

From Hip To Hippie

BEFORE THE DELUGE

The initial breeding ground for the large-scale use of psychedelics was the social and artistic fringe areas associated with the beat phenomenon. For some years prior to the emergence of LSD as a street drug, the number of people whose lives were influenced by psychedelics had been slowly building to a critical mass, until they became visible on both coasts as distinct communities. The most significant expression of the new psychedelic lifestyle was centered in the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco. It was in the Haight that the cultural rebellion fueled by LSD happened so vividly and with such intensity that it attracted worldwide attention.

Situated on the periphery of Golden Gate Park, this quiet, multi-racial, and somewhat run-down neighborhood first became a haven for nonconformists in the early 1960s, when tourists, gangster elements, thrill seekers, and narcs squeezed the life out of the hip scene in North Beach. A good number of beatnik refugees migrated across town to the Haight, where ramshackle Victorians were available at low rent. The next few years were a gestation period in which Haight-Ashbury continued to evolve as a gathering point for the creatively alienated. Increasing numbers of Berkeley radicals, fed up with academia, joined the artists, musicians, and bearded habitués who were probing eccentricity and other forms of dissent.

By 1965, Haight-Ashbury was a vibrant neoboheemian enclave, a community on the cusp of a major transition. A small psychedelic city-state was taking shape, and those who inhabited the open urban space within its invisible borders adhered to a set of laws and rhythms completely different from the nine-to-five routine that governed straight society. More than anything the Haight was a unique state of mind, an arena of exploration and celebration. The new hipsters had cast aside the syndrome of alienation and despair that saddled

many of their beatnik forebears. The accent shifted from solitude to communion, from the individual to the interpersonal. The new sensibility was particularly evident in musical preferences. The sound of the in-crowd was no longer folk or jazz but the bouncing rhythms of rock and roll that could incite an audience to boogie in unison almost as a single organism.

Music happenings were a cornerstone of the cultural revival in the Haight, providing a locus around which a new community consciousness coalesced. One of the early energy-movers in the local rock scene was Chet Helms. A couple of years earlier, Helms had forsaken a future as a Baptist minister and hitchhiked from Texas with a young blues singer named Janis Joplin. Together these two rolling stones traveled the asphalt networks of America in search of kindred spirits until they settled in the Haight. Joplin fell in with other musicians, joining what would later become Big Brother and the Holding Company, and Helms formed the Family Dog, an organization dedicated to what was then the rather novel proposition that people should be encouraged to dance at rock concerts.

On October 16, 1965, the Family Dog held its first rock extravaganza at the Longshoreman's Hall, a dome-shaped union headquarters near Fisherman's Wharf. Dubbed "A Tribute to Dr. Strange," the evening featured the city's premier psychedelic rock band, the Jefferson Airplane, and a handful of other local acts. A large crowd turned out for this inaugural event, including quite a few political radicals who participated in the Berkeley Vietnam Day rally earlier the same day. Everyone was decked out in weird costumes. There were even a few Hell's Angels in attendance, and they joined the snake-dance weaving circles and figure eights through the hall.

The Family Dog dance was a huge success, and soon these concerts became a staple of the hip community. Each weekend people converged at auditoriums such as the Avalon Ballroom for all-night festivals that combined the seemingly incongruous elements of spirituality and debauch. Thoroughly stoned on grass and acid and each other, they rediscovered the crushing joy of the dance, pouring it all out in a frenzy that frequently bordered on the religious. When rock music was performed with all its potential fury, a special kind of delirium took hold. Attending such performances amounted to a total assault on the senses: the electric sound washed in visceral waves over the dancers, unleashing intense psychic energies and

driving the audience further and further toward public trance. Flashing strobes, light shows, body paint, outrageous getups—it was mass environmental theater, an oblivion of limbs and minds in motion. For a brief moment outside of time these young people lived out the implications of André Breton's surrealist invocation: "Beauty will be CONVULSIVE or will not be at all."

No affair in the Haight better illustrated how far these rock events had strayed from conventional entertainment than the Trips Festival staged by Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters in January 1966. "The general tone of things," Kesey advertised, "has moved on from the self-conscious happenings to a more jubilant occasion where the audience participates because it's more fun to do so than not. Audience dancing is an assumed part of all the shows, and the audience is invited to wear ecstatic dress and to bring their own gadgets [A.C. outlets will be provided]." This was a wide-open three-day LSD party with just about every sight and sound imaginable: mime exhibitions, guerrilla theater, a "Congress of Wonders," and live mikes and sound equipment for anyone to play with. Closed-circuit television cameras were set up on the dance floor so people could watch themselves shake and swing. Music blasted at ear-splitting volumes while Day-Glo bodies bounced gleefully on trampolines. At one point Kesey flashed from a projector, "Anyone who knows he is God please go up on stage."

Jerry ("Captain Trips") Garcia, the lead guitarist of the Grateful Dead,* one of the bands that performed at the Trips Festival, tried to put his finger on what made those early events so special:

What the Kesey thing was depended on who you were when you were there. It was open, a tapestry, a mandala—it was whatever you made it. . . . When it was moving right, you could dig that there was something that it was getting toward, something like ordered chaos, or some region of chaos. . . . Everybody would be high and flashing and going through insane changes during which everything would be *demolished*, man, and spilled and broken and affected, and after that, another thing would happen, maybe smoothing out the chaos, then another. . . . Thousands of people, man, all helplessly stoned, all finding themselves in a room of

*The first member of the Grateful Dead to turn on to LSD was Robert Hunter, the Dead lyricist, who participated in a government-sponsored drug study at Stanford University during the early 1960s. Hunter later recommended the experience to the other band members.

thousands of people, none of whom any of them were afraid of. It was magic, far-out beautiful magic.

The Trips Festival was a shot of adrenalin for the entire hip scene in the Haight. The head population began to realize its growing strength in numbers. Scores of local bands were forming, their names indicative of their psychedelic orientation: Blue Cheer, Clear Light, Daily Flash, the Loading Zone, Morning Glory, Celestial Hysteria, Ball Point Banana, Flamin' Groovies, the Electric Flag, the Weeds.... There was even a band called the CIA (Citizens for Interplanetary Activities). Some of the groups—notably the Jefferson Airplane, Big Brother and the Holding Company, Quicksilver Messenger Service, Country Joe and the Fish, and, of course, the Grateful Dead—established themselves as first-rate performers. Their music was rooted in folk and blues, but the rhythms mutated under the influence of LSD and the raw power of electricity. Acid rock, as the San Francisco sound was called, was unique not only as a genre but also as praxis. The musicians viewed themselves first and foremost as community artists, and they often played outdoors for free as a tribute to their constituency. Even when there was a cover charge, Chet Helms and the Family Dog usually waived it for friends and neighbors. People revered Helms for this, but because of his generosity he frequently lost money and could not always pay the bands.

It was only later, when acid rock went national in the summer of 1967, that the scene began to change. Whether it was the profit motive or just that the euphoric spirit of the early days was becoming harder to sustain, some of the originals felt that things were going sour. An up-and-coming rock promoter named Bill Graham was holding shows at the Fillmore auditorium and handling the biggest acts. Unlike Chet Helms, who ran his dance shows more like a church, Graham was in it strictly for the bucks. Although he refused to turn on, he was tuned in enough to see that light shows and acid rock could have mass appeal. Before long, high-powered record execs were knocking at his door.

While a lot of young people didn't dig Graham's "short-haired" attitude toward business, he did manage to stage an ongoing musical shindig, and he also supported the talented poster artists who would soon make psychedelic art an international style. It was under Graham's patronage that the rock club emerged as a significant cultural institution. (He also booked nonrock acts such as Lenny Bruce, who

performed at the Fillmore in 1966 shortly before he died of a heroin overdose.) The rock and roll shows Graham promoted became the new social ritual, above all a music for heads and a powerful reinforcement for the spread of psychedelics.

The acid rock celebration was not confined to the concert hall but poured over into the street, which became the focal point of life in the Haight. The street was center stage, the place where you walked, talked, and dressed any way you wanted. With the pleasant climate you could hang out on the street most of the time, bombarded by a perpetual parade of stimuli—wild costumes, spontaneous theater, assorted antics, wandering minstrels. People were not just striking poses. To patrol the street in full regalia was an act of defiance, an open refusal to buy into the System. But it was also something more. For those who exchanged knowing smiles during their daily rounds, the long hair, beads, and bare feet were not only a symbol of estrangement but a positive leap of consciousness, an affirmation of a radically different set of personal and social priorities.

The Haight was becoming a testing area for fresh shapes of human experience. Dwellers in the acid ghetto frequently clustered into tribal or "intentional" family units. They practiced communal living arrangements in which private property was restricted to a bare minimum. Sexual exclusivity was often rejected in favor of group marriage. The loosening of sexual mores was in part an expression of a growing appetite for a common spirituality. Hangups or restrictions of any sort could only impede the healing process, which entailed nothing less than the reinstatement of ecstasy as the fulcrum of daily life.

Excitement was brewing in the Haight. Although the straight world had scarcely begun to notice what was happening, the psychedelic city-state was having its brief golden age. The energy was unmistakably sky-high; poets and dreamers had the upper hand. One way or another, it all revolved around drugs. The psychedelic experience was the common chord of shared consciousness that unified the entire community. People talked about acid all the time, how it blew apart preconceptions and put you through intense changes. "It seemed like we were in a time machine," said Stephen Gaskin, a self-styled Haight-Ashbury orator. "Nearly anything we did was cool in a sense because it was all learning.... It was all paying attention, and you couldn't build experiments fast enough to catch acid."

Haight-Ashbury was the world's original psychedelic super-

market, the place where acid was first sold on a mass scale. The undisputed king of the illicit LSD trade was Augustus Owsley Stanley III, a dapper individual who could rap for hours on topics ranging from acid rock to Einsteinian physics. Owsley's personal history is something of an enigma—what can you say about someone who ate four steaks a day because he was convinced that vegetables were poison? His father was a government attorney, and his grandfather a US senator from Kentucky. Owsley had been expelled in the ninth grade for bringing intoxicating beverages onto school grounds, after which he was shunted from one prep school to the next. By the age of eighteen he had severed all family ties. He then did a short hitch in the air force, drifted around the West Coast for a few years and hooked up with Melissa Cargill, a young Berkeley chemistry major. Together they began to mass-produce the LSD that would make him a youth culture legend.

Owsley's product first hit the streets in February 1965, during the halcyon days of the early Acid Tests. Though his career as a bootleg chemist led him to adopt a reclusive lifestyle, he did pop up now and again on the psychedelic scene. He visited Millbrook and was on hand to freak freely at some wild parties hosted by Kesey. Owsley was so impressed by the music of the Grateful Dead that he became a patron to the band. During this period he also met Tim Scully, a Berkeley science prodigy whose IQ tipped the scales. He and Scully traveled for a while with the Merry Pranksters. Scully's skills as an electronics wiz came in handy on the psychedelic bus, and he helped design sound equipment for the Dead. But Owsley was more interested in his knowledge of chemicals—which was formidable. Scully became his apprentice, and together they set up an underground laboratory in Point Richmond, California, in the spring of 1966.

Known throughout the Haight as "the unofficial mayor of San Francisco," Owsley cultivated an image as a wizard-chemist whose intentions with LSD were priestly and magical. Over the years he developed a rather esoteric view of LSD and its potential. He was convinced, for example, that the psychic "vibes" in the laboratory at the precise moment when the raw ingredients of LSD were being mixed had a strong influence on what kind of trips people would have. Owsley was obsessed with making his product as pure as possible—even purer than Sandoz, which described LSD in its scientific reports as a yellowish crystalline substance. As he mastered his illicit craft, Owsley found a way to refine the crystal so that it

appeared blue-white under a fluorescent lamp; moreover, if the crystals were shaken, they emitted flashes of light, which meant that LSD in its pure form was piezoluminescent—a property shared by a very small number of compounds.

At first Owsley produced LSD in a powder form that could be doled out in gelatin capsules. He also sold it as a liquid ("Mother's Milk"), tinted light blue so that distributors could keep track of which sugar cubes had been spiked. But it was hard to control the dosage with this method, so Owsley invested in a professional pill press and soon he started dyeing his tablets a different color each time he turned out a new shipment. Although there was no difference between the tablets (each contained a carefully measured 250 micrograms), street folklore ascribed specific qualities to every color: red was said to be exceptionally mellow, green was edgy, and blue was the perfect compromise.

By putting out high-quality merchandise and color-coding his tablets, Owsley was able to stay a few steps ahead of his competitors. Even in the Haight, where he was by far the principal source of LSD, there were other brands available on the black market. But Owsley acid was universally recognized as the most potent, and it was revered by turned-on youth. "Every time we'd make another batch and release it on the street," Scully recalled, "something beautiful would flower, and of course we believed it was all because of what we were doing. We believed that we were the architects of social change, that our mission was to change the world substantially, and what was going on in the Haight was a sort of laboratory experiment, a microscopic sample of what would happen worldwide."

Drug trafficking in the Haight quickly grew to enormous dimensions as people came from all over to cop in large quantities. With his commanding position in the underground market, Owsley kept the retail price of LSD at a steady \$2.00 per trip. He and his assistants are said to have manufactured four million hits in the mid-1960s, and he probably gave away as much as he sold. Of course there was money to be made, and Owsley and the others made plenty, but financial considerations were not the sole motivation. The local dealers saw themselves as performing an important community service: "consciousness raising". They distributed acid because they believed in the drug, and while making their deliveries they also functioned as wandering rap specialists, bearers of news, gossip, rumor, and folk wisdom.

It was perhaps inevitable that those who tripped out would often worship LSD and deify its catalytic properties. And who could blame them in the early days, when so many were heady with optimism? The most ardent enthusiasts looked to LSD as something capable, in and of itself, of ushering in the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. The drug was hailed as an elixir of truth, a psychic solvent that could cleanse the heart of greed and envy and break the barriers of separateness. Needless to say, these young romantics had no idea that the CIA's "enlightened" operatives had been dropping acid since the early 1950s without being moved to trade in their blow darts, shellfish toxin, and extreme prejudices for flowers, love beads and peace signs. If the spies had their minds blown by the drug, it was generally in the direction of bizarre James Bond scenarios like putting thalium salts in Castro's shoes to make his beard fall out.

When Ron and Jay Thelin opened the Psychedelic Shop near the corner of Haight and Ashbury in January 1966, they had a clear-cut purpose: spread the word about LSD. The Psychedelic Shop was unique among the numerous storefronts popping up in the Haight LSD was passed primarily by word of mouth, it served as a place to hang out, gossip, and trade drugs. The shelves were stocked with books, smoking paraphernalia, dance posters, paisley fabrics, imported bells—in short, anything an acidhead might be interested in. The Thelin brothers also installed the first community bulletin board. They had a rather benign vision of the country's manifest destiny. Haight Street, Ron Thelin rhapsodized, would soon become "a world-famous dope center. There would be fine tea shops with big jars of fine marijuana, and chemist shops with the finest psychedelic chemicals."

The Thelin brothers were turned on to acid by Allen Cohen, who was then dealing some of Owsley's finest. Cohen ended up working part-time at the Psychedelic Shop and later became editor of the *Oracle*, a psychedelic tabloid backed by the Thelins. The *Oracle* printed articles on eastern mysticism, macrobiotics, yoga, astrology, and whatever else fit into the "new age" scheme of things. The pages were occasionally sprayed with perfume and were often difficult to read because the colored type was slanted to evoke the undulating shapes that characterize LSD hallucinations.

While most people in the Haight were probably in tune with Kes-

ey's cosmic giggle, the *Oracle* group was particularly keen on Timothy Leary's trip. They took their cues from the ex-Harvard professor who spoke in clichés about acid as an evolutionary tool that could guarantee religious epiphanies. *Oracle* philosophy was Leary philosophy; Ron Thelin summed up the newspaper's editorial slant: "To show that LSD provides a profound experience.... To get everyone to turn on, tune in, and drop out."

When the *Oracle* first started publishing, there was already considerable tension between the police and the hip community. Pot busts were becoming more frequent, and the California legislature had recently passed an edict banning the use of LSD. The new law was slated to go into effect on October 6, 1966. The date took on mystical meaning for the *Oracle* group. In the Bible "666" is a symbol of the Beast, the AntiChrist, the precursor of Apocalypse; the law against LSD was interpreted as a demonic act, a violation of a people's God-given right to experience their own divinity. But the *Oracle* group did not want another angry showdown with the authorities. Instead of protesting the new law, they decided to organize a gala event that would expose the falsity of the legal system. "We were not guilty of using illegal substances," Cohen insisted. "We were celebrating transcendental consciousness, the beauty of the universe, the beauty of being."

On the same day that LSD became a controlled substance, the *Oracle* hosted an outdoor gathering called the Love Pageant Rally. It was an expression of the community's steadfast devotion to their chosen sacrament. A few thousand people, far more than expected, assembled peacefully in the Panhandle next to Golden Gate Park. Rock bands played for free, and the master of ceremonies read a manifesto entitled "A Prophecy of a Declaration of Independence": "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all is equal, that the creation endows us with certain inalienable rights, that among these are: The freedom of the body, the pursuit of joy, and the expansion of consciousness . . ."

At the appropriate moment hundreds of people placed a tab of acid on their outstretched tongues and swallowed in unison. The next year in the Haight would be quite a trip indeed.

Politics of the Bummer

Spring of 1966.

The Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency convenes yet another round of hearings in Washington, DC, to deal with the growing "LSD problem." Chairman Thomas Dodd, a conservative Democrat from Connecticut and a noted Communist hunter, speaks out against the use of psychedelic drugs. He dismisses consciousness expansion as an alibi for sheer kicks and proposes strict new laws aimed at "the pseudo-intellectuals who advocate the use of drugs in search for some imaginary freedoms of the mind and in search for higher psychic experiences." Quick and drastic measures are necessary, Dodd asserts, because the LSD scourge is spreading at an alarming rate among America's youth.

A parade of scientists, health officials, and law enforcement experts render their verdict: the unsupervised use of LSD for nonmedical purposes can only lead to tragic results. L-S-D spells instant psychosis and a tendency toward bizarre behavior and capricious fits of violence. What is more, the psychotic interlude can recur at any moment without warning (the "flashback phenomenon"). Other pearls are cited: those who take the drug exhibit a disturbing tendency to withdraw from productive activity, and some end up drifting aimlessly through life. To complete the hatchet job, the experts resort to their favorite ploy—the domino theory of drug abuse: the neophyte starts with marijuana and LSD and inevitably winds up hooked on heroin.

The bad rap on acid was sensationalized in the establishment press, which had been focusing on the detrimental effects of LSD since the Harvard scandal. Typical scare headlines from the mid-1960s read: "GIRL 5, EATS LSD AND GOES WILD" . . . "A MONSTER IN OUR MIDST—A DRUG CALLED LSD" . . . "THRILL DRUG WARPS MIND, KILLS." In March 1966 *Life* magazine ran a cover story entitled "LSD: The Exploding Threat of the Mind Drug That Got Out of Control," which described the psychedelic experience as chemical Russian roulette in which the player gambled with his sanity. Pictures of people on acid cowering in corners, beyond communication, were used to underscore the message that LSD "could be a one-way trip to an asylum, prison, or grave." *Life*, whose publisher, Henry Luce, had once spoken favorably of psychedelics, didn't pull any punches: "A person

... can become permanently deranged through a single terrifying LSD experience. Hospitals report case after case where people arrive in a state of mental disorganization, unable to distinguish their bodies from their surroundings. . . . it brings out the very worst in some people. LSD is being dropped in girls' drinks. Terrifying parties are being given with a surprise in the punch. The Humane Society is picking up disoriented dogs. . . ."

The smear campaign paid off. In April 1966 Sandoz Pharmaceuticals recalled all the LSD it had distributed to scientists for research purposes, bringing to a halt nearly all government-sponsored experiments in the US (with the exception of the secret research conducted by the CIA and the military). Politicians issued pronouncements against the drug, hoping to ride the coattails of the full scale LSD panic that was sweeping the land. One government official went so far as to characterize LSD as "the greatest threat facing the country today . . . more dangerous than the Vietnam War."

Amidst this atmosphere of near hysteria a few spokesmen for the burgeoning acid subculture were called to testify before the Senate subcommittee. Timothy Leary offered an olive branch to the politicians, suggesting that a moratorium on LSD might be appropriate. (A few months earlier Leary had been convicted of attempting to smuggle marijuana into the US, for which he received the heaviest sentence ever meted out for possession of pot—thirty years in prison and a \$30,000 fine. His case was being appealed at the time of the Senate hearings.) Dressed in a suit and tie, with neatly trimmed hair, Leary announced he would urge everyone to stop taking LSD for a year if the lawmakers refrained from banning the drug. Repressive legislation, Leary warned, would usher in an era of prohibition that would be "much more onerous and anguished" than the moonshining days of the 1920s and 1930s. "We do not want amateur or black-market sale or distribution of LSD," said Leary. "You don't know what you are getting."

Leary claimed that he had always been opposed to the indiscriminate use of psychedelics. "For six years I have been in the unfortunate position of warning society that this was going to happen. We knew there was going to be an LSD panic. We saw it coming the way a meteorologist can see a hurricane coming. . . . But every attempt has been made to keep it underground. All that energy just cannot be kept underground." To insure good-quality LSD and proper use of the drug, Leary proposed seminars for high school and college

students at special psychedelic training centers. These institutions would license responsible adults who wished to utilize LSD "for serious purposes, such as spiritual growth, pursuit of knowledge, or in their own personal development." And what about the lad who chooses military service rather than college? asked Senator Ted Kennedy, a member of the Juvenile Delinquency Subcommittee. "I should think that in the Army of the future," Leary responded, "LSD will be used to expand consciousness so that these men can do their duties more effectively."

Arthur Kleps grew peeved as he watched the politicians react with scorn and derision to Leary's testimony. When it was his turn to speak, he decided to get tough with his interlocutors. "Would you mind telling me if you are really called Chief Boohoo?" asked one southern senator. "I'm afraid so," Kleps replied. Whereupon he launched into one of the most outrageous diatribes ever delivered on Capitol Hill.

"It is difficult for us to imagine what it is like to have been born in 1948," Kleps ranted, "but it is very much like being born into an insane asylum." The Chief Boohoo was particularly irked by FDA commissioner Goddard's contention that LSD-induced mind expansion was "pure bunk" since it could not be measured by objective tests. "If I were to give you an IQ test and during the administration one of the walls of the room opened up giving you a vision of the blazing glories of the central galactic suns, and at the same time your childhood began to unreel before your inner eye like a three-dimensional color movie, you would not do well on the intelligence test."

Kleps spoke with righteous vengeance. "We are not drug addicts, we are not criminals, we are free men, and we will react to persecution the way free men have always reacted." If Leary was imprisoned, Kleps threatened, then all hell would break loose. There'd be a religious civil war. "I'd rather see the prison system become inoperable, and it would be if large amounts of LSD were delivered into the prison and distributed among the inmates. . . . We would have to regard these places as concentration camps where people are being imprisoned because of their religion. . . . I would resort to violence. . . . This is the way this country started. . . ."

When Allen Ginsberg took the stand, he tried to placate the committee by explaining in a calm and dignified tone that many people who took LSD were motivated by a desire for long-lasting beneficial

effects rather than the immediate flash. In an effort to communicate the nature of the LSD experience, he invoked his own psychedelic history. He told of writing the second part of *Howl* on peyote and having fearful visions when he ingested yagé in Peru. He said he had stopped taking psychedelics for a few years, until 1965, when he dropped acid in Big Sur on the same day President Johnson was scheduled for a gallbladder operation. It was scarcely a week before the Berkeley Vietnam Day demonstration at which Ginsberg was slated to speak. A great deal of hostility to Johnson policy was percolating in radical circles. Ginsberg thought of the ailing president and the impending protest. Impressed by the majesty of the wooded landscape and the ocean cliffs, the poet realized that more harsh words and negative vibrations would not help the situation. While high on acid, he knelt and prayed for Johnson's health in psychedelic reconciliation with his anger about the administration's Vietnam debacle.

All of this was Ginsberg's way of telling the senators that LSD could have a positive effect on consciousness. For a healthy individual, he asserted, the drug posed a negligible risk—whereupon the bearded bard was quickly rebuffed by Senator Jacob Javits of New York, who reminded him that as a layman he was not qualified to comment on the medical aspects of LSD. But Ginsberg would not recant. He insisted that there had been a journalistic exaggeration of the dangers of LSD, and he warned that laws enacted in a climate of ignorance and hysteria would almost certainly create more problems than they solved.

Certain government officials also expressed reservations about new legislation to ban LSD. "I have a strong feeling," said Dr. Stanley Yolles, former director of NIMH, "that if we make the possession of LSD illegal, it will drive it further underground and make what perhaps is the beginning of a flaunting of authority . . . a more pathological process and a more strongly accented act of rebellion." Yolles believed that punitive measures would actually spur the growth of the illicit drug market—which was exactly what happened.

Historically in the United States repressive controls have been targeted at drugs identified with the poor, the underprivileged, and racial minorities; often such controls were enacted in times of social crisis (the reefer of the black and brown ghettos was outlawed during the Depression, for example). During the 1960s psychedelic drugs became associated with cultural and political rebellion, but in this

case the user population was composed primarily of well-educated white middle-class youth. As a symbol of generational conflict acid provided a convenient scapegoat for the guardians of the status quo, who embraced the anti-LSD crusade as a high-consensus issue in an era otherwise riddled with political schisms. By invoking the specter of hallucinogenic drugs, conservative politicians implicitly attacked the groups that opposed the war in Vietnam. Certainly it was a lot easier to discredit the radical cause if the rest of society could be convinced that those uppity radicals were out of their minds—and the LSD craze was touted as sure proof of that.

"We are now in a position to understand the real reason for the condemnation of hallucinogens and why their use is punished," wrote Octavio Paz in *Alternating Current*. "The authorities do not behave as though they were trying to stamp out a harmful vice, but as though they were attempting to stamp out dissidence. Since this is a form of dissidence that is becoming more widespread, the prohibition takes on the proportion of a campaign against a spiritual contagion, against an *opinion*. What the authorities are displaying is *ideological zeal*: they are punishing a heresy, not a crime."

Indeed, if it were simply a matter of public health, it would be hard to explain all the hubbub about LSD when other commonly used substances are far more injurious: six million Americans are addicted to alcohol, ten million consume enough caffeine to cause health problems; over fifty million smoke cigarettes, which have been linked to lung cancer; and barbiturates (usually in conjunction with alcohol) are responsible for 90% of drug-related deaths each year. Nevertheless, President Johnson mentioned only LSD in his State of the Union address of 1968 (the year LSD possession was reclassified as a felony) when hyping his war against dangerous drugs.

LSD was also singled out as Public Enemy Number One by the mass media, which whipped America into a virtual frenzy over psychedelic drugs. It wasn't enough to convey the false impression that LSD probably caused permanent insanity; all of a sudden the press conjured up the frightening prospect of couples giving birth to some kind of octopus because acid had scrambled their chromosomes. However, when the Army Chemical Corps ran in-house studies to assess the potential hazards of LSD "from a tissue or genetic standpoint," it could not duplicate these findings. "Although human chromosome breaks have been reported by others, we found them much more frequently from caffeine and many other substances," stated

Dr. Van Sim, chief of clinical research at Edgewood Arsenal during the 1960s and early 1970s. "We were unable to demonstrate any damage by LSD to any system used." But army officials never uttered a public peep while the so-called facts about LSD and chromosome damage were trumpeted over and over again by the mass media. Nor did the CIA attempt to set the record straight, even though the Agency had access to the same classified reports as Dr. Sim by virtue of a long-standing liaison between the CIA and the research and development staff at Edgewood.

The chromosome hoax had all the earmarks of a media-hyped disinformation campaign against psychedelic drugs. Hardly a day passed in the mid-1960s without yet another story about people freaking out and hurling themselves from windows while high on acid. At the same time, Leary and his cohorts kept churning out magical proclamations about mind expansion, groovy highs, and utopian prospects. ("Can the world live without LSD?" asked the *East Village Other*, an underground newspaper. Their answer, of course, was no.) The combination of dire warnings and ecstatic praise created a highly polarized atmosphere. LSD acquired the emotional and magnetic pull of the taboo, and as a result, more and more people decided to try the drug.

The political controversy surrounding LSD was not an abstract debate that had little bearing on daily use and experimentation. On the contrary, the barrage of contradictory messages conveyed by the straight and alternative press made the situation all the more precarious for the acid initiate. During an acid trip one is in a state of extreme susceptibility to an infinite variety of stimuli, including pressures from the immediate environment as well as more subtle influences stemming from the overall cultural matrix—that invisible field of presence which informs the psychological framework of the subject. Given the highly politicized environment of the 1960s, it is not surprising that taking LSD was accompanied by a considerable degree of anxiety and apprehension. Those who were willing to risk their own sanity to attain ecstasy or expanded consciousness often had unsettling experiences on acid.

How many people actually had bummers on LSD? More than many an acid buff would probably care to admit. In his paper "Social and Political Sources of Drug Effects: The Case of Bad Trips on Psychedelics," Richard Bunce, a research sociologist at the School of Public Health in Berkeley, California, cited statistics based on a

survey he conducted in which nearly 50% of those questioned reported having had a bad acid trip during the 1960s. The high percentage was in part a consequence of the widespread anxiety that ensued after LSD was declared illegal in late 1966. These witch-hunting laws created a hostile environment that predisposed people toward more traumatic reactions. As the level of hostility rose, so did the frequency of "marginal psychoses" attributable to LSD. By the mid-1970s, however, the emotionally charged atmosphere had subsided, and the percentage of bad trips dropped accordingly. "We can explain the substantial historical decline in the incidence of bad trips," Bunce concluded, "by reference to variations in the political culture which informs its use."

But what did Bunce mean when he spoke of bad trips? To be sure, there were tragic incidents involving LSD, but only a small percentage of those who experimented with the drug required hospitalization. For most people the hellish vision was only temporary, and because it was temporary it was also in some sense salutary. Difficult experiences were relatively common during LSD trips, but they were often thought to be useful, especially when one worked through their meaning with a therapist or friend. But the potential efficacy of the so-called bumper was never acknowledged by the mass media, which portrayed a bad acid trip as a no-exit situation, rather than an existential challenge. This climate of fear predisposed some people to panic as soon as anxiety set in, thinking that a bout with utter insanity was imminent.

The interpretation of the bumper as pure psychosis—the standard psychotomimetic analysis—was initially promoted by scientists connected with the US Army and the CIA. In addition to influencing the debate over LSD and its effects, the CIA and the military, through their complicity in the dissemination of false information about LSD and chromosome damage, helped create a negative set and setting on a collective scale for those who turned on during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

"That was a mean and dirty trick," said Ken Kesey in reference to the chromosome hoax. Kesey recalled the early days of acid glory before the media created the bad trip: "We didn't have bummers back then." Laura Huxley also lamented the passing of that era of relative innocence, when LSD had not yet become a household word:

How lucky those of us are who approached LSD before it had either the demoniacal or paradisaical vibrations it has now—when it had no echoes

of gurus and heroes, doctors or delinquents. We went into the experience not knowing what would happen, not expecting that it would be like the experience of someone at last Saturday night's party, or like that of Mary Jones, whose hallucinated, frightened eyes stare at me from the pages of a magazine. LSD—those three now famous letters were free of association with scientific righteousness and beatnik conformity, with earthly paradise and parental loving care—also free from close-mindedness, obscurantism and bigotry. The unconscious identification with those ideas, feelings and fears inevitably occurs now, with disastrous consequences.

The First Human Be-In

As the Love Pageant Rally drew to a close and the crowd began to drift away from the Panhandle, the organizers of the stoned festival exulted in their achievement. That same evening members of the *Oracle* group gathered at the home of Michael Bowen to consider their next step. Bowen was a key personality within the *Oracle* clique, and his studio served for a time as the office of the psychedelic tabloid. A painter with beatnik roots, he spent much of his time depicting third eyes and occult symbols amid swirls of bright color. When he wasn't putting the brush to an acid-influenced canvas, he acted as a self-appointed liaison between the *Oracle* staff and various psychedelic and artistic luminaries such as Allen Ginsberg, Timothy Leary, and Lawrence Ferlinghetti.

Some years earlier Bowen had fallen under the singular and charismatic influence of a mysterious guru-type figure named John Starr Cooke. A man of wealth and influential family connections, Cooke was no stranger to high-level CIA personnel. His sister, Alice, to whom he was very close, was married to Roger Kent, a prominent figure in the California state Democratic party; Roger's brother, Sherman Kent, was head of the CIA's National Board of Estimates (an extremely powerful position) and served as CIA director Allen Dulles's right-hand man during the Cold War. John Cooke hobnobbed with Sherman Kent at annual family reunions and is said to have made the acquaintance of a number of CIA operatives while traveling in Europe.

Driven by an avid interest in the occult, Cooke journeyed around the world befriending an assortment of mystics and spiritual teachers. In the early 1950s he became a close confidant of L. Ron Hubbard, the ex-navy officer who founded the Scientology organization. Cooke rose high in the ranks of the newly formed religious cult. (He was

the first "clear" in America, meaning he had attained the level of an advanced Scientology initiate.) Before long, however, he grew disillusioned with Hubbard and they parted ways. A few years later, while living in Algiers, Cooke was stricken with polio, which left him crippled and confined to a wheelchair for the rest of his life. Despite his physical disability he was revered by a Sufi sect in northern Africa as a great healer and a saint. Some of his admirers claimed he could activate shakti, or kundalini energy, and induce a blissful spinal seizure merely by touching people on the forehead.

By the early 1960s Cooke had moved back to California, where he immersed himself in an intensive study of the tarot. Word quickly spread through the West Coast occult circuit about an extraordinary psychic who possessed a tarot deck with the handwritten annotations of its previous owner, the infamous Aleister Crowley. Crowds of young people started to flock to Carmel to visit Cooke, and they were not disappointed. With a bald head, goatee, and piercing gray eyes, Cooke looked as though he belonged behind a crystal ball. Shortly after he participated in a series of "channeling" sessions, which resulted in the New Tarot Deck for the Aquarian Age, he had his first taste of LSD-25. Apparently he found the psychedelics to his liking, as he proceeded to drop acid nearly every day for a two-year period. According to one of his disciple-associates, Cooke was also something of a bacchant. At times his penchant for alcohol and acid left him drunk and crazed in his wheelchair.

While the Haight was in its heyday, Cooke was sequestered at a secluded outpost in Cuernavaca, Mexico (his home until he died in 1976), from whence he directed a small but dedicated band of acid evangelists known as the Psychedelic Rangers. Michael Bowen was a member of this group. At Cooke's instruction a half-dozen Rangers were dispatched to various psychedelics hot spots in North America and Europe. Bowen went to Millbrook to try and influence the thinking of Leary's clan and lure some of them back to Mexico where Cooke was leading séances while high on acid. Among those who are said to have visited the crippled psychic were Ralph Metzner, songwriter Leonard Cohen, Andrija Puharich, who conducted parapsychology and drug experiments for the US military in the late 1950s, and Seymour ("The Head") Lazare, a wealthy business associate of William Mellon Hitchcock's.

Following Cooke's "master plan," the Psychedelic Rangers targeted selected individuals for high-dose LSD initiations. They em-

ployed 2,000 to 3,000 micrograms (100 to 250 micrograms is usually sufficient for a full-blown acid trip) during a single session in an effort to bring about a rapid and permanent transformation of psychological disposition. Bowen claims he furnished acid to a number of well-known public figures, including comedian Dick Gregory and Jerry Rubin, the future Yippie leader. He also turned on certain journalists (among them a reporter for *Life* magazine) with the hope that they might see the Clear Light, as it were, and present a more favorable picture of LSD in the press.

Cooke and his Psychedelic Rangers believed that by spreading the LSD revelation they were helping to enlighten mankind. They fancied themselves cosmic Good Guys secretly battling the Forces of Darkness in an all-out struggle that would ultimately determine the destiny of the planet. Their world view was distinctly Manichaeic: Eros versus Thanatos, the great mythic showdown, with history merely the echo of these titanic opposites locked in eternal conflict. In this respect their perceptions were akin to those of another group of psychedelics devotees who operated in secret while invoking a Manichaeic demonology to justify their activities. Nourished by the dual specter of an all-powerful enemy (Communism) and a permanently threatened national security, the CIA assumed the role of America's first line of defense. In its never-ending battle against the Red Menace the cult of intelligence utilized every weapon at its disposal, including covert LSD warfare.

In 1966 Michael Bowen settled in Haight-Ashbury, at the specific request of John Cooke. The two men communicated on a regular basis, keeping each other abreast of new developments within the burgeoning youth culture. When the *Oracle* people convened at Bowen's pad after the Love Pageant Rally, he dutifully called his spiritual adviser to tell him what had transpired. During their conversation, according to Bowen, the plan for an even bigger event was conceived: a "Gathering of the Tribes," a spiritual occasion of otherworldly dimensions that would raise the vibration of the entire planet. The Haight would host the Happening of happenings. It would be the first Human Be-In.

One of the main purposes of the Be-In, as formulated by Cooke, Bowen, and the rest of the *Oracle* crew, was to bring together cultural and political rebels who did not always see eye to eye on strategies for liberation. In effect the goal was to psychedelize the radical left. Toward this end the organizers decided to include at least one

representative of the Berkeley activist community among the list of invited speakers. Bowen suggested Jerry Rubin, a leader of the Berkeley Vietnam Day protest, who was still a devoted Marxist although he had recently turned on to acid (evidence, according to Bowen, that the LSD reconditioning process was only partially successful). A permit was secured to hold the demonstration on the Polo Grounds of Golden Gate Park on January 14, 1967. Five different posters were printed to advertise the be-in, including one with a picture of a Plains Indian on horseback holding an electric guitar. The posters appeared in shopwindows, on kiosks, and on coffeehouse bulletin boards. The *Berkeley Barb*, the Bay Area's first underground newspaper, announced the event on the front page with a banner headline.

The publicity campaign was not solely directed at the radical and hip population. The organizers had their sights set on a much wider horizon. They wanted to send a message throughout the world that a new dawn was breaking and the time had come for all good men and women to abandon their exploitative posture toward the earth and apocalypse spare them the task. Buoyed by an instinctive understanding of McLuhan, the *Oracle* group realized that in an age of instant communication any event could acquire worldwide significance with the proper press coverage. "We knew we had the tiger by the tail," said Allen Cohen. "We knew that anything we did would attract the attention of the mass media."

The be-in was staged as much for the press corps and TV cameras as for the hip community. A few days prior to January 14, the organizers held a meeting with reporters. "For ten years," declared a press release, "a new nation has grown inside the robot flesh of the old. Before your eyes a new free vital soul is reconnecting the living centers of the American body. . . . Berkeley political activists and the love generation of the Haight-Ashbury will join together. . . . to powwow, celebrate, and prophesy the epoch of liberation, love, peace, compassion, and unity of mankind. . . . Hang your fear at the door and join the future. If you do not believe, please wipe your eyes and see."

True to expectations, it was an unforgettable afternoon. Over twenty-five thousand men, women, and children assembled around a makeshift stage at the edge of an open meadow. Gary Snyder opened the proceedings by blowing on a white-beaded conch shell. Beside him were other poets from the beatnik era—Michael McClure, Law-

rence Ferlinghetti, Lenore Kandel—while a group of Hell's Angels guarded the PA system. (Many Angels had settled in the Haight, where they served as self-appointed protectors of the acid community.) Allen Ginsberg chanted OM and clinked his finger cymbals. Just two months earlier, in a "Public Solitude" address at a church in Boston, Ginsberg had proposed that every American in good health over the age of fourteen "try the chemical LSD at least once. . . that, if necessary, we have a mass emotional nervous breakdown in these States once and for all." But there was no need to reiterate such remarks on this unseasonably warm winter day in San Francisco. The be-in was a healing affair, a feast for the senses, with music, poetry, sunshine, bells, robes, talismans, incense, feathers, and flags. The smell of marijuana lingered over the park slope, and acid flowed like lemonade.

"Welcome," said a calm, clear voice from the platform. "Welcome to the first manifestation of the Brave New World." It was a rather ironic way of introducing the hip superstars who were about to address the crowd. Clad like a holy man in white pajamas, Timothy Leary teased the audience with one-liners such as "The only way out is in." The High Priest of the psychedelic movement spoke of expanded consciousness as the "Fifth Freedom," urging everyone to start their own religion—which was exactly what he and his Millbrook friends had done. Leary's be-in appearance was part of a barnstorming tour to promote his new group, the League for Spiritual Discovery. The League had only two commandments—"Thou shalt not alter the consciousness of thy fellow man" and "Thou shalt not prevent thy fellow man from altering his own consciousness." A tireless proselytizer, Leary had presided over a series of "psychedelic religious celebrations" featuring dramatic re-enactments of the lives of the Buddha, Christ, Mohammed, etc. The purpose of these well-advertised, well-financed productions (one promoter called them the "best thing since vaudeville") was to reproduce the effects of an acid trip without drugs. But Leary's traveling light show was antique by Bay Area standards.

For some people Leary's brief sermon at the be-in marked the highlight of the afternoon. It didn't matter that they had heard it all before; they accepted as gospel every word he'd uttered since he came out of the academic closet and turned into the Pied Piper of the acid generation. But others were not particularly impressed by Tim's laconic manifesto. ("We could even tolerate *him!*" commented

one Haight-Ashbury resident in describing the community's live-and-let-live attitude.) The Pope of Dope was trying to symbolize in rather outmoded ways a religious revival that defied traditional categories. After all, why invoke catechisms and commandments when the sheer fact of being alive in that corner of time and space was sufficiently intoxicating?

The be-in was not organized to protest a specific government ordinance or policy. Thousands of people had come together to do nothing in particular, which in itself was quite something. They sat on the grass, shared food and wine, and marveled at how peaceful everyone was. There wasn't even a single uniformed policeman around to spoil the party. At one point a man parachuted down from the sky within view of the gathering. A rumor spread that it was none other than Owsley, the premier acid chemist, descending upon the faithful in waves of billowing white silk. It was just another piece of instant mythos that characterized the day. As Michael McClure put it, "The be-in was a blossom. It was a flower. It was out in the weather. It didn't have all its petals. There were worms in the rose. It was perfect in its imperfections. It was what it was—and there had never been anything like it before."

The be-in was the culmination of everything that had been brewing in the Haight, and people were still buzzing from it weeks later. If LSD already had a reputation as a drug of peace and love, the be-in swelled it to gigantic proportions. Those who basked in the afterglow of this "epochal event," as Ginsberg referred to it, were convinced that acid constituted nothing less than a pharmacological key to world peace—not a peace negotiated through compromise and treaties, but a veritable "Glad State" based on mutual recognition of the supranational Godhead. If only President Johnson turned on to the "right stuff," many an acidhead effused, surely the war in Vietnam would be over in a matter of days! Richard Alpert spoke as a true believer when he claimed that twenty-five thousand freaks represented a political force. "In about seven or eight years," he predicted, "the psychedelic population of the United States will be able to vote anybody into office they wanted to.... Imagine what it would be like to have anybody in high political office with our understanding of the universe. I mean, let's just imagine if Bobby Kennedy had a fully expanded consciousness. Just imagine him in his position, what he would be able to do."

Even if one did not succumb to this kind of puerile thinking, it

was hard to remain immune to the messianic fervor associated with the psychedelic upsurge. Juxtaposed with the grim realities of nine-to-five and the nuke, LSD seemed to herald an alternative, a new way of life. During the peak of an acid high one could wink at a turned-on sister or brother, who might also catch a glimpse of a happily-ever-after ending. Or beginning. No need to pin it down. No mix of words or meanings could recapture that overwhelming sense of *promise*. Such sentiments were immortalized in a stitch of drug-inspired prose by Hunter Thompson: "There was a fantastic universal sense that whatever we were doing was *right*, that we were winning.... And that, I think, was the handle—that sense of inevitable victory over the forces of Old and Evil. Not in any mean or military sense; we didn't need that. Our energy would simply *prevail*. There was no point in fighting—on our side or theirs. We had all the momentum; we were riding the crest of a high and beautiful wave."

The grandiosity generated by the be-in was reinforced and exaggerated by the tremendous airplay the event received. Just as the organizers had intended, the be-in attracted not only national but international notice. It marked the beginning of a concentrated media assault on the Haight-Ashbury. Soon it became the most exposed neighborhood in the country as reporters from all over the world zeroed in on the psychedelic underground. Nearly every major American media outlet, including all the big TV networks, ran features on the hip community, and for a time it seemed that the rest of the country was mesmerized by this baffling lifestyle revolution. *San Francisco Chronicle* columnist Herb Caen bestowed a new title on the cultural rebels, branding the whole lot "hippies." Other descriptions, such as "flower children" and "love generation," reeled off the presses and into the mainstream vocabulary, providing straight society with an assortment of ready-made labels to pin on an otherwise inscrutable phenomenon. Hippies became *the Other*, the very people "our parents warned us against," and this negative definition quickly congealed into a national obsession. The public response was typically ambivalent; the flower children were variously treated as threats to public order or as harmless buffoons. Ronald Reagan, then governor of California, described a hippie as someone who "dresses like Tarzan, has hair like Jane, and smells like Cheetah."

Yet for all the ridicule, there was something deeply disturbing about the youth subculture that begged for an explanation. Why had

the sons and daughters of white middle-class America forsaken the affluent lifestyle of their parents? Why did they give up the plush, easy routine of the suburbs to crash in a crowded commune? And why did they blow their minds with dangerous drugs? A panoply of pundits offered interpretations as to what it all meant. To some the hippies were a barometer of a sick society, a warning to industrial civilization of its impending collapse. Others compared them to the early Christians because of their commitment to universal brotherhood and love for all mankind. A journalist from *Time* suggested that "in their independence of material possessions and their emphasis on peacefulness and honesty, hippies lead considerably more virtuous lives than the great majority of their fellow citizens." (This was quite a switch from an earlier assessment by the same publication, which dismissed the longhairs as utopian dreamers in search of a "zero-hour day and freakouts for all.") More than a few commentators projected absurd hopes on the youthful dropouts, claiming that they were "the most significant development of the twentieth century," "the salvation of the Western world," "the incarnation of the gospel," and so forth and so on. Indeed, it was possible for reporters, sociologists, educators, clergymen, or psychologists to find nearly anything they wanted in the Haight. And some of the hippies actually believed what was written about them.

The media coverage in the wake of the be-in obscured the fact that the *Oracle* group failed to accomplish one of its major goals: the unification—if only on a symbolic level—of political radicals and psychedelic dropouts. If anything, the be-in tended to underscore the differences between the two camps. This tension was crystallized when Jerry Rubin addressed the mind-blown throng. His aggressive ranting about the danger of the war in Vietnam, and the greater danger of doing nothing to stop it, seemed out of context at the peaceful gathering, and the audience generally ignored his speech. Except for Ginsberg, no one else mentioned the bloodshed in Southeast Asia.

The apolitical tone of the event was disconcerting to New Left activists, who had once looked upon their hipster brethren as spiritual allies. The radicals disagreed with acid eaters who thought they could elevate the world simply by elevating themselves. This wistful notion was shared by hippies, dropouts, and others in the LSD subculture who believed that massive change would only come about when enough people expanded their consciousness. They re-

jected the possibility of revamping the social order through political activity, opting instead for a lifestyle that celebrated political disengagement.

Not surprisingly, hard-core politicians were critical of some of the more bizarre manifestations of the acid scene. In an article for *Ramparts* magazine, the leading left-wing monthly of the late 1960s, Warren Hinckle attacked the Haight-Ashbury community for its mindless mystagogy, druggy excess, and latent fascist tendencies. Veteran political organizers, however, were not about to ignore the hippie phenomenon. They saw masses of youth all across the country getting off on this vague peace-and-love kick, and they made efforts to lure them into the political camp. In the spring of 1967 antiwar activists in New York sponsored Flower Power Day; handbills for the event made it look like a be-in, and rock bands were scheduled to entertain the marchers. By this time signs of an emerging counterculture were everywhere: bell-bottoms, work shirts, beads, light shows, pot parties, transistors pulsing with acid rock. People started showing up at political meetings in costume, the style firmly hippiesque, and it became increasingly difficult to discern where protest ended and lifestyle began.

This interaction was certainly evident at the SDS national office in Chicago, where staff members lived and slept together in communal apartments. They shared drug experiences—mostly marijuana, but also LSD—that engendered a sense of closeness and unity. But even as they got stoned during their daily activities, the SDS staffers were always cognizant of the difference between changing their heads and changing the system. "The hip thing," explained former SDS president Carl Oglesby, "was fundamentally a mass introspection, a drug-boosted look-in. The New Left, on the other hand, went out to the world from a set of shared moral perceptions about race, war, and imperialism; it was recreating a private moral judgment as a public political act. Of course, the hippie's every instinct indisposed him to war and made him wholly eager to demonstrate this, provided someone else set the stage. But he was satisfied to act without strategic thought, without any sense of political plan, except that the more people who smoked grass, the better off the country would be."

The leaders of SDS saw grass as a mild pleasure rather than a social panacea. LSD, however, was a bit more problematic. A strong dose of acid could dredge up all sorts of weirdness that had little to

do with the world of *Realpolitik*; if anything, all the psychic debris was likely to be more distracting than stimulating when it came to questions of strategy and organization. Bob Dylan's nightmare surrealism, so much admired by student radicals, was heavily influenced by psychedelics, and he withdrew from political protest during the peak of his acid phase to probe the tangled roots of the self. The Dylan saga was proof to some that drugs in general and acid in particular nurtured a privatistic tendency within the youth culture, or perhaps that the ingrained privatism of American life insinuated itself in such a way as to use the chemical high for its own purposes. In either case, certain activists were concerned about the long-range implications of the drug scene.

A few days after the be-in, the *Oracle* hosted a hip summit conference focusing on "the whole problem of whether to drop out or take over," as philosopher Alan Watts put it. Watts was joined by Allen Ginsberg, Gary Snyder, and Timothy Leary, who made no bones about where he stood on the issue. In his opinion the psychedelic and antiwar movements were completely incompatible. "The choice is between being rebellious and being religious," he declared. "Don't vote. Don't politic. Don't petition. You can't do anything about America politically." To Leary there was no real difference between capitalism and Communism, between Ronald Reagan and Fidel Castro; both were hung up on competitive power politics. And so were the student activists, whom he denigrated as "young men with menopausal minds." Leary dismissed any action that did not emanate from an expanded consciousness as "robot behavior." "People should not be allowed to talk politics," he stated, "except on all fours."

Watts cautioned against imposing a particular vision on the world, but Leary persisted. As far as he was concerned, the psychedelic subculture was the only game in town. Forget about civil rights and exploitation, forget about the war; dropping out was the revolution. "The first thing you have to do is completely detach yourself from anything inside the plastic, robot Establishment." And then what? Leary envisioned the Haight as a launching pad for thousands of young people who would gallantly band together in small tribes and wander the United States and Western Europe, living off the fat of what he contemptuously called the unenlightened "mineral culture" (technological society). He preached his own version of lysergic Leninism—the nation-state would eventually wither away as more

and more people turned on. ("Let the State Disintegrate" was one of his less successful slogans.) In the meantime the hippies would "stamp out reality," as the famous button read, by loving the establishment to death.

Leary's rap was such an affront to the radical community that at one point when he brought his traveling religious road show to the Bay Area, the editors of the *Berkeley Barb* urged antiwar activists to demonstrate against the acid guru. Even his ostensible allies were put off by his apolitical stance. Gary Snyder felt that dropping out could easily mean copping out unless people cultivated techniques of self-sufficiency as a prerequisite to building a new social order. He did not want to reject those who made tremendous sacrifices for the cause of social justice, although he hoped they could be brought around to what he considered "a more profound vision of themselves and society." That was where LSD might prove useful—to help broaden the very definition of politics and thereby enhance the historical vision of the New Left. Snyder understood that student radicalism and the psychedelic subculture derived from similar roots, and he tried to encourage a creative dialogue between the two.

The flower power ethos was in some sense a caricatured extension of the nonviolent pacifist ideology that dominated the early history of the New Left. During the mid-1960s the psychedelic underground plugged into the spiritual rhetoric of the civil rights movement, which had nothing to do with "expanded consciousness" per se. Although acid in and of itself does not imply a particular moral framework or political outlook, as a nonspecific catalyst of psychic and social processes (the two realms are intimately connected) it brings out "the flavors and ingredients of whatever happens to be cooking in the cultural stew," as Michael Rossman put it. That LSD and the subculture it inspired came to be so closely associated with peace and love and tra-la-la was in no small part due to the prevailing left-wing political gestalt of passive resistance.

The rhetoric of nonviolent pacifism constituted only one aspect of the legacy that was adopted by the acid subculture. Members of the Berkeley Free Speech Movement, SDS, and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the radical youth wing of the civil rights movement, were trying to create alternative structures within which "the loving community" could flourish. This notion—which harked back to the Wobblies' slogan a half-century earlier, "Forming the new society within the shell of the old"—

became a moving force in the Haight. By early 1967 a number of thriving alternative institutions already existed in the psychedelic city-state: the *Oracle*, the Community Switchboard, the Hip Job Coop, Happening House (a cooperative teaching venture), Radio Free Hashbury; in coming months the Free Medical Clinic would open its doors. Even the neighborhood merchants formed a business council, HIP (Haight Independent Proprietors). The idea of building a parallel society smack-dab in the belly of the beast held great appeal to many a shell-shocked pacifist who'd grown weary of sit-ins, demonstrations, and police violence. For these people the futility of trying to reform the system was amply confirmed by the landslide election of Ronald Reagan as governor of California. They were ready for a different approach, rather than try to overhaul the social and economic structures of mass commercial society, they would simply try to outflank them.

By dropping out and joining the Haight-Ashbury scene, young people were not necessarily renouncing their commitment to social change. But they felt that the personal and the political could not be split into separate categories. Human liberation was something to be acted out because it was right on, a better way to live, rather than an item petitioned for during protest hour. If, as Charles Olson proposed, "the private is public, and the public is where we behave," then the clearest political statement was how people chose to comport themselves on a daily basis. This premise informed the hip penumbra of the radical left, that widening sphere where culture and politics overlapped in ways both complementary and problematic. The Haight became a crucible of dynamic interchange as left-wing activists cross-fertilized with turned-on poets, drifters, artists, and dropouts who were refashioning themselves into living articulations of the struggle against bureaucracy. A hybrid army of young rebels was on the move: politicians loosened up and grew their hair long, antiwar posters appeared in psychedelic design, and demonstrations incorporated more colorful elements of music, dance, and absurdity.

The hippies, for their part, never completely deserted the peace movement, despite Leary's proddings. At their best they represented an edge where the perspectives and tactics of the New Left were being transformed. Although there were important distinctions that placed the two groups at either end of the spectrum of dissent, the common ground they shared was significant. Both were expressions

of the "Great Refusal," and the existential project they embraced was essentially the same: the regeneration of personality. The cultural renaissance fueled by LSD was the force that broke the stranglehold of bourgeois morality and the Protestant work ethic. It provided the passionate underpinning for a lifestyle that existed on the far side of power politics. Above all it insisted upon a revolution that would not only destroy the political bonds that shackle and diminish us but would also, in the words of Antonin Artaud, "turn and face man, face the body of man himself, and decide once and for all to demand that *he change*."