

LSD Lecture

n.b.) “Hallucinogens” versus “psychedelics.”

Users prefer latter, which means “mind-manifesting.”
“Hallucinogenic” implies craziness-inducing.

1) **Early History of LSD**

There may be precursors to LSD in ergot on rye

Were these responsible for mass possessions in Middle Ages?

1938 Albert Hoffman synthesized LSD in Swiss Lab

Not looking for psychedelic, looking for circulatory drug

Accidentally absorbed through skin 1943 and had very strange bike trip

25 micrograms (often on blotter paper) → 10-12 hour trip

2) **Other hallucinogens**

magic mushrooms (also experimented with by Leary)

-- psilocybin (used by Mexican shamans)

morning glory seeds (Commercial ones often poisoned)

ibogaine – Africa

- treatment for opium addiction

DMT (popularized by Terence McKenna)

- South American Indians
- Broken down in stomach, so snorted or smoked
- 15-30 minute “businessman’s trip”
- found in toads too

Yage – amazon drink

- lasts 6 hours

Peyote

- active ingredient mescaline
- Aldous Huxley = proponent
- Huxley’s Doors of Perception celebrates it
- Huxley requested mescaline on death bed

3) LSD’s Use in CIA mind-control experiments

CIA saw it as instrument for interrogation & brainwashing

Lee & Schlain (Acid Dreams): LSD “has been used both as a weapon and as a sacrament.”

Jon Marks, Search for the Manchurian Candidate tells the story of CIA mind-control experiments with LSD

Fear of mind control gap in context of Korean War

American POWs seemed brainwashed when condemned US on TV

MKULTRA program = CIA’s response

US became what it feared Russians & Chinese were!

LSD & mushrooms as solution

Also tried marijuana, cocaine, PCP, DMT, amyl nitrate, speed, heroin (in latter case, used withdrawal as adjunct to interrogation)

Nazi drs had tried mescaline at Dachau

CIA abducted foreign agents & used LSD to interrogate them

CIA agents spiked each others' drinks – one had psychotic break & jumped out window

hidden from his family til Ford apologized on TV

Got prostitutes in San Francisco to slip LSD to clients while CIA agents watched through one-way mirrors

Dr. Ewan **Cameron** directed Allan Memorial psychiatric hospital (McGill) in Canada in 1950s.

Was President American Psychiatric Association 1953

1st President of World Psychiatric Association.

Skeptical of Freudian talk therapy; interested in reconditioning neurotics.

CIA's interest in reconditioning people too: **Manchurian candidate** (enemy agent brainwashed to do your bidding)

CIA secretly funding Cameron to develop brainwashing techniques

experimenting with schizophrenics & depressives - without their or kin's knowledge or consent

usually women

Depatterning:

15-30 days of "sleep therapy" ("sleep cocktails" of thiorazine, nembutal, seconal etc 3 times a day)

electroshock therapy: 110 volts once/ day = normal

Cameron did higher doses for longer intervals 3 times a day

Patients became disoriented & terrified of sleep rooms.

He locked some people up for days in sensory deprivation boxes

Psychic driving: continuous tape for 16 hours/ day, several weeks. Speakers often under pillows:

Quote p.136, Search for Manchurian Candidate

CIA interested in effects of LSD, so gave patients LSD while listened to tapes. Didn't tell them what was.

Experimented with **curare** too: paralysis.

Result: (Cameron's words): "an extremely interesting constriction of the range of recollections which one ordinarily brings in to modify & enrich one's statements... There is complete amnesia for all events in his life."

After Cameron retired, his work was investigated by Allan Memorial hospital. One member of committee said:

"I probably shouldn't talk about this... God, we talk about concentration camps. I don't want to make this comparison, but God, you talk about 'we didn't know it was happening,' and it was - right in our back yard."

4) **Emergence of counterculture**

For long time, LSD had no legal status (til '68)

2 streams fed in:

- (a) Much liked MDMA in early 80s, avant garde elite experimenting in 50s/early 60s

Leary, Alpert, Huxley, Stanford circle

Harvard experiments part of this strand

- (b) CIA paid Kesey to take LSD as part of mind-control experiments. He liked LSD and decided to turn his friends onto it. Kesey & Leary disillusioned with elite approach. Wanted LSD as goad to revolution

In context of civil rights & antiwar movements already turning US upside down, emergence of youth culture

LSD added to mix

1965 Owsley (Son of Southern Senator) became master chemist of LSD

Leary's mantra: "turn on, tune in, drop out."

Leary: "America will be an LSD country within 15 years."

Kesey's Merry Pranksters toured country in rainbow bus, administering "acid test." (See Tom Wolfe's Electric Kool-Aid Acid test).

Grateful Dead came out of this milieu

1968 Leary testified to Senate that there should be LSD pilot's license

Senate rejected idea & made LSD illegal

Radical movement splitting → political activists & hippies, each with own excesses

1966: 15,000 hippies in Haight-Ashbury

Beats as hippie ancestors

Political types losing spirituality, hippies losing social involvement

Haight-Ashbury full of young kids not ready for LSD, lots of bad trips, ugliness

Some now turning to Eastern religion: **Ram Dass** (formerly Leary's Harvard colleague, Richard Alpert).

5) Timothy Leary

1968 Leary ran for CA governor saying he'd camp on lawn & let Reagan do actual governing

Leary also talking about founding own country – getting crazier & crazier

Jay Stevens (Storming Heaven) calls Leary a “storefront messiah” with “paranoid self-importance.”

1968 Leary jailed, but broken out by Weathermen!

Leary: “to shoot a genocidal robot policeman is a sacred act.”

Kesey condemned Leary: “if they can plant a deep enough rage in you, they make of you an ally.”

Leary → Algeria with Black Panthers, but eventually got in conflict with them over his drug use

Leary left for Switzerland, where he was re-arrested (sold out by heiress girlfriend?)

Bail = \$5 million

25-year sentence

Informed on others for lighter sentence

In 1990s Leary made a sort of comeback as an apostle of cyberculture

What are affinities of psychedelic and cyberculture?