

lions taking the drug it was certain that the occasional bad trips would start to add up.¹

Around ten percent of alcohol drinkers are abusers. Then as now booze casualties were epidemic, so the jaded press paid no attention to the misadventures of one drunk. Their attitude was different with psychedelic drugs. Only one out of every thousand LSD users reported a negative experience, yet the press dug up a thousand lurid stories of bark-eating Princeton grads. Some of these were the result of amateur experimentation on a new scale. But there was such an appetite for anti-LSD tales that many hoaxes developed. The medical director of a mental hospital in Pennsylvania earned banner headlines when he announced that eight patients had been blinded looking at the sun during acid trips. When the story was later exposed as a fraud, little attention was paid to the quiet retraction. Indeed the medical director was credited with a nice try.

Throughout the land anti-drug people—politicians, police officials, institutional psychiatrists—popped up to denounce LSD and marijuana as the most dangerous threats confronted by the human race. This sort of propaganda was guaranteed to create mass hysteria and to sow the seeds of bad set and setting.

I flew into corrective action, giving public lectures and interviews and writing magazine articles that outlined the need for guidance, preparation, protected settings, and knowledge of centering techniques to deal with trip-confusions. Few of these communications reached the national press. Some counseling in understanding media was clearly indicated.

The lunch with Marshall McLuhan at the Plaza was informative. "Dreary Senate hearings and courtrooms are not the platforms for your message, Tim. You call yourself a philosopher, a reformer. Fine. But the key to your work is advertising. You're promoting a product. The new and improved accelerated brain. You must use the most current tactics for arousing consumer interest. Associate LSD with all the good things that the brain can produce—beauty, fun, philosophic wonder, religious revelation, increased intelligence, mystical romance. Word of mouth from satisfied consumers will help, but get your rock and roll friends to write jingles about the brain." He sang:

Lysergic acid hits the spot.
Forty billion neurons, that's a lot.

"The problem is tricky," I said. "The opposition beat us to the punch. The psychiatrists and police propagandists have already stressed the negative, which can be dangerous when the mind is re-imprinting under LSD.

They may be deliberately provoking bad trips. They never mention the 999 good experiences. They keep repeating 'LSD: jump out a window.' When some ill-prepared person goes spinning into new realms, he or she wonders what happens now? Oh yeah. Jump out a window. It's like the over-solicitous mother who warned her kids not to push peanuts up their noses."

"Exactly," agreed McLuhan. "That's why your advertising must stress the religious. Find the god within. This is all frightfully interesting. Your competitors are naturally denouncing the brain as an instrument of the devil. Priceless!

"To dispel fear you must use your public image. You are the basic product endorser. Whenever you are photographed, smile. Wave reassuringly. Radiate courage. Never complain or appear angry. It's okay if you come off as flamboyant and eccentric. You're a professor, after all. But a confident attitude is the best advertisement. You must be known for your smile."

The waiter, who seemed to be hanging on McLuhan's words, knocked my champagne glass into my lap. McLuhan looked at me expectantly. I smiled.

"You're going to win the war, Timothy. Eventually. But you're going to lose some major battles on the way. You're not going to overthrow the Protestant Ethic in a couple of years. This culture knows how to sell fear and pain. Drugs that accelerate the brain won't be accepted until the population is geared to computers. You're ahead of your time. They'll attempt to destroy your credibility."

"It's incredibility I'm after," I replied.

And that's how it happened, step by step from the Harvard firing to the deportations, from Laredo to the Liddy raid, I was pushed from scientific detachment and scholarly retirement into public opposition to the policies of the ruling regime.

By this time I no longer regretted being an outcast. I was beginning to enjoy the fray. And I was not alone in the rebellion. Millions of Americans, exactly at this time, were also pushed to open resistance to the group that had taken over Washington after the assassination. A cultural revolution was brewing.

My understanding of the situation was this: America was experiencing a quantum jump in intelligence. For the first time in our history a large and influential sector of the populace was coming to disrespect institutional authority, not as members of organized dissident groups but as intelligent individuals, highly selective political consumers who demanded responsive and effective leadership, which no existing party, no religion, no labor union seemed able to provide. Thus a conflict between the old industrial society and the new information society was to be played

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FLASHBACKS

An Autobiography

Timothy Leary



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