

Altered States of Consciousness and Literature Doctoral Workshop

June 5-7, Crêt-Bérard



Plenary talks:

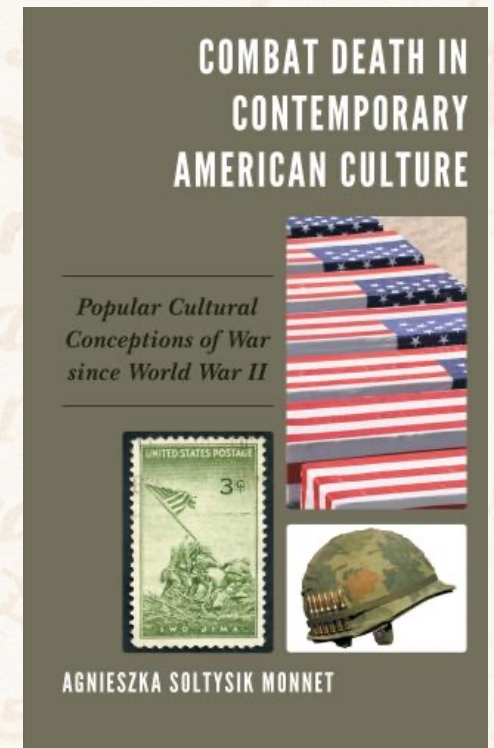
Wed, June 5, 13:30: Juliana Dresvina (Oxford): "Literary Alterity: three ways"

Wed, June 5, 16:45: Dr. Ansgar Rougemont-Bücking (Associate Professor of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy based in Vevey), "The vampirocene – or the crises of consciousness of our epoch"

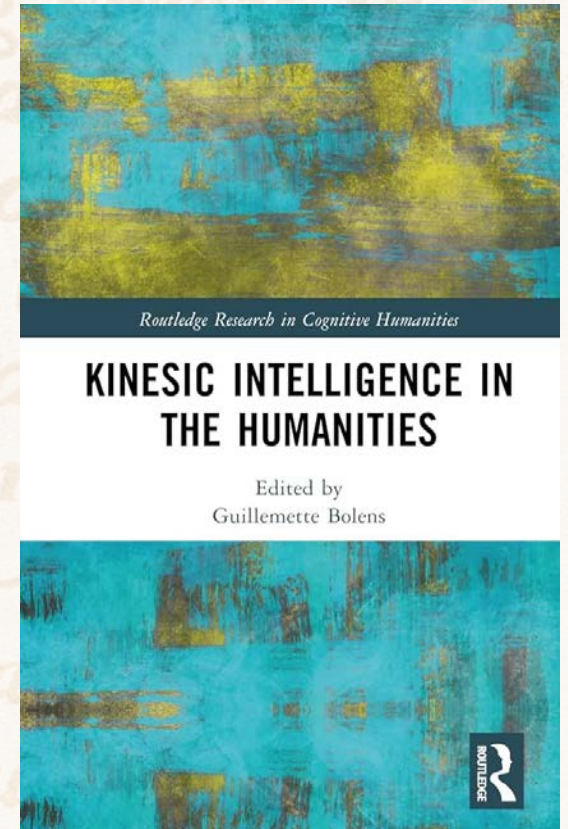
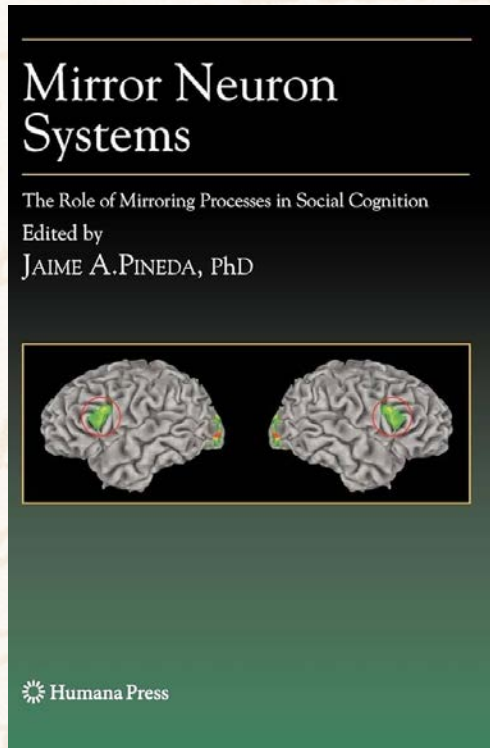
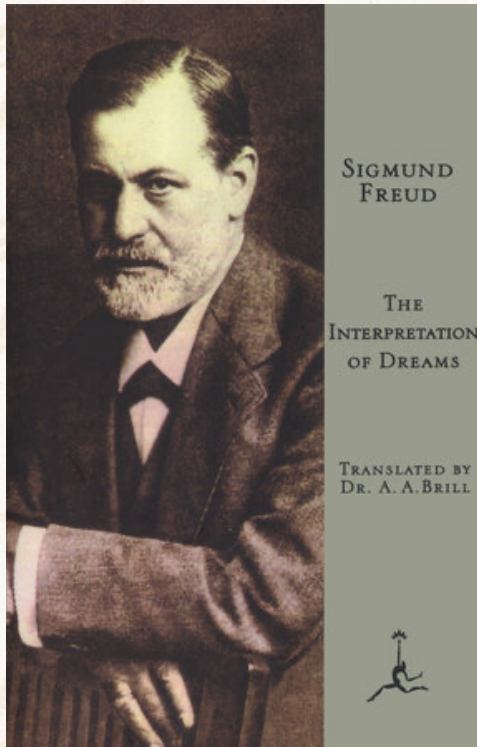
**Thursday, June 6, 16:45: Hermann Herlinghaus (University of Freiburg-in-Breisgau):
"Approaching Western Psychoactive Modernity"**

Researcher as theoretical ‘bricoleur’

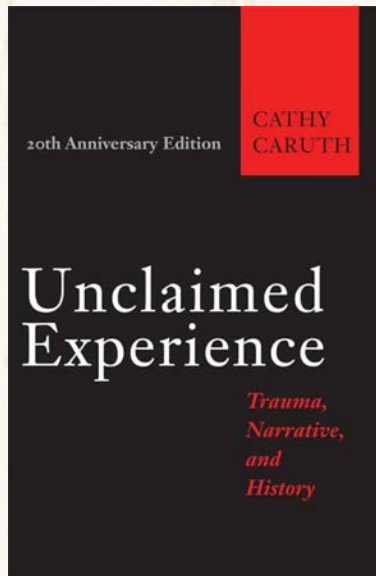
- Theory: history, philosophy, political theory, linguistics
- In my own work:
 - sociology has been the most ‘fished in’ sister discipline: for concepts around nationalism, the emotions surrounding the flag (‘emotional energy chains’), martyrdom



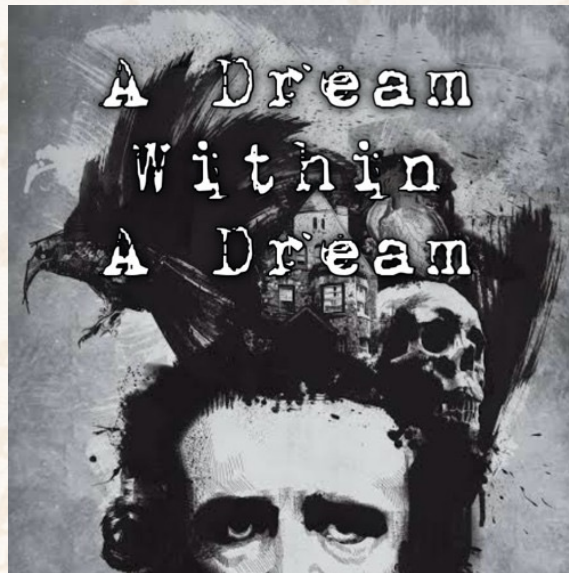
Psychology



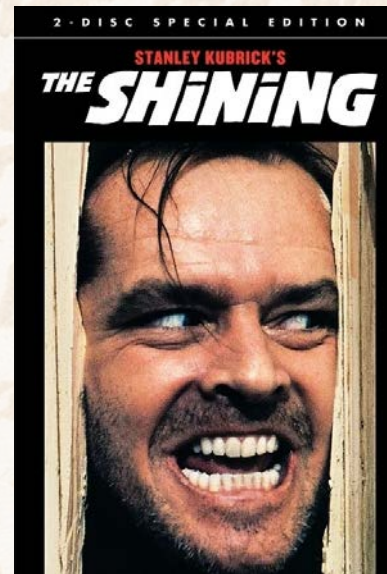
Psychology in literature



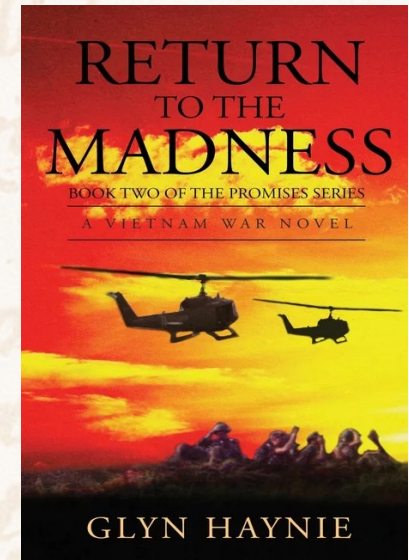
Cathy Caruth



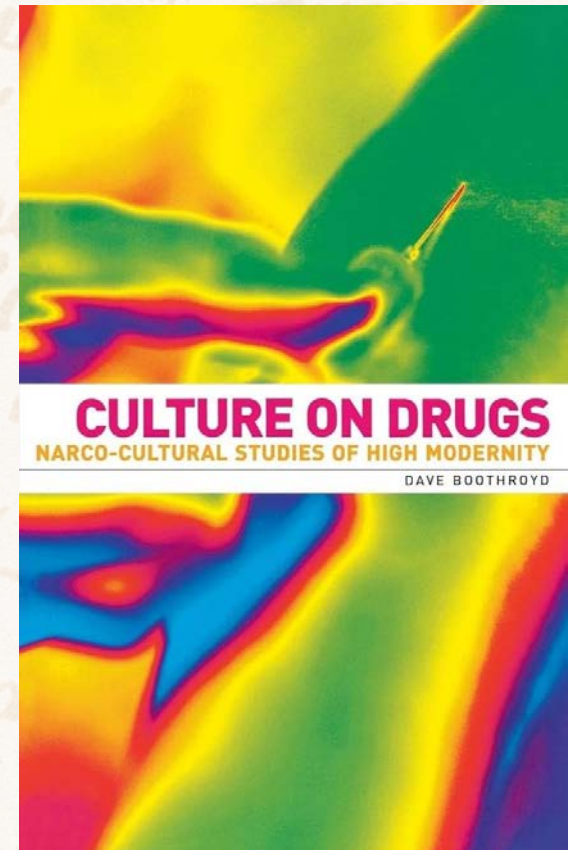
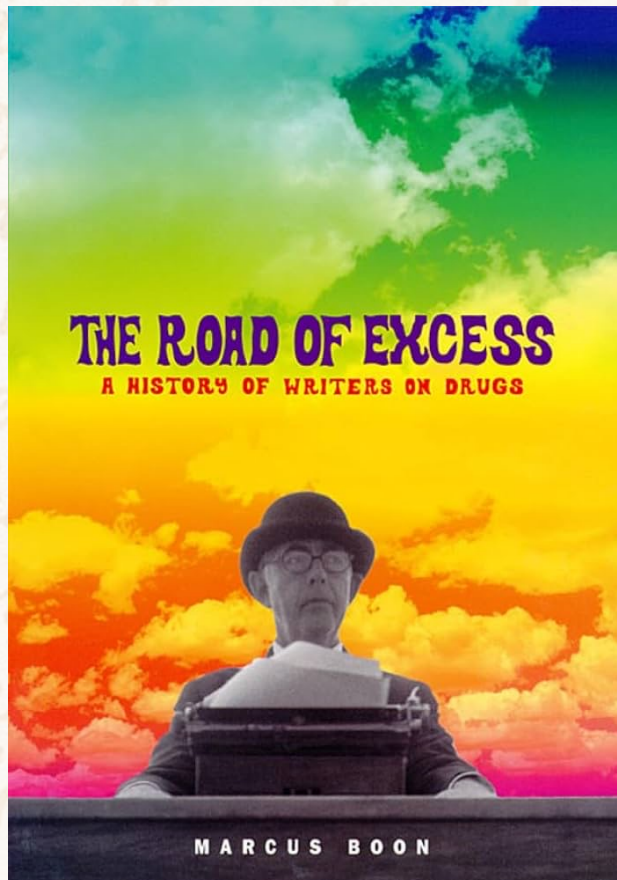
Allen Ginsberg



War lit.



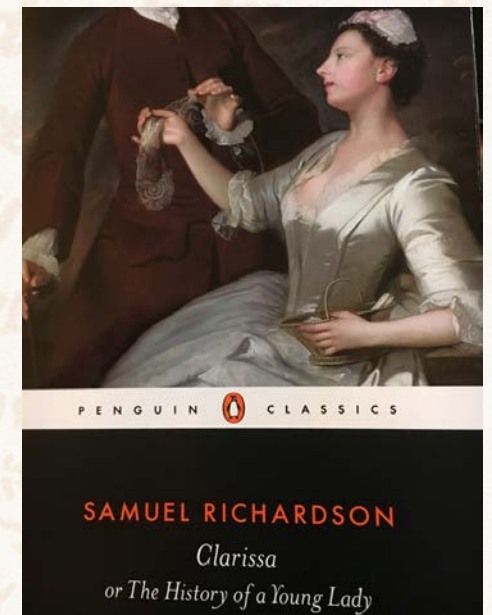
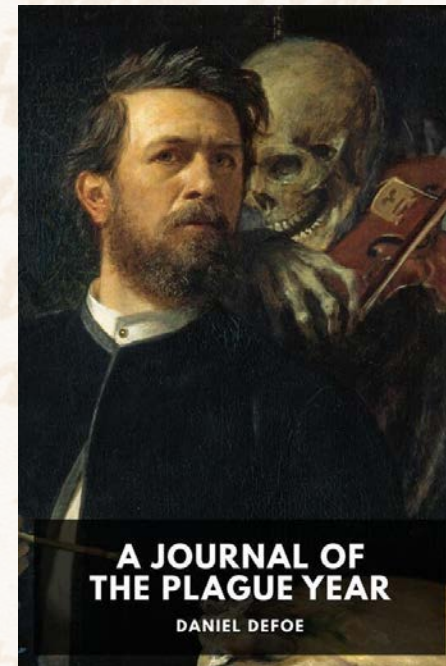
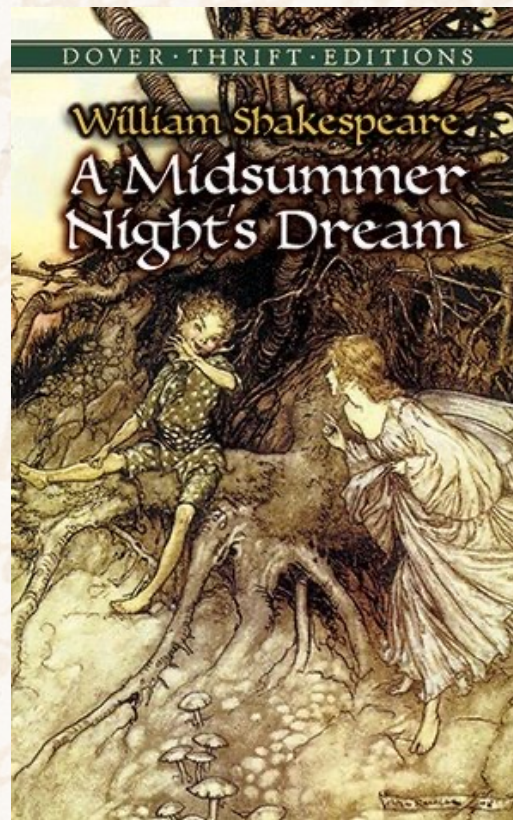
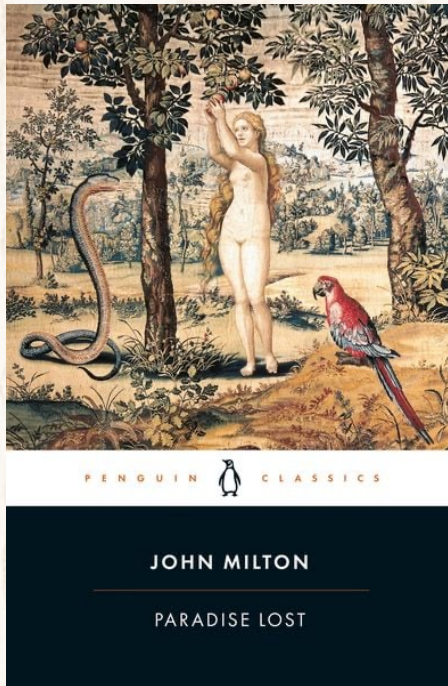
Studies of literature, Theory, and altered states



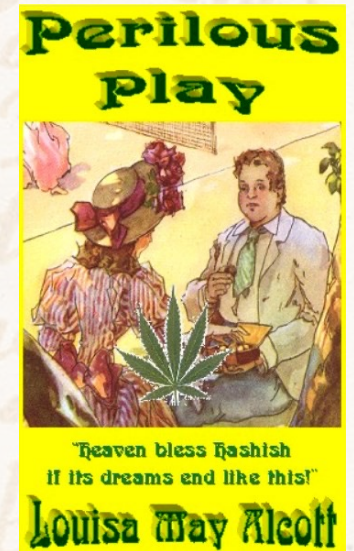
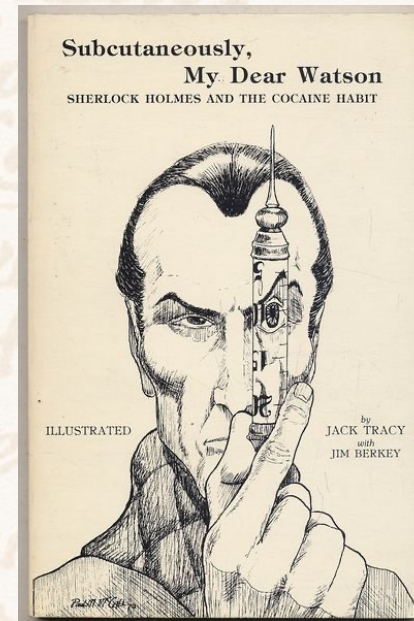
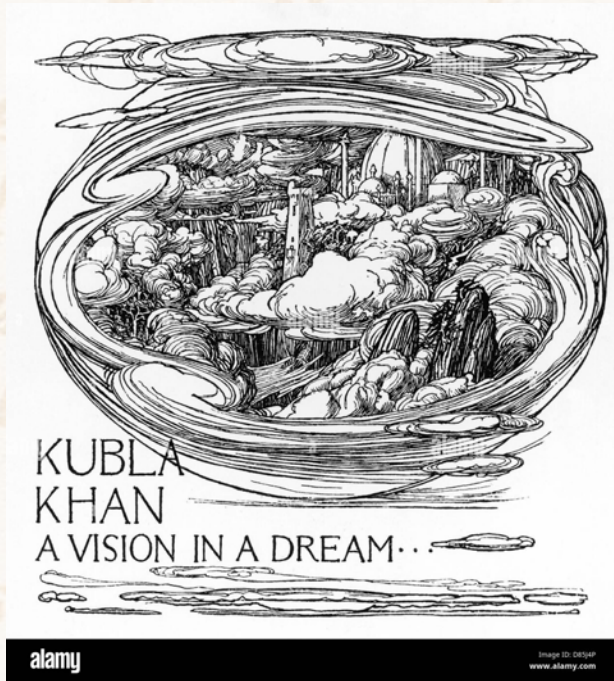
What are altered states of consciousness?

- ‘normal’ consciousness?
 - Return of idealism, implications of quantum physics
- **A spectrum of examples:** sleep, dreaming, hypnagogia, states induced by drugs, plants, medications, accidents, triggers, or occurring naturally, hypnotic states, psychedelic journeys, mystical experiences, NDEs, out of body experiences, dissociation (‘automatic pilot’), meditation, sport, dancing, fasting, sex, listening to music, writing, reading?, experiencing great art (the aesthetic response?)
 - Psychoactive substances: depressants, stimulants, analgesics, hallucinogens & MDMA (extasy)
- Seeking altered states as a universal in human history
 - Terence McKenna and Roland L. Fisher, theory of human evolution & psilocybin
 - “Stoned ape theory”: Ingestion of psilocybin helped creative cognitive revolution in humans
 - Traces of psychoactive substances found in archeological sites from Neolithic era, Eleusinian mysteries (possibly ergot-derived ritual drink), Soma in Vedic ritual, plants and shamanism in Amazon, Asia, Africa and North America and other places
 - Escape from consciousness or self-healing and creativity activation?

Altered states and literature

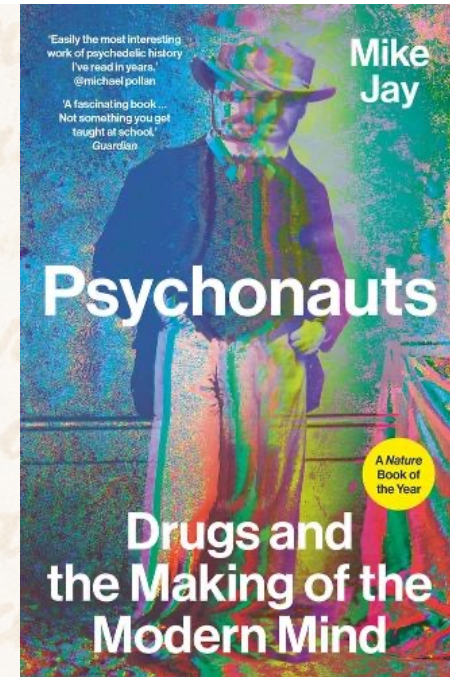


Altered states and literature



The invention of 'drugs' – early 20th c.

The 1920s: Prohibition and criminalization of alcohol and other substances



Early experiments and explorations by scientists

The Varieties of Religious Experience A Study in Human Nature by William James



LECTURES XVI AND XVII – MYSTICISM

Mysticism defined– Four marks of mystic states–
They form a distinct region of consciousness–
Examples of their lower grades– Mysticism and alcohol–
"The anaesthetic revelation"– Religious mysticism–
Aspects of Nature– Consciousness of God–
"Cosmic consciousness"– Yoga– Buddhist mysticism–
Sufism– Christian mystics– Their sense of revelation–
Tonic effects of mystic states– They describe by negatives–
Sense of union with the Absolute– Mysticism and music–
Three conclusions–
(1) Mystical states carry authority for him who has them–
(2) But for no one else–
(3) Nevertheless, they break down the exclusive authority of rationalistic states–
They strengthen monistic and optimistic hypotheses.



'An accomplishment'
The New York Times

'... full of surprises and beautiful writing'
Mike Jay, author of Psychonauts

Tripping on Utopia



FOOTNOTE

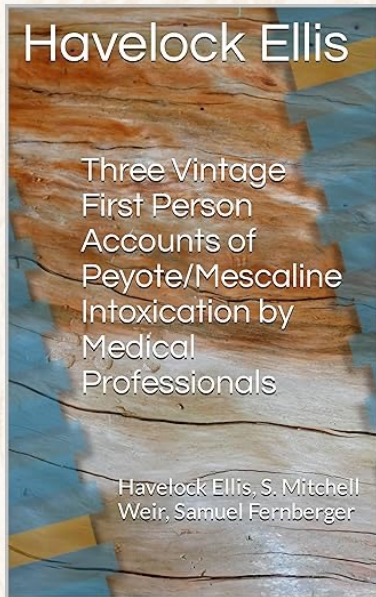
Margaret Mead, the Cold War
and the birth of psychedelics

Benjamin Breen

Margaret Mead and
Gregory Bateson, 1920s

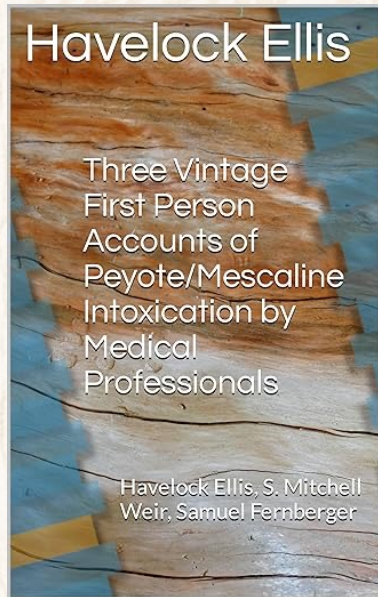
Wrote about peyote as a
possible society-changing
substance

Early explorations by scientists: S. Wier Mitchell



Their variety and strange juxtapositions were indeed fascinating for one to whom colour is more than it is to most men; **nor is it possible to describe the hundredth of what I saw saw** | I was at last conscious of the fact that at moments I was almost asleep, and then wide awake. In one of these magic moments I saw my last vision and the strangest. I heard what appeared to be approaching rhythmical sounds, and then saw a beach, which, I knew to be that of Newport. On this, with a great noise, which lasted but a moment, rolled in out of darkness wave on wave. These as they came, were **liquid splendours huge and threatening, of wonderfully pure green, or red or deep purple, once only deep orange and with no trace of foam** | These water hills of colour broke on the beach with myriads of lights of the same tint as the wave. This lasted some time, and while, it did so I got back to more distinct consciousness, and **wished the beautiful terror of these huge mounds of colour would continue.**

Early explorations by scientists: S. Wier Mitchell

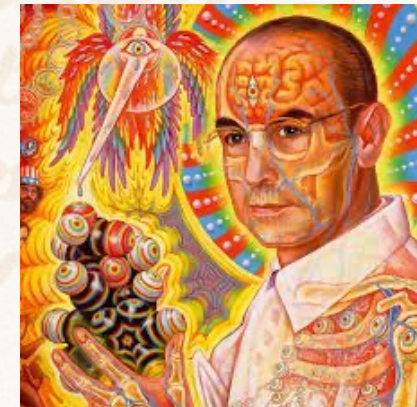
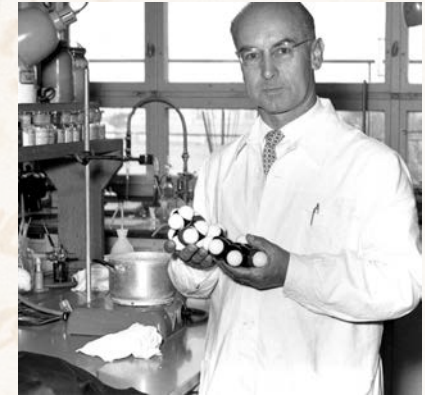


- For the psychologist this agent should have value. To be able with a whole mind to experiment mentally upon such phenomena as I have described is an unusual privilege. Here is unlocked **a storehouse of glorified memorial treasures** of one kind. There may be a drug which shall so release a mob of verbal memories, or of musical records, or, in fact, of tastes and odours. I naturally speak of things seen under mescal influence as glorified memories—**certainly nothing soon in these visions was altogether outside of my known experiences**—but everything was expressive—forms were gigantic—colours marvellously intermingled. In fact, **nothing was simply the vision of a thing remembered and recognised except the familiar Newport Beach.**

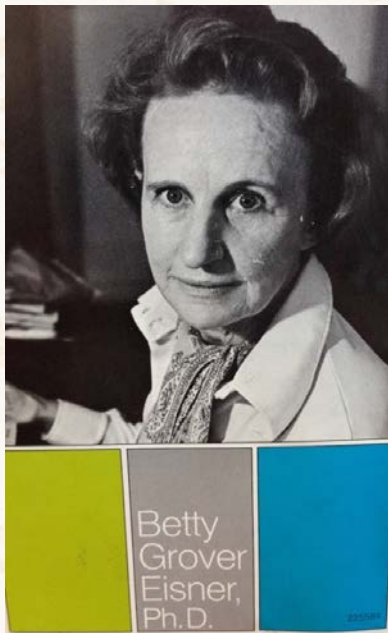
Struggling to decide if these were personal 'memories' or something transpersonal?

1938, 1943: invention of LSD by Albert Hoffman

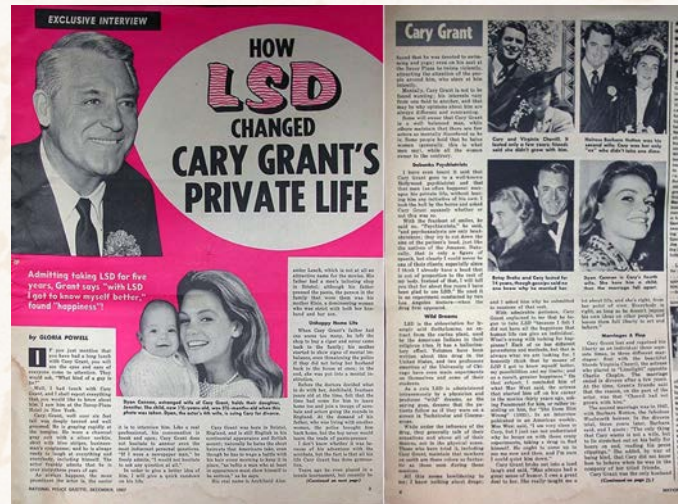
- 1938, first synthesized LSD-25 from ergot
 - Looking for treatments for migraines or for labor pains
- 1943, goes back to the compound and accidentally doses himself
- Takes it deliberately on April 19, 1943 – “Bicycle Day”
 - Has a difficult trip, then a wondrous afterglow
- Sandoz sends it to anyone who asks and wants to experiment, looking for an application
- First used as a ‘psychotomimetic’ – simulation of madness
- Then research in 1950s for alcoholism, addiction, depression



1950s: research takes off in LA and Canada (and by army and CIA—MK-Ultra)



Pioneered set & setting



Most famous celebrity on LSD

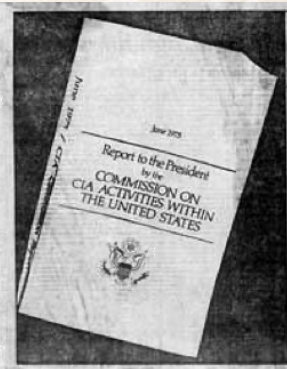
CIA Infiltrated 17 Area Groups, Gave Out LSD

Suicide Revealed District the Focus
 By Thomas G. Train
 Washington Post Staff Writer

A 40-page memo of the Department of the Army reportedly took LSD as part of a Central Intelligence Agency plot, the memo is said to have been found in a Washington, D.C., apartment in 1967 and was sent to the Rockefeller Commission, a Senate subcommittee investigating CIA activities.

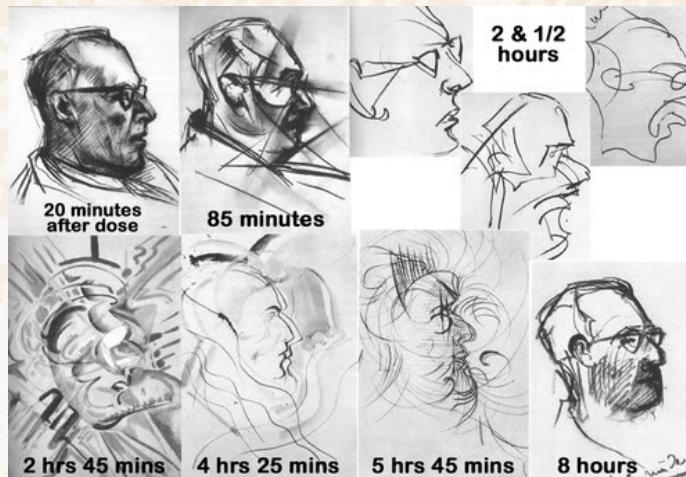
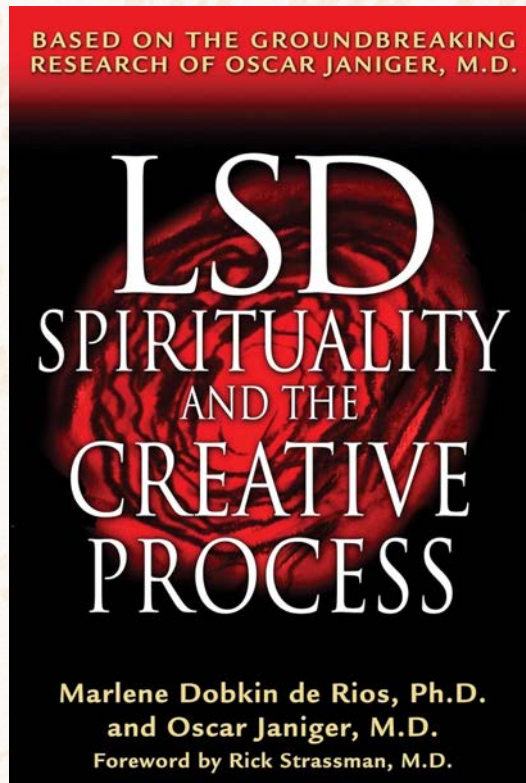
The memo was given the drug while attending a meeting with CIA personnel working on a form project that involved the organization of word-homophony groups on clothing who were unaware they were being watched.

"This individual was not made aware he had been given LSD until after the project was over," the document says. "The document also states that the CIA was aware of the project and was aware of the fact that the Rockefeller Commission had been established."

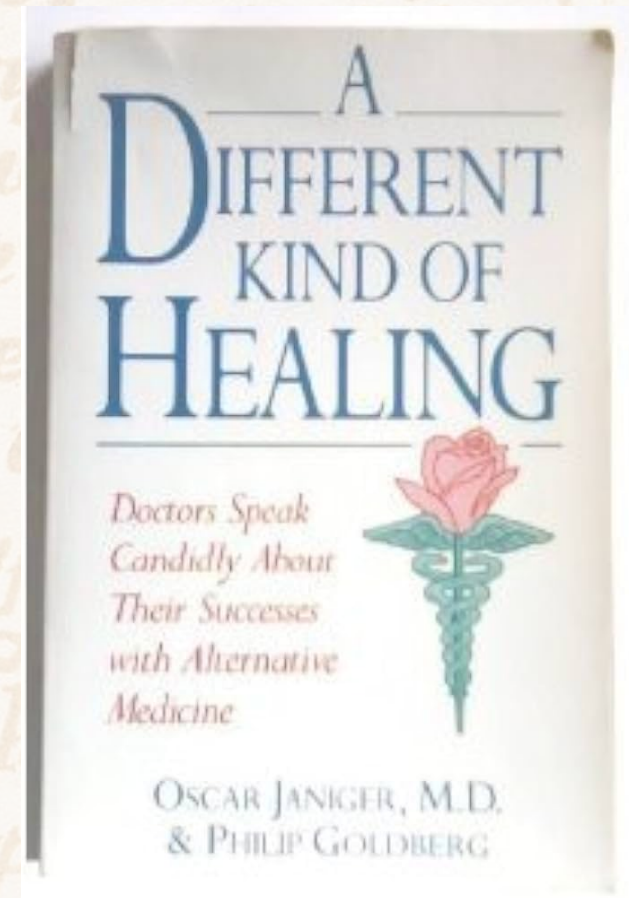


MK-Ultra – extremely unethical research, literally torture

1950s: Oscar Janiger & creativity



Gave LSD to hundreds to artists and writers to study creative process



Anais Nin, one of Janiger's subjects

“The walls turned to gold, the bedcover was gold, my whole body was becoming GOLD, liquid gold, scintillating, warm gold. I WAS GOLD. It was the most pleasurable sensation I had ever known, like an orgasm. It was the secret of life, the alchemist’s secret of life.”

Later, as the effects of LSD began to wear off, she observed:

“I felt I could capture the secret of life because the secret of life was metamorphosis and transmutation, but it happened too quickly and was beyond words. ... Ah, I cannot capture the secret of life with WORDS. Sadness. The secret of life was BREATH. That was what I always wanted words to do, to BREATHE.”

Ultimately, she saw a continuity between the LSD experience and other forms of altered states:

“Obviously, by way of writing, reveries, waking dreams, and night dreams, I had visited all those landscapes.”

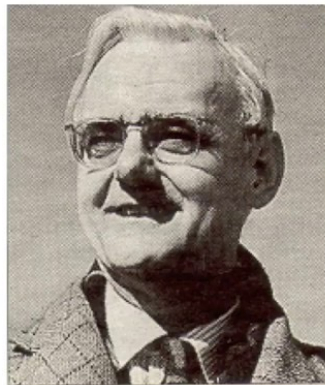


1950s: Huxley and Humphrey Osmond

Psychedelics = Mind manifesting?



“To fathom hell, or soar angelic, take a pinch of psychedelic.”
-Dr. Humphrey Osmond in a letter to Aldous Huxley, (1957)
From Greek ‘psyche’ for mind, and ‘delos’ for manifest.



Humphrey Osmond . . . drug pioneer



The Doors of Perception (1954)

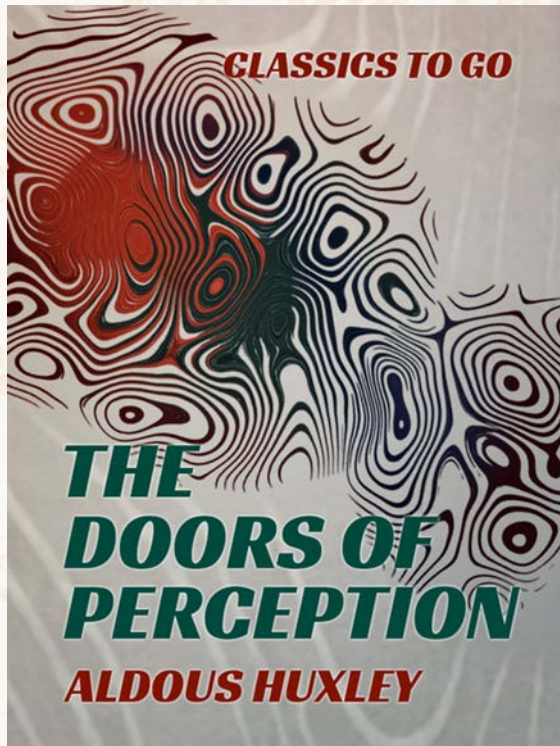
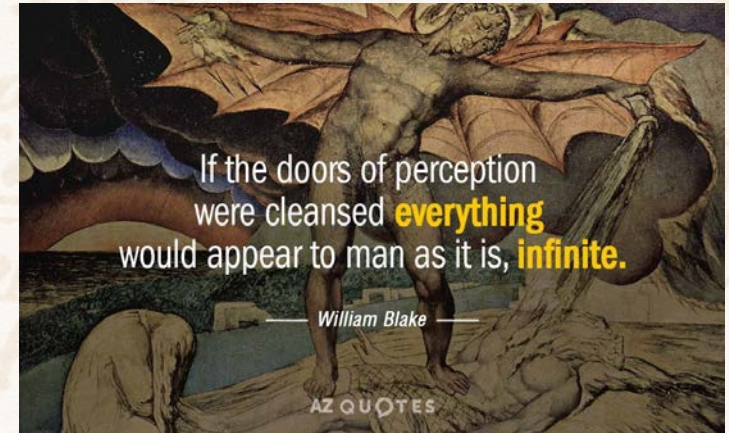


Plate 14, The Marriage of Heaven & Hell



I continued to look at the flowers, and in their living light I seemed to detect the qualitative equivalent of breathing -but of a breathing without returns to a starting point, with no recurrent ebbs but only a repeated flow from beauty to heightened beauty, from deeper to ever deeper meaning. Words like "grace" and "transfiguration" came to my mind, and this, of course, was what, among other things, they stood for. My eyes traveled from the rose to the carnation, and from that feathery incandescence to the smooth scrolls of sentient amethyst which were the iris. The Beatific Vision, Sat Chit Ananda, Being-Awareness-Bliss-for the first time I understood, not on the verbal level, not by inchoate hints or at a distance, but precisely and completely what those prodigious syllables referred to. And then I remembered a passage I had read in one of Suzuki's essays. "What is the Dharma-Body of the Buddha?" ("the Dharma-Body of the Buddha" is another way of saying Mind, Suchness, the Void, the Godhead.) The question is asked in a Zen monastery by an earnest and bewildered novice. And with the prompt irrelevance of one of the Marx Brothers, the Master answers, "The hedge at the bottom of the garden." "And the man who realizes this truth," the novice dubiously inquires, "what, may I ask, is he?" Groucho gives him a whack over the shoulders with his staff and answers, "A golden-haired lion."

It had been, when I read it, only a vaguely pregnant piece of nonsense. Now it was all as clear as day, as evident as Euclid. Of course the Dharma-Body of the Buddha was the hedge at the bottom of the garden. At the same time, and no less obviously, it was these flowers, it was anything that I - or rather the blessed Not-I, released for a moment from my throttling embrace - cared to look at. The books, for example, with which my study walls were lined. Like the flowers, they glowed, when I looked at them, with brighter colors, a profounder significance. Red books, like rubies; emerald books; books bound in white jade; books of agate; of aquamarine, of yellow topaz; lapis lazuli books whose color was so intense, so intrinsically meaningful, that they seemed to be on the point of leaving the shelves to thrust themselves more insistently on my attention.

breathing

beauty

meaning

Hindu: Sat Chit Ananda,
Being Awareness Bliss

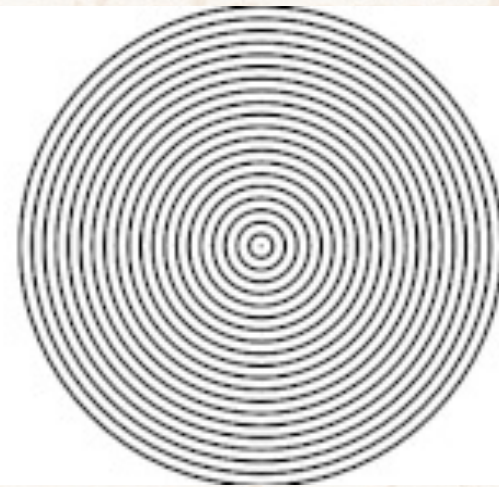
Budhism: Dharma

The sacredness of the
mundane – the re-
enchantment of the
world

Jewel colors

Meaningful, agencive
color

Pantfolds: moiré patterns



Language & reality (if the doors of perception were cleansed ...)

languages. Every individual is at once the beneficiary and the victim of the linguistic tradition into which he has been born - the beneficiary inasmuch as language gives access to the accumulated records of other people's experience, the victim in so far as it confirms him in the belief that reduced awareness is the only awareness and as it bedevils his sense of reality, so that he is all too apt to take his concepts for data, his words for actual things. That which, in the language of religion, is called "this world" is the universe of reduced awareness, expressed, and, as it were, petrified by language. The various "other

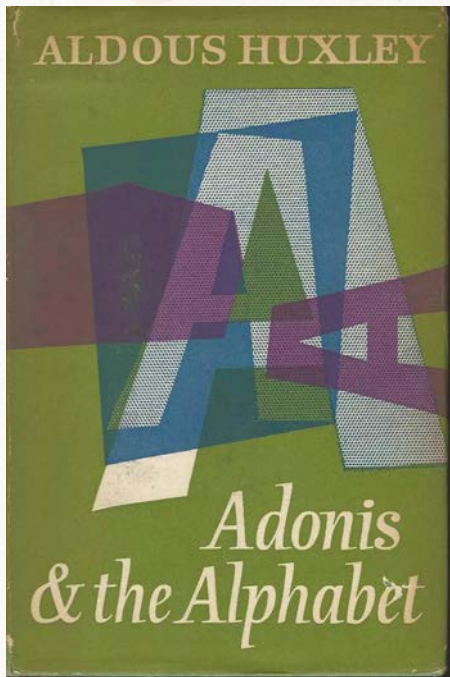
worlds," with which human beings erratically make contact are so many elements in the totality of the awareness belonging to Mind at Large. Most people, most of the time, know only what comes through the reducing valve and is consecrated as genuinely real by the local language. Certain persons, however, seem to be born with a kind of by-pass that circumvents the reducing valve. In others temporary by-passes may be acquired either spontaneously, or as the result of deliberate "spiritual exercises," or through hypnosis, or by means of drugs. Through these permanent or temporary by-passes there flows, not indeed the perception "of everything that is happening everywhere in the universe" (for the by-pass does not abolish the reducing valve, which still excludes the total content of Mind at Large), but something more than, and above all something different from, the carefully selected utilitarian material which our narrowed, individual minds regard as a complete, or at least sufficient, picture of reality.

This world is
'reduced
awareness'

normal
consciousness as
'a reducing valve'

Drugs allow
perception of true
transpersonal
reality

“Education of an Amphibian” (1956)



Man is an amphibian who lives simultaneously in two worlds—the given and the home-made, the world of matter, life and consciousness and the world of symbols.

— Aldous Huxley —

AZ QUOTES

Anais Nin ambivalent about the ineffability of the psychedelic experience

“No one had taught them [Western scientists] to dream, to transcend outer events and read their meaning. They had been deprived of all such spiritual disciplines. It was a scientific culture, a technological culture. It was logical that they would believe in drugs, drugs of all kinds: curative, tranquilizing, stimulating and (logically) dream-inducing drugs... they were going in their own scientific way into their other reality.

At one party, Leary discussed a statement he had made, **that there was no language, no way to describe the LSD experience. I did not agree. I mentioned the poets; I mentioned Michaux; I mentioned the surrealists.** All unknown to them. They were scientists, not poets. Huxley’s plain, precise, methodical report was more trustworthy. They were making links with ancient religions but not with literature, I felt.”

“Ah, I cannot capture the secret of life with WORDS”

Yet Huxley both wrote about his experience *and* the importance of the non-verbal world



William Blake approaches idealism through his juxtaposition of word and image, more in line with Nin's claim that poets are able to come closer to capturing the non-ordinary experience and truth, not by describing it denotively but indirectly, through metaphor and poetic performance

1960s

The HUMAN BE-IN
A GATHERING OF THE TRIBES

Timothy Leary
Richard Albert
Dick Gregory
Allen Ginsberg
Jerry Rubin
MANY OTHERS

**SATURDAY
JAN. 14th
—1967—
FREE**

ALL OF SAN FRANCISCO'S ROCK BANDS

INCLUDING -
SANTANA
AND
THE STEVE
MILLER
BAND

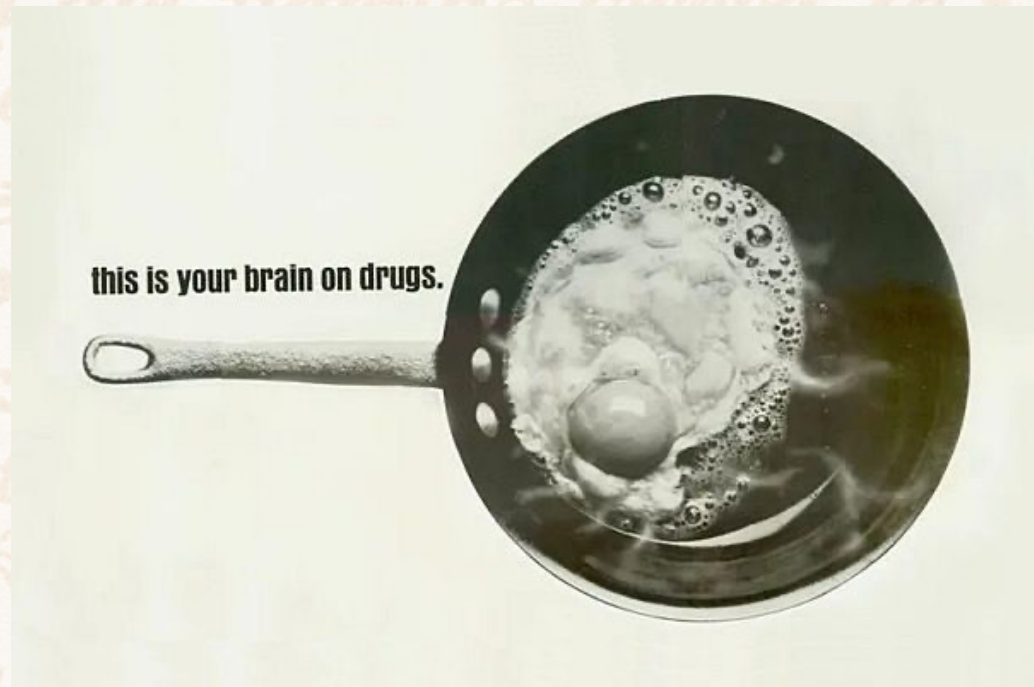
**GOLDEN GATE PARK
SAN FRANCISCO**

BRING
FLOWERS
INCENSE

BRING
FAMILIES
ANIMALS



**SUMMER OF
LOVE 1967**



1987

War on Drugs, 1971



[Report: Aide says Nixon's war on drugs targeted blacks, hippies](#)

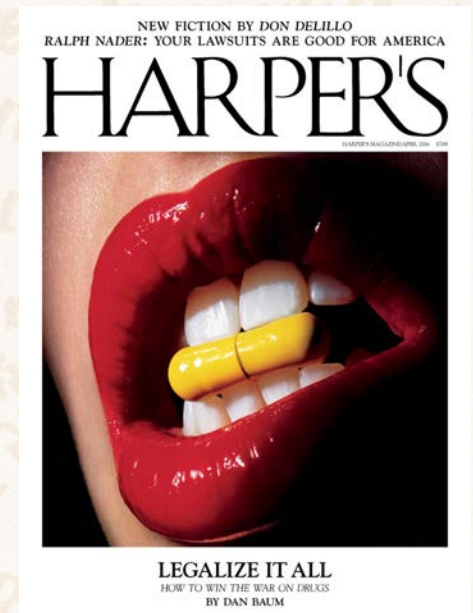
In 1996 an aid to the Nixon administration -- former Nixon domestic policy chief John Ehrlichman -- admitted in an interview that Nixon started the war on drugs in 1971 on purpose in order to harass and arrest Black people and leftists.

Published in 2016

“The Nixon campaign in 1968, and the Nixon White House after that, had two enemies: the antiwar left and black people,” former Nixon domestic policy chief John Ehrlichman said in 2016.

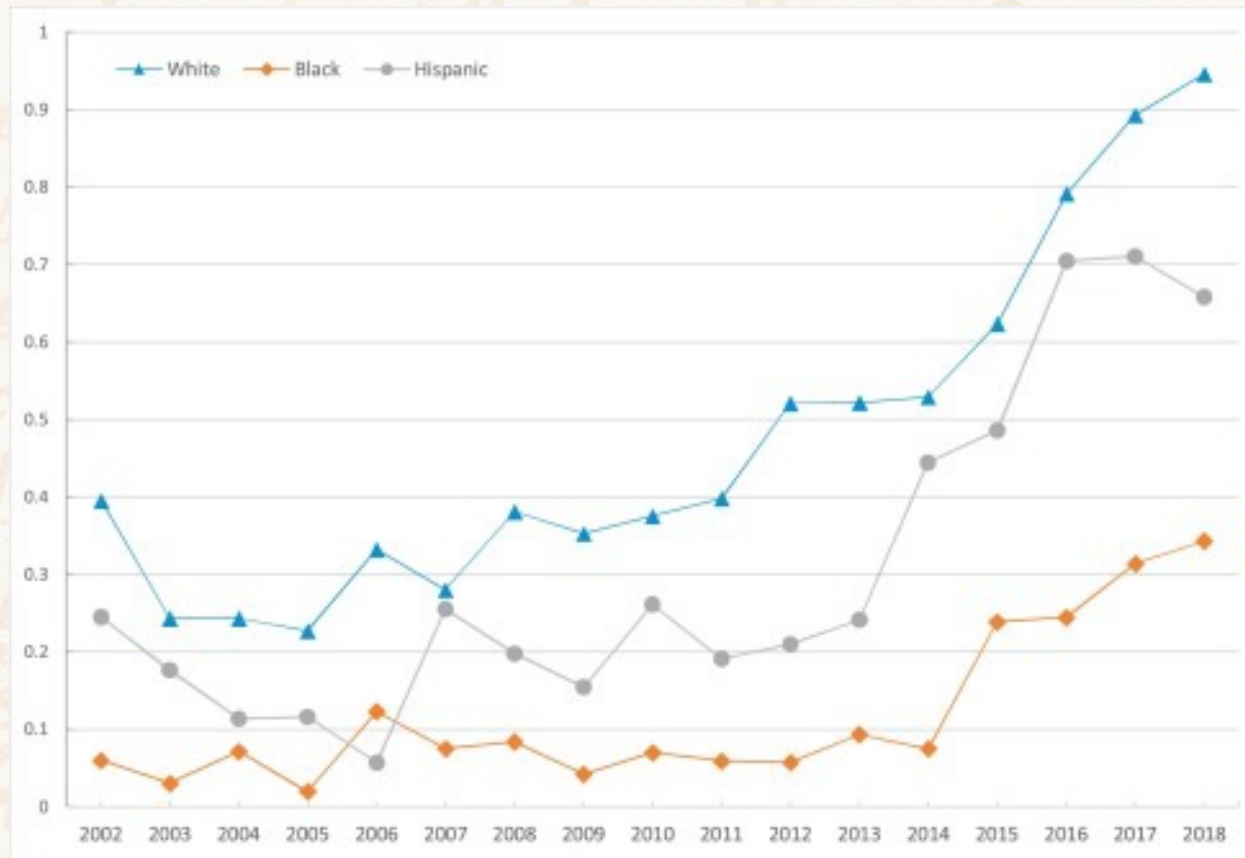
“You understand what I’m saying? We knew we couldn’t make it illegal to be either against the war or black, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin. And then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities,” Ehrlichman said. “We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news. Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course we did.”

<https://edition.cnn.com/2016/03/23/politics/john-ehrichman-richard-nixon-drug-war-blacks-hippie/index.html>



Actual LSD usage rates

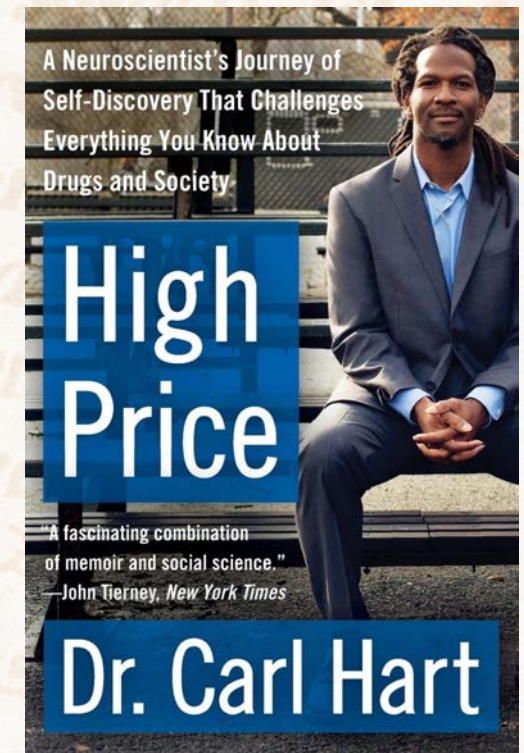
2002-2018



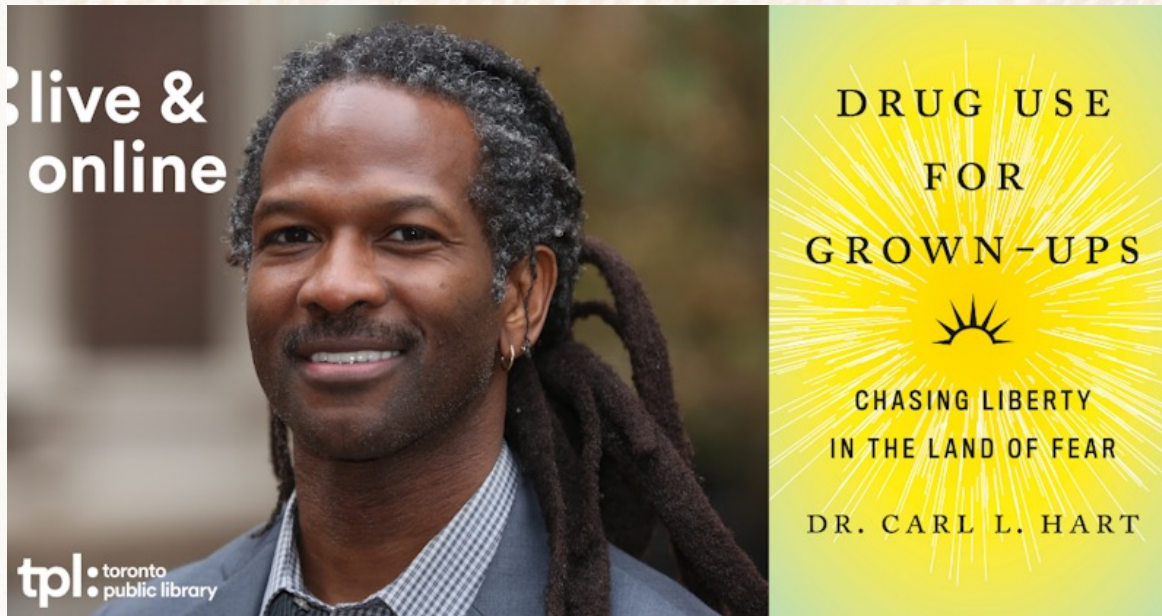
Psychedelic justice and racial politics

LSD, Kesey wrote, "lets you in on something. When you're tripping, the idea of race disappears; the idea of sex disappears; you don't even know what species you are sometimes. And I don't know of anybody who hasn't come back from that being more humane, more thoughtful, more understanding."

- Starting in 1971, African Americans were targeted by War on Drugs, and incarcerated at rates several times that of white people
- Sentencing of crack vs. cocaine (associated with Black users vs. white users) was 100x more severe
- Many people, mostly Black, are still in jail for life sentences for possession of cannabis
- Early LSD tests were done on uninformed subjects in hospitals and asylums, largely poor and Black, and included devastating trials that last several consecutive days, up to 174 in one case
- The discourse has shifted for the opioid epidemic (is it partly because most victims are white?)



‘what’s wrong with getting high?’



2nd psychedelic renaissance happening NOW



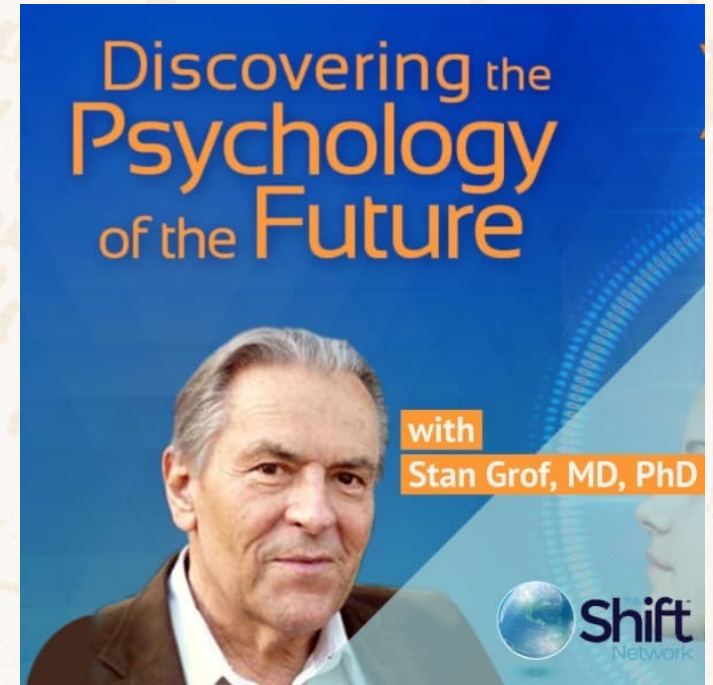
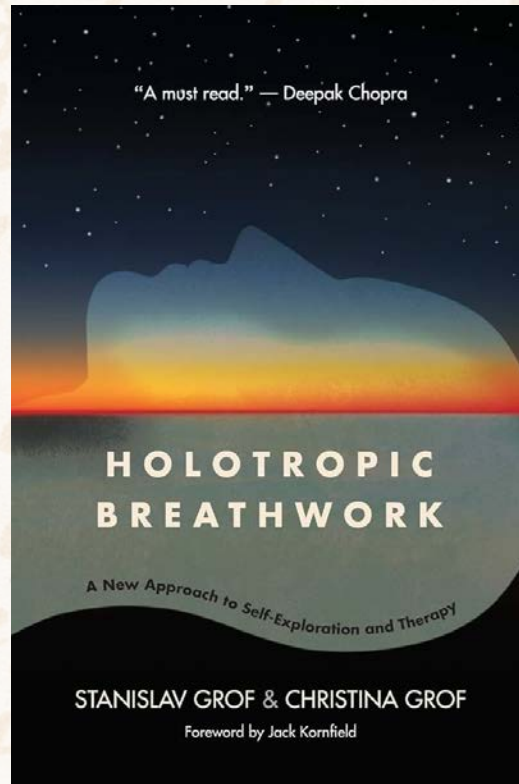
Breaking of patterns
and grooves

Music

Help of guides

Ego-dissolution:
'I'm not my ego'

Stanislav Grof and 'holotropic states'



Conclusion and some take-aways

- A wide range of altered states
- Psychiatry and psychology will need to change to better accommodate these important experiences
- Much to be learned still about states like dreaming, psychedelic journeying and many others
- Our culture has very contradictory attitudes about these states
 - Especially since the modern era, from 18th century onward
 - A mixture of fear and fascination
- Literature has been exploring them for centuries & can offer interesting tools for engaging with them even though the relationship between literature/language and altered consciousness is complicated
- Many of these states can be healing, positive, meaningful
- Altered states can also help us become more aware of non-verbal world around us (and inside us) – so we can become more whole and more aligned with the community of life on the planet

Altered States of Consciousness and Literature Doctoral Workshop

With the support of the English Department (UNIL),

and CUSO English Doctoral School

June 5-7, 2024, Crêt-Bérard, Vaud

Plenary talks:

Wed, June 5, 13:30: **Juliana Dresvina (Oxford): "Literary Alterity: Three Ways"**

Wed, June 5, 16:45: **Ansgar Rougemont-Bücking (Associate Professor of psychiatry and psychotherapy based in Vevey), "The Vamprocene – or the Crises of Consciousness of our Epoch"**

Thursday, June 6, 16:45: **Hermann Herlinghaus (Freiburg-am-Brisgau): "Approaching Western Psychoactive Modernity"**

Programme

June 5 Wednesday

9:30-10:00 Shuttles from the train station

10:00-10:30 Coffee and arrival

10:30 - 12:00 Introduction by all participants, Denis Renevey and Agnieszka Soltysik-Monnet (UNIL) introduction and breath workshop

12:30-13:30 Lunch

13:30 – 15:00 Keynote: Juliana Dresvina (University of Oxford): "Literary Alterity: Three Ways"

15:00-15:30 Coffee break

15:30-16:00 David Elminger (Psychology, UNIBE) "Rewriting the Psychedelic Story"

16:00-16:30 Leonardo Perez (postdoc, Pierre de Bois Foundation for Current History), "The Second Psychedelic Revolution at the United Nations: Indigenous People's Psychedelics at the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples EMRIP and the World Intellectual Property Organization WIPO"

16:30 – 16:45 Break

16:45 – 18:15 Keynote: Dr Ansgar Rougemont-Bücking, M.D., "The Vamprocene – or the Crises of Consciousness of our Epoch"

18:15: Break before dinner

18:45: Dinner

20:00: Campfire

Thursday June 6

7:30 breakfast

8:30 – 10:00 Workshop by Juliana Dresvina (PhD students only)

10:00-10:20 Coffee break

10:20 – 10:50 Olena Danylovyh (UNIL), "Walter Hilton and Intention in Ascent"

10:50-11:20, Corinne Clark (UNIGE), "Drunk on God: Exploring Sensory Intoxication in Middle English Contemplative Literature"

11.20-11:30 Short break

11:30 – 12:00 Mireille Le Berre (UNIL), "The Dryness of Christ and the Shyness of Four."

12:00 – 12:30 Ana Rita Parreiras Reis (UNIL), "Despair as an Altered State of Consciousness? Some Clues from Late-Medieval Guidance Texts"

12:30 -13.30 Lunch

13.30 – 14:00 Lorenzo Zaggia (University of Padova/UNIL), "Stirred, not Shaken: The Quest for Spiritual Transformation in *The Cloud of Unknowing*"

14:00 – 14:30 Juliette Vuille (UNIL), "Shape Shifting and Animal Spirits in Old Icelandic Literature"

14:30 -- 15:00 Roberto Biolzi (UNIL, History) "War and Drugs in the Scandinavian world: the Case of the Berserker"

15:00 – 15:30 Coffee break

15:30 – 16:00 Céline Magada (UNIL), "Altered Judgment: Poison in Early Modern England"

16:00 – 17:30 Keynote: Hermann Herlinghaus (Freiburg-am-Brisgau) "Approaching Western Psychoactive Modernity"

17:30 – 18:00 Short break

18:00 – 19:00 Dancing in the Sark

19:15 – 20:00 Dinner

20:00 Campfire

Friday June 7

7:30 Breakfast

8:30 – 9:00 Sara Khalili Jahromi (UNIFR), "An Altered Mind Wandering in Taziyeh's Eternal Time"

9:00 – 9:30 Jana Constantin (UNINE), "'Half sleep, half waking': Hypnagogia in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*"

9:30 – 10:00 Maxime Pellaton (UNIL), "'Math, Not Even Once': Altered States as an Aesthetic and Generic Strategy in H.P. Lovecraft's 'The Dreams in the Witch House'"

10:00 – 10:30 Coffee break

10:30 – 12:00 Hermann Herlinghaus workshop (PhD students only)

12:30 – 13:30 Lunch

13:30 – 14:00 Corey Heimlich (UNIL), "Trap House Denizens in *Breaking Bad*"

14:00 – 14:30 Nora Zufferey (UNIGE), "Low Frequencies and Spirit Possession in Jayne Cortez's Jazz Poetry and Jean Binta Breeze's Dub Poetry"

14:30 – 15:00 Robert Green (UNIL), "Remedies for Eco-Technological Catastrophe: Re-envisioning Psychedelics' Potential for Helping Solve Today's Challenges"

15:00 – 15:30 Coffee break

15:30 – 16:30 Closing remarks, round-robin

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