free individual – is to Leary a process of coming to know one's body, one's relationships, one's programs, and one's divinity. It is political, religious, scientific, and linguistic. This modern Western form of Enlightenment therefore removes the disenchanting dichotomies from our language and self-knowledge: it is not just reason and science, nor religion and revelation, but an encounter with the full spectrum of 'who we are.'

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