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THE USE OF PSYCHEDELIC DRUGS is rapidly increasing, yet there does not seem to be a great increase in the information describing or attempting to explain the psychedelic phenomenon to non-users.

The nature of the psychedelic experience may be impossible to communicate, but it appears important to try to explain it to people who have not used drugs, and especially to those who may at some time make use of them. While current research on possible chromosomal damage or other deleterious side effect which may result from the use of LSD, mescaline, or psilocybin is inconclusive, there is one unquestionable danger — that of "bad trips".

When a tablet of LSD is ingested (containing, usually, from 100 to 250 micrograms of dlysergic acid diethylamide) only one percent of the drug ever reaches the brain. Forty-five minutes (approximately) later, after the drug has completely disappeared from the brain, the individual experiences the psychedelic state (Whitaker, p. 120). The chemical seems to retard serotonin metabolism in the brain, serotonin being one of the agents which transfers information from one brain cell to another.

Presumably awareness is the result of a process wherein information (perceptions and conceptions) is brought into the brain and recognized in terms of various patterns set up in the brain as the result of previous experience, the most important of these past experiences are the structures (conceptual categories) which allow the individual to categorize his information. The structures which permit categorization may be called value-filters. Many of these structures are the result of the rapid early learning which the individual went through during the first years of his life.

conversation where the important point to focus our attention is on the conversation, and our consciousness blocks off extraneous sounds such as that of a water-tap dripping in another room.

By retarding serotonin metabolism, LSD suspends these value-filters temporarily, and when the chemical's effect wears off, a new set of value-structures may be imagined to form, organized in the light of the psychedelic experience. These new categories would be built up from all the knowledge and experience the individual brought to his trip (the set), the environment in which his trip takes place (the setting), and the association of past and present experience during the hallucinogenic session itself.

The result is a feeling in the individual of being in an uncategorized world. There are no structures which determine which things are important to perception and which aren't. For example, in normal activity we filter out certain things in the environment as unimportant, as in a Hallucinogenics break down this filter so that peeling a mushroom apart will seem as important and as fascinating as a conversation on the individual's favorite topic. More importantly, as there are no categories, everything seems to be one big single thing. The parts of this single thing are all fascinating and beautiful. We see an object in normal perception (such as a pen) in terms of certain categories; we recognize it as an implement for writing, being of such a shape, colour etc. in the psychedelic state the perceived object is seen as an object pure and simple. Its function is not as important as its existence in itself, and its existence as part of the single thing (see Whitaker, p. 122-123).

A bad trip is a horrifying and emotionally shattering experience. The subject's main desire is to stop going through the thing he is experiencing, which is not possible without the use of sedatives which may not be available. It is primarily a feeling that the environment,

Psychedelic

the single thing, is hostile.

This feeling of hostility may be occasioned by various things, the two most frequent are the setting and the subject's self-questioning. At this point it may be important to distinguish between two approaches to hallucinogenics, one active, and the other passive. In the active variety the individual becomes involved in things outside of himself, such as music, watching the movements of colors in a Turkish carpet, or whatever. The passive tripper is reflective and uses the drug to relate ideas (now that there are no categories to separate them) at a phenomenal speed and with amazing clarity.

THE BAD TRIP CAN BE AVOIDED by taking certain precautions. The first of these is having a guide, someone who has done drugs before and who will remain with the neophyte during his experience.

The guide will reassure him that he isn't the first person to feel as he does, and that all is (given the context) normal. The guide and the setting of the trip should be chosen with a relative amount of care.

The most important prevention is to realize what is happening. First, one should never forget that the psychedelic state is, in part, the product of a chemical reaction and is thus transient. Next, one should have some idea of what type of experience he is going to go through. For example, I have noticed that when I was tripping I was aware that in my normal perceptions I had a tendency to see things in terms of man, and so form an anthropomorphic and man-centered universe. This concept seemed ludicrous when I was tripping. I saw mankind as a highly developed animal species populating the planet, and so just one more part of the single thing.

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SUGGESTED READING

1. Leary, Metzner, and Alpert, *The Psychedelic Experience*.
2. Masters and Houston. *Varieties of Psychedelic Experience*.
3. Solomon (ed.) *LSD: The Consciousness-Expanding Drug*.
4. Watts: *The Joyous Cosmology*.
5. Watts: *This Is It*. (The essay of interest is the one entitled "The New Alchemy")
6. Whitaker' *Drugs & The Law: The Canadian Scene*.

Experience

A friend of mine in a letter described a series of associations he made in a different manner. : "less than two months ago I was tripped out on some fine acid and went to a party that a psychology student was having. While I was at the party I became very disturbed and eventually decided to leave the party to discover why I was disturbed. I began walking the intricately patterned sidewalks laden with warm glittering snow back to my apartment and tried to resolve the mystery of the demonic disturbance. Then, just before I was to step onto the porch, it occurred to me that I was disurbed by the thought of being disturbed, *ad infinitum*; and the problem lay completely in my own head."

When the individual perceives the single thing he may react violently to being swallowed up in it, losing himself to it. Instead of allowing himself to be reduced to just a part of the single thing, his ego tries to assert itself by forcing him to believe that he is the single thing. Everything he can think of fits into a pattern of repetition, unending repetition, unending repetition, and he becomes deluded into believing that it is all bound up in one quivering nerve of awareness that is his ego, his conscious self. Everything seems to suggest that all that exists is this ego which is aware and then the existential void; in other words, the perceived exists only insofar as there exists "my" perception of it. The mistake he makes is to feel that this endless cycle of activity he perceives is dependent upon

him and his personal awareness, thus making him, in some way, the cycle. The ego disappears, and the individual experiences what Dr. Leary calls the psychedelic experience, what a mystic would call the mystical experience, what a theologian would call God, what Tillich and other philosophers would call the Ultimate Ground of Being, or Being-in-Itself, what a scientist might call evolution, or what this writer would simply call the "I" which possess "my" ego.

This experience is perhaps the most satisfying and beautiful one an individual may go through, but it may be blocked by certain fears the individual may have before taking the drug. Leary lists five fears: a fear of the loss of rational control; a fear of doing something socially unacceptable or silly; a fear of finding out something about society you don't want to be aware of; a fear of discovering something about society you don't want to be aware of and the fear of what he calls "Ontological Addiction" — a fear of discovering something so beautiful you will never want to return. If one thinks about them, they are all rather silly fears, but very common ones.

Suppose you do decide to drop acid? I believe the best and most rewarding method is a very disciplined one. I would suggest that before taking drugs one should spend three to six months reading as much about acid and related drugs as he can find (a short suggested bibliography to begin with follows this article). Spend part of that time reading mystical and religious writing describing mysticism (*The Tibetan Book of the Dead* edited by W.Y. Evans-Wentz — and especially the introduction by Jung — is a good starting point), as well as philosophical works on metaphysics. Also spend time in meditation and self-reflection, try to become aware of what your personal hang-ups are so that they won't come as a surprise to you when you drop. During this time also get to know your guide, smoke a lot of grass with him, get to trust him. Then choose a good environment, with familiar objects around. Most importantly, keep a sense of humor.

All in all, the last question must remain a paraphrase of Hamlet: To drop or not to drop. It remains your choice (the legal establishment warns you that if you choose to drop you will be committing a crime). If, however, you do choose to drop, then make the most you can of it, or at least avoid making any of the mistakes which may make it more dangerous than the laws want you to believe it is. And, don't get caught with acid in your possession.

