

Part II: The Crack-Up

Timothy Leary came late to psychedelics. By the time he launched the Harvard Psilocybin Project in 1960, there had already been a full decade of psychedelic research in North America, with hundreds of academic papers and several international conferences to show for it. Leary himself seldom made reference to this body of work, preferring to give the impression that his own psychedelic research represented a radical new chapter in the annals of psychology. In 1960, the future of psychedelic research looked bright. Yet within the brief span of five years, the political and cultural weather completely shifted, a moral panic about LSD engulfed America, and virtually all psychedelic research and therapy were either halted or driven underground. *What happened?*

“Timothy Leary” is the too-obvious answer to that question. Just about everyone I’ve interviewed on the subject—dozens of people—has prefaced his or her answer by saying, “It’s far too easy to blame Leary,” before proceeding to do precisely that. It’s hard to avoid the conclusion that the flamboyant psychology professor with a tropism bending him toward the sun of publicity, good *or* bad, did grave damage to the cause of psychedelic research. He did. And yet the social forces unleashed by the drugs themselves once they moved from the laboratory out into the culture were bigger and stronger than any individual could withstand—or take credit for. With or without the heedless, joyful, and amply publicized antics of Timothy Leary, the sheer Dionysian power of LSD was itself bound to shake things up and incite a reaction.

By the time Leary was hired by Harvard in 1959, he had a national reputation as a gifted personality researcher, and yet even then—before his first shattering experience with psilocybin in Cuernavaca during the summer of 1960—Leary was feeling somewhat disenchanted with his field. A few years before, while working as director of psychiatric research at Kaiser Hospital in Oakland, Leary and a colleague had conducted a clever experiment to assess the effectiveness of psychotherapy. A group of patients seeking psychiatric care were divided into two groups; one received the standard treatment of the time, the other (consisting of

people on a waiting list) no treatment at all. After a year, one-third of all the subjects had improved, one-third had gotten worse, and one-third remained unchanged—regardless of which group they were in. Whether or not a subject received treatment made no difference whatsoever in the outcome. So what good was conventional psychotherapy? Psychology? Leary had begun to wonder.

Leary quickly established himself at Harvard's Department of Social Relations as a dynamic and charismatic, if somewhat cynical, teacher. The handsome professor was a great talker, in the expansive Irish mode, and could charm the pants off anyone, especially women, for whom he was apparently catnip. Leary had always had a roguish, rebellious streak—he was court-martialed during his time at West Point for violating the honor code and expelled from the University of Alabama for spending the night in a women's dorm—and Harvard-the-institution brought out rebellion in him. Leary would speak cynically of psychological research as a "game." Herbert Kelman, a colleague in the department who later became Leary's chief adversary, recalls the new professor as "personable" (Kelman helped him find his first house) but says, "I had misgivings about him from the beginning. He would often talk out of the top of his head about things he knew nothing about, like existentialism, and he was telling our students psychology was all a game. It seemed to me a bit cavalier and irresponsible."

I met Kelman, now in his nineties, in the small, overstuffed apartment where he lives with his wife in an assisted-living facility in West Cambridge. Kelman displayed no rancor toward Leary yet evinced little respect for him either as a teacher or as a scientist; indeed, he believes Leary had become disenchanted with science well before psychedelics came into his life. In Kelman's opinion, even before the psilocybin, "He was already halfway off the deep end."

Leary's introduction to psilocybin, poolside in Mexico during the summer of 1960, came three years after R. Gordon Wasson published his notorious *Life* magazine article about the "mushrooms that cause strange visions." For Leary, the mushrooms were transformative. In an afternoon, his passion to understand the human mind had been reignited—indeed, had exploded.

"In four hours by the swimming pool in Cuernavaca I learned more about the mind, the brain, and its structures than I did in the preceding

fifteen as a diligent psychologist,” he wrote later in *Flashbacks*, his 1983 memoir. “I learned that the brain is an underutilized biocomputer . . . I learned that normal consciousness is one drop in an ocean of intelligence. That consciousness and intelligence can be systematically expanded. That the brain can be reprogrammed.”

Leary returned from his journey with an irresistible urge to “rush back and tell everyone,” as he recalled in *High Priest*, his 1968 memoir. And then in a handful of sentences he slid into a prophetic voice, one in which the whole future trajectory of Timothy Leary could be foretold:

Listen! Wake up! You are God! You have the Divine plan engraved in cellular script within you. Listen! Take this sacrament! You'll see! You'll get the revelation! It will change your life!

But at least for the first year or two at Harvard, Leary went through the motions of doing science. Back in Cambridge that fall, he recruited Richard Alpert, a promising assistant professor who was heir to a railroad fortune, and, having secured the tacit approval of their department chair, David McClelland, the two launched the Harvard Psilocybin Project, operating out of a tiny broom closet of an office in the Department of Social Relations in a house at 5 Divinity Avenue. (I went looking for the house, but it has long since been razed and replaced by a sprawling, block-long brick science building.) Leary, ever the salesman, had convinced Harvard that the research he proposed to undertake was squarely in the tradition of William James, who in the early years of the century had also studied altered states of consciousness and mystical experience at Harvard. The university placed one condition on the research: Leary and Alpert could give the new drugs to graduate students, but not to undergraduates. Before long, an intriguingly titled new seminar showed up in the Harvard course listings:

Experimental Expansion of Consciousness

The literature describing internally and externally induced changes in awareness will be reviewed. The basic elements of mystical experiences will be studied cross-culturally. The

members of the seminar will participate in experiences with consciousness expanding methods and a systematic analysis of attention will be paid to the problems of methodology in this area. This seminar will be limited to advanced graduate students. Admission by consent of the instructor.

“Experimental Expansion of Consciousness” proved to be extremely popular.

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IN ITS THREE YEARS of existence, the Harvard Psilocybin Project accomplished surprisingly little, at least in terms of science. In their first experiments, Leary and Alpert administered psilocybin to hundreds of people of all sorts, including housewives, musicians, artists, academics, writers, fellow psychologists, and graduate students, who then completed questionnaires about their experiences. According to “Americans and Mushrooms in a Naturalistic Environment: A Preliminary Report,” most subjects had generally very positive and occasionally life-changing experiences.

“Naturalistic” was apt: these sessions took place not in university buildings but in comfortable living rooms, accompanied by music and candlelight, and to a casual observer they would have looked more like parties than experiments, especially because the researchers themselves usually joined in. (Leary and Alpert took a heroic amount of psilocybin and, later, LSD.) At least in the beginning, Leary, Alpert, and their graduate students endeavored to write up accounts of their own and their subjects’ psilocybin journeys, as if they were pioneers exploring an unmapped frontier of consciousness and the previous decade of work surveying the psychedelic landscape had never happened. “We were on our own,” Leary wrote, somewhat disingenuously. “Western literature had almost no guides, no maps, no texts that even recognized the existence of altered states.”

Drawing on their extensive fieldwork, however, Leary did do some original work theorizing the idea of “set” and “setting,” deploying the words in this context for the first time in the literature. These useful terms, if not the concepts they denote—for which Al Hubbard deserves

most of the credit—may well represent Leary’s most enduring contribution to psychedelic science. Leary and Alpert published a handful of papers in the early years at Harvard that are still worth reading, both as well-written and closely observed ethnographies of the experience and as texts in which the early stirrings of a new sensibility can be glimpsed.

Building on the idea that the life-changing experiences of volunteers in the Psilocybin Project might have some broader social application, in 1961 Leary and a graduate student, Ralph Metzner, dreamed up a more ambitious research project. The Concord Prison Experiment sought to discover if the potential of psilocybin to change personality could be used to reduce recidivism in a population of hardened criminals. That this audacious experiment ever got off the ground is a testimony to Leary’s salesmanship and charm, for not only the prison psychiatrist but the warden had to sign off on it.

The idea was to compare the recidivism rates of two groups of prisoners in a maximum security prison in Concord, Massachusetts. A group of thirty-two inmates received psilocybin in sessions that took place in the prison, with one member of Leary’s team taking the drug with them—so as not to condescend to the prisoners, Leary explained, or treat them like guinea pigs.* The other remained straight in order to observe and take notes. A second group of inmates received no drugs or special treatment of any kind. The two groups were then followed for a period of months after their release.

Leary reported eye-popping results: ten months after their release, only 25 percent of the psilocybin recipients had ended up back in jail, while the control group returned at a more typical rate of 80 percent. But when Rick Doblin at MAPS meticulously reconstructed the Concord experiment decades later, reviewing the outcomes subject by subject, he concluded that Leary had exaggerated the data; in fact, there was no statistically significant difference in the rates of recidivism between the two groups. (Even at the time, the methodological shortcomings of the study had prompted David McClelland, the department chair, to write a scathing memo to Metzner.) Of Leary’s scientific work, Sidney Cohen, himself a psychedelic researcher, concluded that “it was the sort of research that made scientists wince.”

Leary played a more tangential role in one other, much more credible study done in the spring of 1962: the Good Friday Experiment, described

in chapter one. Unlike the Concord Prison Experiment, the “Miracle at Marsh Chapel,” as it became known, made a good faith effort to honor the conventions of the controlled, double-blind psychology experiment. Neither the investigators nor the subjects—twenty divinity students—were told who had gotten the drug and who had gotten the placebo, which was active. The Good Friday study was far from perfect; Pahnke suppressed the fact that one subject freaked out and had to be sedated. Yet Pahnke’s main conclusion—that psilocybin can reliably occasion a mystical experience that is “indistinguishable from, if not identical with,” the experiences described in the literature—still stands and helped to inspire the current wave of research, particularly at Johns Hopkins, where it was replicated (roughly speaking) in 2006.

But most of the credit for the Good Friday Experiment rightfully belongs to Walter Pahnke, not Timothy Leary, who was critical of its design from the start; he had told Pahnke it was a waste of time to use a control group or a placebo. “If we learned one thing from that experience,” Leary later wrote, “it was how foolish it was to use a double-blind experiment with psychedelics. After five minutes, no one’s fooling anyone.”

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BY NOW, Leary had pretty much lost interest in doing science; he was getting ready to trade the “psychology game” for what he would call the “guru game.” (Perhaps Leary’s most endearing character trait was never to take himself too seriously—even as a guru.) It had become clear to him that the spiritual and cultural import of psilocybin and LSD far outweighed any therapeutic benefit to individuals. As with Hubbard and Huxley and Osmond before him, psychedelics had convinced Leary that they had the power not just to heal people but to change society and save humankind, and it was his mission to serve as their prophet. It was as though the chemicals themselves had hit upon a brilliant scheme for their own proliferation, by colonizing the brains of a certain type of charismatic and messianic human.

“We were thinking far-out history thoughts at Harvard,” Leary later wrote about this period, “believing that it was a time (after the shallow,

nostalgic fifties) for far-out visions, knowing that America had run out of philosophy, that a new, empirical, tangible meta-physics was desperately needed.” The bomb and the cold war formed the crucial background to these ideas, investing the project with urgency.

Leary was also encouraged in his shift from scientist to evangelist by some of the artists he turned on. In one notable session at his Newton home in December 1960, Leary gave psilocybin to the Beat poet Allen Ginsberg, a man who needed no chemical inducement to play the role of visionary prophet. Toward the end of an ecstatic trip, Ginsberg stumbled downstairs, took off all his clothes, and announced his intention to march naked through the streets of Newton preaching the new gospel.

“We’re going to teach people to stop hating,” Ginsberg said, “start a peace and love movement.” You can almost hear in his words the 1960s being born, the still-damp, Day-Glo chick cracking out of its shell. When Leary managed to persuade Ginsberg not to leave the house (among other issues, it was December), the poet got on the phone and started dialing world leaders, trying to get Kennedy, Khrushchev, and Mao Zedong on the line to work out their differences. In the end, Ginsberg was only able to reach his friend Jack Kerouac, identifying himself as God (“that’s G-O-D”) and telling him he *must* take these magic mushrooms.

Along with everyone else.

Ginsberg was convinced that Leary, the Harvard professor, was the perfect man to lead the new psychedelic crusade. To Ginsberg, the fact that the new prophet “should emerge from Harvard University,” the alma mater of the newly elected president, was a case of “historic comedy,” for here was “the one and only Dr. Leary, a respectable human being, a worldly man faced with the task of a Messiah.” Coming from the great poet, the words landed like seeds on the fertile, well-watered soil of Timothy Leary’s ego. (It is one of the many paradoxes of psychedelics that these drugs can sponsor an ego-dissolving experience that in some people quickly leads to massive ego inflation. Having been let in on a great secret of the universe, the recipient of this knowledge is bound to feel special, chosen for great things.)

Huxley and Hubbard and Osmond shared Leary’s sense of historical mission, but they had a very different idea of how best to fulfill it. The three were inclined to a more supply-side kind of spiritualism—first you must turn on the elite, and then let the new consciousness filter down to

the masses, who might not be ready to absorb such a shattering experience all at once. Their unspoken model was the Eleusinian mysteries, in which the Greek elite gathered in secret to ingest the sacred *kykeon* and share a night of revelation. But Leary and Ginsberg, both firmly in the American grain, were determined to democratize the visionary experience, make transcendence available to everyone *now*. Surely that was the great blessing of psychedelics: for the first time, there was a technology that made this possible. Years later Lester Grinspoon, a Harvard professor of psychiatry, captured the ethos nicely in a book he wrote with James Bakalar, *Psychedelic Drugs Reconsidered*: “Psychedelic drugs opened to mass tourism mental territories previously explored only by small parties of particularly intrepid adventurers, mainly religious mystics.” As well as visionary artists like William Blake, Walt Whitman, and Allen Ginsberg. Now, with a pill or square of blotter paper, anyone could experience firsthand exactly what in the world Blake and Whitman were talking about.

But this new form of spiritual mass tourism had not yet received much advertising or promotion before the spring of 1962. That’s when news of controversy surrounding the Harvard Psilocybin Project first hit the newspapers, beginning with Harvard’s own student paper, the *Crimson*. Harvard being Harvard, and Leary Leary, the story quickly spread to the national press, turning the psychology professor into a celebrity and hastening his, and Alpert’s, departure from Harvard, in a scandal that both prefigured and helped fuel the backlash against psychedelics that would soon close down most research.

Leary and Alpert’s colleagues had been uncomfortable about the Harvard Psilocybin Project almost from the start. A 1961 memo from David McClelland had raised questions about the absence of controls in Leary and Alpert’s “naturalistic” studies as well as the lack of medical supervision and the fact that the investigators insisted on taking the drugs with their subjects, of whom there were hundreds. (“How often should a person take psilocybin?” he asked, referring to Leary and Alpert.) McClelland also called the two researchers out on their “philosophical naivete.”

“Many reports are given of deep mystical experiences,” he wrote, “but their chief characteristic is the wonder at one’s own profundity.” The following year, in a detailed critique of Ralph Metzner’s Concord Prison

Experiment, McClelland accused the graduate student of failing to “analyz[e] your data objectively and carefully. You know what the conclusions are to be . . . and the data are simply used to support what you already know to be true.” No doubt the popularity of the Psilocybin Project among the department’s students, as well as its cliquishness, rankled the rest of the faculty, who had to compete with Leary and Alpert and their drugs for a precious academic resource: talented graduate students.

But these grievances didn’t leave the premises of 5 Divinity Avenue—not until March 1962. That’s when McClelland, responding to a request by Herb Kelman, called a meeting of the faculty and students to air concerns about the Psilocybin Project. Kelman asked for the meeting because he had heard from his graduate students that a kind of cult had formed around Alpert and Leary, and some students felt pressure to participate in the drug taking. Early in the meeting Kelman took the floor: “I wish I could treat this as scholarly disagreement, but this work violates the values of the academic community. The whole program has an anti-intellectual atmosphere. Its emphasis is on pure experience, not on verbalizing findings.

“I’m also sorry to say that Dr. Leary and Dr. Alpert have taken a very nonchalant attitude toward these experiments—especially considering the effects these drugs might have on the subjects.

“What most concerns me,” Kelman concluded, “and others who have come to me, is how the hallucinogenic and mental effects of these drugs have been used to form a kind of ‘insider’ sect within the department. Those who choose not to participate are labeled as ‘squares.’ I just don’t think that kind of thing should be encouraged in this department.” Psychedelic drugs had divided a Harvard department just as they would soon divide the culture.

Alpert responded forcefully, claiming the work was “right in the tradition of William James,” the department’s presiding deity, and that Kelman’s critique amounted to an attack on academic freedom. But Leary took a more conciliatory approach, consenting to a few reasonable restrictions on the research. Everyone went home thinking the matter had been closed.

Until the following morning.

The room had been so completely jammed with faculty and students that no one noticed the presence of an undergraduate reporter from the *Crimson* named Robert Ellis Smith, furiously taking notes. The next day's *Crimson* put the controversy on page 1: "Psychologists Disagree on Psilocybin Research." The day after that, the story was picked up by the *Boston Herald*, a Hearst paper, and given a much punchier if not quite as accurate headline: "Hallucination Drug Fought at Harvard—350 Students Take Pills." Now the story was out, and very soon Timothy Leary, always happy to supply a reporter with a delectably outrageous quote, was famous. He delivered a particularly choice one after the university forced him to put his supply of Sandoz psilocybin pills under the control of Health Services: "Psychedelic drugs cause panic and temporary insanity in people who have not taken them."

By the end of the year, Leary and Alpert had concluded that "these materials are too powerful and too controversial to be researched in a university setting." They announced in a letter to the *Crimson* they were forming something called the International Federation for Internal Freedom (IFIF) and henceforth would be conducting research under its umbrella rather than Harvard's. They decried the new restrictions placed on psychedelic research, not only at Harvard, but by the federal government: in the wake of the thalidomide tragedy, in which a new sedative given to pregnant women for morning sickness had caused terrible birth defects in their children, Congress had given the FDA authority to regulate experimental drugs. "For the first time in American history," the IFIF announced, "and for the first time in the Western world since the Inquisition there now exists a scientific underground." They predicted that "a major civil liberties issue of the next decade will be the control and expansion of consciousness."

"Who controls your cortex?" they wrote in their letter to the *Crimson*—which is to say, to students. "Who decides on the range and limits of your awareness? If you want to research your own nervous system, expand your consciousness, who is to decide that you can't and why?"

It's often said that in the 1960s psychedelics "escaped from the laboratory," but it would probably be more accurate to say they were thrown over the laboratory wall, and never with as much loft or velocity as by Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert at the end of 1962. "We're through playing the science game," Leary told McClelland when he

returned to Cambridge that fall. Now, Leary and Alpert were playing the game of cultural revolution.

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THE LARGER COMMUNITY of psychedelic researchers across North America reacted to Leary's provocations with dismay and then alarm. Leary had been in regular contact with the West Coast and Canadian groups, exchanging letters and visits with his far-flung colleagues on a fairly regular basis. (He and Alpert had paid a visit to Stolaroff's foundation in 1960 or 1961; "I think they thought we were too straitlaced," Don Allen told me.) Soon after arriving at Harvard, Leary had gotten to know Huxley, who was teaching for a semester at MIT. Huxley had become extremely fond of the roguish professor, and shared his aspirations for psychedelics as an agent of cultural transformation, but worried that Leary was moving too fast and too flagrantly.* During his last visit to Cambridge (Huxley would die in Los Angeles in November 1963, on the same day as John F. Kennedy), Huxley felt that Leary "had talked such nonsense . . . that I became quite concerned. Not about his sanity—because he is perfectly sane—but about his prospects in the world."

Soon after Leary announced the formation of the International Federation for Internal Freedom, Humphry Osmond traveled to Cambridge to try to talk some sense into him. He and Abram Hoffer were worried that Leary's promotion of the drugs outside the context of clinical research threatened to provoke the government and upend their own research. Osmond also faulted Leary for working without a psychopharmacologist and for treating these "powerful chemicals [as] harmless toys." Hoping to distance serious research from irresponsible use, and troubled that the counterculture was contaminating his formerly neutral term "psychedelic," Osmond tried once again to coin a new one: "psychodelytic." I don't need to tell you it failed to catch on.

"You must face these objections rather than dissipate them with a smile, however cosmic," Osmond told him. There it was again: the indestructible Leary smile! But Osmond got nothing more than that for his troubles.

Myron Stolaroff weighed in with a blunt letter to Leary describing the IFIF as “insane” and accurately prophesying the crack-up to come: It will “wreak havoc on all of us doing LSD work all over the nation . . .

“Tim, I am convinced you are heading for very serious trouble if your plan goes ahead as you have described it to me, and it would not only make a great deal of trouble for you, but for all of us, and may do irreparable harm to the psychedelic field in general.”

But what exactly *was* the plan of the IFIF? Leary was happy to state it openly: to introduce as many Americans to “the strong psychedelics” as it possibly could in order to change the country one brain at a time. He had done the math and concluded that “the critical figure for blowing the mind of the American society would be four million LSD users and this would happen by 1969.”

As it would turn out, Leary’s math was not far off. Though closer to two million Americans had tried LSD by 1969, this cadre had indeed blown the mind of America, leaving the country in a substantially different place.

But perhaps the most violent response to Leary’s plans for worldwide mental revolution came from Al Hubbard, who had always had an uneasy relationship with the professor. The two had met soon after Leary got to Harvard, when Hubbard made the drive to Cambridge in his Rolls-Royce, bringing a supply of LSD he hoped to trade for some of Leary’s psilocybin.

“He blew in with that uniform,” Leary recalled, “laying down the most incredible atmosphere of mystery and flamboyance, and really impressive bullshit!”—a subject on which Leary was certainly qualified to judge. Hubbard “started name-dropping like you wouldn’t believe . . . claimed he was friends with the Pope.

“The thing that impressed me is, on one hand he looked like a carpetbagger con man, and on the other he had these most impressive people in the world in his lap, basically backing him.”

But Leary’s legendary charm never had much traction with Hubbard, a deeply conservative and devout man who disdained both the glare of publicity and the nascent counterculture. “I liked Tim when we first met,” he said years later, “but I warned him a dozen times” about staying out of trouble and the press. “He seemed like a well-intentioned person, but then he went overboard . . . he turned out to be completely no good.” Like

many of his colleagues, Hubbard strongly objected to Leary's do-it-yourself approach to psychedelics, especially his willingness to dispense with the all-important trained guide. His attitude toward Leary might also have been influenced by his extensive contacts in law enforcement and intelligence, which by now had the professor on their radar.

According to Osmond, the Captain's antipathy toward Leary surfaced alarmingly during a psychedelic session the two shared during this period of mounting controversy. "Al got greatly preoccupied with the idea he ought to shoot Timothy, and when I began to reason with him that this would be a very bad idea . . . I became much concerned he might shoot me."

Hubbard was probably right to think that nothing short of a bullet was going to stop Timothy Leary now. As Stolaroff put the matter in closing his letter to Leary, "I suppose there is little hope that with the bit so firmly in your mouth you can be deterred."

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BY THE SPRING OF 1963, Leary had one foot out of Harvard, skipping classes and voicing his intention to leave at the end of the school year, when his contract would be up. But Alpert had a new appointment in the School of Education and planned to stay on—until another explosive article in the *Crimson* got them both fired. This one was written by an undergraduate named Andrew Weil.

Weil had arrived at Harvard with a keen interest in psychedelic drugs—he had devoured Huxley's *Doors of Perception* in high school—and when he learned about the Psilocybin Project, he beat a path to Professor Leary's office door to ask if he could participate.

Leary explained the university rule restricting the drugs to graduate students. Yet, trying to be helpful, he told Weil about a company in Texas where he might order some mescaline by mail (it was still legal at the time), which Weil promptly did (using university stationery). Weil became fascinated with the potential of psychedelics and helped form an undergraduate mescaline group. But he wanted badly to be part of Leary and Alpert's more exclusive club, so when in the fall of 1962 Weil began to hear about other undergraduates who had received drugs from Richard

Alpert, he was indignant. He went to his editor at the *Crimson* and proposed an investigation.

Weil developed leads on a handful of fellow students whom Alpert had turned on in violation of university rules. (Weil would later write that “students and others were using hallucinogens for seductions both heterosexual and homosexual.”) But there were two problems with his scoop: none of the students to whom Alpert supposedly gave drugs were willing to say so on the record, and the *Crimson*’s lawyers were worried about printing defamatory charges against professors. The lawyers advised Weil to turn over his information to the administration. He could then write a story reporting on whatever actions the university took in response to the charges, thereby reducing the newspaper’s legal exposure. But Weil still needed a student to come forward.

He traveled to New York City to meet with the prominent father of one of them—Ronnie Winston—and offered him a deal. As Alpert tells the story,* “He went to Harry Winston”—the famous Fifth Avenue jeweler—“and he said, ‘Your son is getting drugs from a faculty member. If your son will admit to that charge, we’ll cut out your son’s name. We won’t use it in the article.’” So young Ronnie went to the dean and, when asked if he had taken drugs from Dr. Alpert, confessed, adding an unexpected fillip: “Yes, sir, I did. And it was the most educational experience I’ve had at Harvard.”

Alpert and Leary appear to be the only Harvard professors fired in the twentieth century. (Technically, Leary wasn’t fired, but Harvard stopped paying him several months before his contract ended.) The story became national news, introducing millions of Americans to the controversy surrounding these exotic new drugs. It also earned Andrew Weil a plum assignment from *Look* magazine to write about the controversy, which spread the story still further. Describing the psychedelic scene at Harvard in the third person, Weil alluded to “an undergraduate group . . . conducting covert research with mescaline,” neglecting to mention he was a founding member of that group.

This was not, suffice it to say, Andrew Weil’s proudest moment, and when I spoke to him about it recently, he confessed that he’s felt badly about the episode ever since and had sought to make amends to both Leary and Ram Dass. (Two years after his departure from Harvard, Alpert embarked on a spiritual journey to India and returned as Ram Dass.)

Leary readily accepted Weil's apology—the man was apparently incapable of holding a grudge—but Ram Dass refused to talk to Weil for years, which pained him. But after Ram Dass suffered a stroke in 1997, Weil traveled to Hawaii to seek his forgiveness. Ram Dass finally relented, telling Weil that he had come to regard being fired from Harvard as a blessing. “If you hadn't done what you did,” he told Weil, “I would never have become Ram Dass.”

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HERE, UPON THEIR EXIT from Harvard, we should probably take our leave of Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert, even though their long, strange trip through American culture still had a long, strange way to go. The two would now take their show (with its numerous ex-students and hangers-on) on the road, moving the International Federation for Internal Freedom (which would later morph into the League for Spiritual Discovery) from Cambridge to Zihuatanejo, until the Mexican government (under pressure from U.S. authorities) kicked them out, then briefly to the Caribbean island of Dominica, until that government kicked them out, before finally settling for several raucous years in a sixty-four-room mansion in Millbrook, New York, owned by a wealthy patron named Billy Hitchcock.

Embraced by the rising counterculture, Leary was invited (along with Allen Ginsberg) to speak at the first Human Be-In in San Francisco, an event that drew some twenty-five thousand young people to Golden Gate Park in January 1967, to trip on freely distributed LSD while listening to speakers proclaim a new age. The ex-professor, who for the occasion had traded in his Brooks Brothers for white robes and love beads (and flowers in his graying hair), implored the throng of tripping “hippies”—the term popularized that year by the local newspaper columnist Herb Caen—to “turn on, tune in, drop out.” The slogan—which he at first said he had thought up in the shower but years later claimed was “given to him” by Marshall McLuhan—would cling to Leary for the rest of his life, earning him the contempt of parents and politicians the world over.

But Leary's story only gets weirder, and sadder. Soon after his departure from Cambridge, the government, alarmed at his growing

influence on the country's youth, launched a campaign of harassment that culminated in the 1966 bust in Laredo; he was driving his family to Mexico on vacation, when a border search of his car turned up a small quantity of marijuana. Leary would spend years in jail battling federal marijuana charges and then several more years on the lam as an international fugitive from justice. He acquired this status in 1970 after his bold escape from a California prison, with the help of the Weathermen, the revolutionary group. His comrades managed to spirit Leary out of the country to Algeria, into the arms of Eldridge Cleaver, the Black Panther, who had established a base of operations there. But asylum under Cleaver turned out to be no picnic: the Panther confiscated his passport, effectively holding Leary hostage. Leary had to escape yet again, this time making his way to Switzerland (where he found luxurious refuge in the chalet of an arms dealer), then (after the U.S. government persuaded Switzerland to jail him) on to Vienna, Beirut, and Kabul, where he was finally seized by U.S. agents and remanded to an American prison, now maximum security and, for a time, solitary confinement. But the persecution only fed his sense of destiny.

The rest of his life is an improbable 1960s tragicomedy featuring plenty of courtrooms and jails (twenty-nine in all) but also memoirs and speeches and television appearances, a campaign for governor of California (for which John Lennon wrote, and the Beatles recorded, the campaign song, "Come Together"), and a successful if somewhat pathetic run on the college lecture circuit teamed up with G. Gordon Liddy. Yes, the Watergate burglar, who in an earlier incarnation as Dutchess County assistant DA had busted Leary at Millbrook. Through it all, Leary remains improbably upbeat, never displaying anger or, it would seem from the countless photographs and film clips, forgetting Marshall McLuhan's sage advice to smile always, no matter what.

Meanwhile, beginning in 1965, Leary's former partner in psychedelic research, Richard Alpert, was off on a considerably less hectic spiritual odyssey to the East. As Ram Dass, and the author of the 1971 classic *Be Here Now*, he would put his own lasting mark on American culture, having blazed one of the main trails by which Eastern religion found its way into the counterculture and then the so-called New Age. To the extent that the 1960s birthed a form of spiritual revival in America, Ram Dass was one of its fathers.

But Leary's post-Harvard "antics" are relevant to the extent they contributed to the moral panic that now engulfed psychedelics and doomed the research. Leary became a poster boy not just for the drugs but for the idea that a crucial part of the counterculture's DNA could be spelled out in the letters *LSD*. Beginning with Allen Ginsberg's December 1960 psilocybin trip at his house in Newton, Leary forged a link between psychedelics and the counterculture that has never been broken and that is surely one of the reasons they came to be regarded as so threatening to the establishment. (Could it have possibly been otherwise? What if the cultural identity of the drugs had been shaped by, say, a conservative Catholic like Al Hubbard? It's difficult to imagine such a counter history.)

It didn't help that Leary liked to say things like "LSD is more frightening than the bomb" or "The kids who take LSD aren't going to fight your wars. They're not going to join your corporations." These were no empty words: beginning in the mid-1960s, tens of thousands of American children actually *did* drop out, washing up on the streets of Haight-Ashbury and the East Village.* And young men were refusing to go to Vietnam. The will to fight and the authority of Authority had been undermined. These strange new drugs, which seemed to change the people who took them, surely had *something* to do with it. Timothy Leary had said so.

But this upheaval would almost certainly have happened without Timothy Leary. He was by no means the only route by which psychedelics were seeping into American culture; he was just the most notorious. In 1960, the same year Leary tried psilocybin and launched his research project, Ken Kesey, the novelist, had his own mind-blowing LSD experience, a trip that would inspire him to spread the psychedelic word, and the drugs themselves, as widely and loudly as he could.

It is one of the richer ironies of psychedelic history that Kesey had his first LSD experience courtesy of a government research program conducted at the Menlo Park Veterans Hospital, which paid him seventy-five dollars to try the experimental drug. Unbeknownst to Kesey, his first LSD trip was bought and paid for by the CIA, which had sponsored the Menlo Park research as part of its MK-Ultra program, the agency's decade-long effort to discover whether LSD could somehow be weaponized.

With Ken Kesey, the CIA had turned on exactly the wrong man. In what he aptly called “the revolt of the guinea pigs,” Kesey proceeded to organize with his band of Merry Pranksters a series of “Acid Tests” in which thousands of young people in the Bay Area were given LSD in an effort to change the mind of a generation. To the extent that Ken Kesey and his Pranksters helped shape the new zeitgeist, a case can be made that the cultural upheaval we call the 1960s began with a CIA mind-control experiment gone awry.

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IN RETROSPECT, the psychiatric establishment’s reaction was probably unavoidable the moment that Humphry Osmond, Al Hubbard, and Aldous Huxley put forward their new paradigm for psychedelic therapy in 1956–1957. The previous theoretical models used to make sense of these drugs were, by comparison, easy to fold into the field’s existing frameworks without greatly disturbing the status quo.

“Psychotomimetics” fit nicely into the standard psychiatric understanding of mental illness—the drugs’ effects resembled familiar psychoses—and “psycholytics” could be incorporated into both the theory and the practice of psychoanalysis as a useful adjunct to talking therapy. But the whole idea of psychedelic therapy posed a much stiffer challenge to the field and the profession. Instead of interminable weekly sessions, the new mode of therapy called for only a single high-dose session, aimed at achieving a kind of conversion experience in which the customary roles of both patient and therapist had to be reimagined.

Academic psychiatrists were also made uncomfortable by the spiritual trappings of psychedelic therapy. Charles Grob, the UCLA psychiatrist who would play an important role in the revival of research, wrote in a 1998 article on the history of psychedelics that “by blurring the boundaries between religion and science, between sickness and health, and between healer and sufferer, the psychedelic model entered the realm of applied mysticism”—a realm where psychiatry, increasingly committed to a biochemical understanding of the mind, was reluctant to venture. With its emphasis on set and setting—what Grob calls “the critical extra-pharmacological variables”—psychedelic therapy was also a little too

close to shamanism for comfort. For so-called shrinks not entirely secure in their identity as scientists (the slang is short for “headshrinkers,” conjuring images of witch doctors in loincloths), this was perhaps too far to go. Another factor was the rise of the placebo-controlled double-blind trial as the “gold standard” for testing drugs in the wake of the thalidomide scandal, a standard difficult for psychedelic research to meet.

By 1963, leaders of the profession had begun editorializing against psychedelic research in their journals. Roy Grinker, the editor of the *Archives of General Psychiatry*, lambasted researchers who were administering “the drugs to themselves and . . . [had become] enamored with the mystical hallucinatory state,” thus rendering them “disqualified as competent investigators.” Writing the following year in the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)*, Grinker deplored the practice of investigators taking the drugs themselves, thereby “rendering their conclusions biased by their own ecstasy.” An unscientific “aura of magic” surrounded the new drugs, another critic charged in *JAMA* in 1964. (It didn’t help that some psychedelic therapists, like Betty Eisner, celebrated the introduction of “the transcendental into psychiatry” and developed an interest in paranormal phenomenon.)

But although there is surely truth to the charge that researchers were often biased by their own experiences using the drugs, the obvious alternative—abstinence—posed its own set of challenges, with the result that the loudest and most authoritative voices in the debate over psychedelics during the 1960s were precisely the people who knew the least about them. To psychiatrists with no personal experience of psychedelics, their effects were bound to look a lot more like psychoses than transcendence. The psychotomimetic paradigm had returned, now with a vengeance.

After quantities of “bootleg LSD” showed up on the street in 1962–1963 and people in the throes of “bad trips” began appearing in emergency rooms and psych wards, mainstream psychiatry felt compelled to abandon psychedelic research. LSD was now regarded as a cause of mental illness rather than a cure. In 1965, Bellevue Hospital in Manhattan admitted sixty-five people for what it called LSD-induced psychoses. With the media now in full panic mode, urban legends about the perils of LSD spread more rapidly than facts.* The same was often

true in the case of ostensibly scientific findings. In one widely publicized study, a researcher reported in *Science* that LSD could damage chromosomes, potentially leading to birth defects. But when the study was later discredited (also in *Science*), the refutation received little attention. It didn't fit the new public narrative of LSD as a threat.

Yet it was true that the mid-1960s saw a surge of people on LSD showing up in emergency rooms with acute symptoms of paranoia, mania, catatonia, and anxiety, as well as “acid flashbacks”—a spontaneous recurrence of symptoms days or weeks after ingesting LSD. Some of these patients were having genuine psychotic breaks. Especially in the case of young people at risk for schizophrenia, an LSD trip can trigger their first psychotic episode, and sometimes did. (It should be noted that any traumatic experience can serve as such a trigger, including the divorce of one's parents or graduate school.) But in many other cases, doctors with little experience of psychedelics mistook a panic reaction for a full-blown psychosis. Which usually made things worse.

Andrew Weil, who as a young doctor volunteered in the Haight-Ashbury Free Clinic in 1968, saw a lot of bad trips and eventually developed an effective way to “treat” them. “I would examine the patient, determine it was a panic reaction, and then tell him or her, ‘Will you excuse me for a moment? There's someone in the next room who has a serious problem.’ They would immediately begin to feel much better.”

The risks of LSD and other psychedelic drugs were fiercely debated during the 1960s, both among scientists and in the press. Voices on both sides of this debate typically cherry-picked evidence and anecdotes to make their case, but Sidney Cohen was an exception, approaching the question with an open mind and actually conducting research to answer it. Beginning in 1960, he published a series of articles that track his growing concerns. For his first study, Cohen surveyed forty-four researchers working with psychedelics, collecting data on some five thousand subjects taking LSD or mescaline on a total of twenty-five thousand occasions. He found only two credible reports of suicide in this population (a low rate for a group of psychiatric patients), several transient panic reactions, but “no evidence of serious prolonged physical side effects.” He concluded that when psychedelics are administered by qualified therapists and researchers, complications were “surprisingly infrequent” and that LSD and mescaline were “safe.”

Leary and others often cited Cohen's 1960 paper as an exoneration of psychedelics. Yet in a follow-up article published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* in 1962, Cohen reported new and "alarming" developments. The casual use of LSD outside the clinical setting, and in the hands of irresponsible therapists, was leading to "serious complications" and occasional "catastrophic reactions." Alarmed that physicians were losing control of the drug, Cohen warned that "the dangers of suicide, prolonged psychotic reactions and antisocial acting out behavior exist." In another paper published in the *Archives of General Psychiatry* the following year, he reported several cases of psychotic breaks and an attempted suicide and presented an account of a boy who, after ingesting a sugar cube laced with LSD that his father, a detective, had confiscated from a "pusher," endured more than a month of visual distortions and anxiety before recovering. It was this article that inspired Roy Grinker, the journal's editor, to condemn psychedelic research in an accompanying commentary, even though Cohen himself continued to believe that psychedelics in the hands of responsible therapists had great potential. A fourth article that Cohen published in 1966 reported still more LSD casualties, including two accidental deaths associated with LSD, one from drowning and the other from walking into traffic shouting, "Halt."

But balanced assessments of the risks and benefits of psychedelics were the exception to what by 1966 had become a full-on moral panic about LSD. A handful of headlines from the period suggests the mood: "LSD-Use Charged with Killing Teacher"; "Sampled LSD, Youth Plunges from Viaduct"; "LSD Use Near Epidemic in California"; "Six Students Blinded on LSD Trip in Sun"; "Girl, 5, Eats LSD and Goes Wild"; "Thrill Drug Warps Mind, Kills"; and "A Monster in Our Midst—a Drug Called LSD." Even *Life* magazine, which had helped ignite public interest in psychedelics just nine years before with R. Gordon Wasson's enthusiastic article on psilocybin, joined the chorus of condemnation, publishing a feverish cover story titled "LSD: The Exploding Threat of the Mind Drug That Got out of Control." Never mind that the magazine's publisher and his wife had recently had several positive LSD experiences themselves (under the guidance of Sidney Cohen); now the kids were doing it, and it had gotten "out of control." With pictures of crazed people cowering in corners, the story warned that "an LSD trip is not always a round trip"

but rather could be “a one-way trip to an asylum, a prison or a grave.”* As Clare Boothe Luce wrote to Sidney Cohen in 1965, “LSD *has* been your Frankenstein monster.”

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OTHER POWERFUL DRUGS subject to abuse, such as the opiates, have managed to maintain a separate identity as a legitimate tool of medicine. Why not psychedelics? The story of Timothy Leary, the most famous psychedelic researcher, made it difficult to argue that a bright line between the scientific and the recreational use of psychedelics could be drawn and patrolled. The man had deliberately—indeed gleefully—erased all such lines. But the “personality” of the drug may have as much to do with the collapse of such distinctions as the personalities of people like Timothy Leary or the flaws in their research.

What doomed the first wave of psychedelic research was an irrational exuberance about its potential that was nourished by the drugs themselves—that, and the fact that these chemicals are what today we would call disruptive technologies. For people working with these powerful molecules, it was impossible not to conclude that—like that divinity student running down Commonwealth Avenue—you were suddenly in possession of news with the power to change not just individuals but the world. To confine these drugs to the laboratory, or to use them only for the benefit of the sick, became hard to justify, when they could do so much for everyone, including the researchers themselves!

Leary might have made his more straitlaced colleagues cringe at his lack of caution, yet most of them shared his exuberance and had come to more or less the same conclusions about the potential of psychedelics; they were just more judicious when speaking about them in public.

Who among the first generation of psychedelic researchers would dispute a word of this classic gust of Leary exuberance, circa 1963: “Make no mistake: the effect of consciousness-expanding drugs will be to transform our concepts of human nature, of human potentialities, of existence. The game is about to be changed, ladies and gentlemen. Man is about to make use of that fabulous electrical network he carries around in

his skull. Present social establishments had better be prepared for the change. Our favorite concepts are standing in the way of a floodtide, two billion years building up. The verbal dam is collapsing. Head for the hills, or prepare your intellectual craft to flow with the current.”*

So perhaps Leary’s real sin was to have the courage of his convictions—his and everyone else’s in the psychedelic research community. It’s often said that a political scandal is what happens when someone in power inadvertently speaks the truth. Leary was all too often willing to say out loud to anyone in earshot what everyone else believed but knew better than to speak or write about candidly. It was one thing to use these drugs to treat the ill and maladjusted—society will indulge any effort to help the wayward individual conform to its norms—but it is quite another to use them to treat society itself as if it were sick and to turn the ostensibly healthy into wayward individuals.

The fact is that whether by their very nature or the way that first generation of researchers happened to construct the experience, psychedelics introduced something deeply subversive to the West that the various establishments had little choice but to repulse. LSD truly was an acid, dissolving almost everything with which it came into contact, beginning with the hierarchies of the mind (the superego, ego, and unconscious) and going on from there to society’s various structures of authority and then to lines of every imaginable kind: between patient and therapist, research and recreation, sickness and health, self and other, subject and object, the spiritual and the material. If all such lines are manifestations of the Apollonian strain in Western civilization, the impulse that erects distinctions, dualities, and hierarchies and defends them, then psychedelics represented the ungovernable Dionysian force that blithely washes all those lines away.

But it surely is not the case that the forces unleashed by these chemicals are *necessarily* ungovernable. Even the most powerful acids can be carefully handled and put to use as tools for accomplishing important things. What is the story of the first-wave researchers if not a story about searching for an appropriate container for these powerful chemicals? They tested several different possibilities: the psychotomimetic, the psycholytic, the psychedelic, and, still later, the entheogenic. None were perfect, but each represented a different way to regulate the power of these compounds, by proposing a set of protocols

for their use as well as a theoretical framework. Where Leary and the counterculture ultimately parted ways with the first generation of researchers was in deciding that no such container—whether medical, religious, or scientific—was needed and that an unguided, do-it-yourself approach to psychedelics was just fine. This is risky, as it turns out, and probably a mistake. But how would we ever have discovered this, without experimenting? Before 1943, our society had never had such powerful mind-changing drugs available to it.

Other societies have had long and productive experience with psychedelics, and their examples might have saved us a lot of trouble had we only known and paid attention. The fact that we regard many of these societies as “backward” probably kept us from learning from them. But the biggest thing we might have learned is that these powerful medicines can be dangerous—both to the individual and to the society—when they don’t have a sturdy social container: a steadying set of rituals and rules—protocols—governing their use, and the crucial involvement of a guide, the figure that is usually called a shaman. Psychedelic therapy—the Hubbard method—was groping toward a Westernized version of this ideal, and it remains the closest thing we have to such a protocol. For young Americans in the 1960s, for whom the psychedelic experience was new in every way, the whole idea of involving elders was probably never going to fly. But this is, I think, the great lesson of the 1960s experiment with psychedelics: the importance of finding the proper context, or container, for these powerful chemicals and experiences.

Speaking of lines, psychedelics in the 1960s did draw at least one of them, and it has probably never before been quite so sharp or bright: the line, I mean, between generations. Saying exactly how or what psychedelics contributed to the counterculture of the 1960s is not an easy task, there were so many other forces at work. With or without psychedelics, there probably would have been a counterculture; the Vietnam War and the draft made it more than likely. But the forms the counterculture took and its distinctive styles—of music, art, writing, design, and social relations—would surely have been completely different were it not for these chemicals. Psychedelics also contributed to what Todd Gitlin has called the “as if” mood of 1960s politics—the sense that everything now was up for grabs, that nothing given was inviolate, and

that it might actually be possible to erase history (there was that acid again) and start the world over again from scratch.

But to the extent that the upheaval of the 1960s was the result of an unusually sharp break between generations, psychedelics deserve much of the blame—or credit—for creating this unprecedented “generation gap.” For at what other time in history did a society’s young undergo a searing rite of passage with which the previous generation was utterly unfamiliar? Normally, rites of passage help knit societies together as the young cross over hurdles and through gates erected and maintained by their elders, coming out on the other side to take their place in the community of adults. Not so with the psychedelic journey in the 1960s, which at its conclusion dropped its young travelers onto a psychic landscape unrecognizable to their parents. That this won’t ever happen again is reason to hope that the next chapter in psychedelic history won’t be quite so divisive.

So maybe this, then, is the enduring contribution of Leary: by turning on a generation—the generation that, years later, has now taken charge of our institutions—he helped create the conditions in which a revival of psychedelic research is now possible.

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BY THE END OF 1966, the whole project of psychedelic science had collapsed. In April of that year, Sandoz, hoping to distance itself from the controversy engulfing the drug that Albert Hofmann would come to call his “problem child,” withdrew LSD-25 from circulation, turning over most of its remaining stocks to the U.S. government and leading many of the seventy research programs then under way to shut down.

In May of that year, the Senate held hearings about the LSD problem. Timothy Leary and Sidney Cohen both testified, attempting valiantly to defend psychedelic research and draw lines between legitimate use and a black market that the government was now determined to crush. They found a surprisingly sympathetic ear in Senator Robert F. Kennedy, whose wife, Ethel, had reportedly been treated with LSD at Hollywood Hospital in Vancouver—one of Al Hubbard’s outposts. Grilling the FDA regulators about their plans to cancel many of the remaining research

projects, Kennedy demanded to know, “Why if [these projects] were worthwhile six months ago, why aren’t they worthwhile now?” Kennedy said it would be a “loss to the nation” if psychedelics were banned from medicine because of illicit use. “Perhaps we have lost sight of the fact that [they] can be very, very helpful in our society if used properly.”

But Kennedy got nowhere. Leary, and perhaps the drugs themselves, had made drawing such distinctions impossible. In October, some sixty psychedelic researchers scattered across the United States received a letter from the FDA ordering them to stop their work.

James Fadiman, the psychologist conducting experiments on creativity at the International Foundation for Advanced Study in Menlo Park, remembers the day well. The letter revoking FDA approval of the project arrived at the very moment he had finished dosing four of his problem-solving creatives to begin their session. As he read the letter, sprawled on the floor in the next room, “four men lay, their minds literally expanding.” Fadiman said to his colleagues, “I think we need to agree that we got this letter tomorrow.” And so it was not until the following day that the research program of the International Foundation for Advanced Study, along with virtually every other research program then under way in the United States, closed down.

One psychedelic research program survived the purge: the Maryland Psychiatric Research Center at Spring Grove. Here, researchers such as Stanislav Grof, Bill Richards, Richard Yensen, and, until his death in 1971, Walter Pahnke (the Good Friday researcher) continued to explore the potential of psilocybin and LSD to treat alcoholism, schizophrenia, and the existential distress of cancer patients, among other indications. It remains something of a mystery why this large psychedelic research program was allowed to continue—as it did until 1976—when dozens of others were being closed down. Some researchers who weren’t so fortunate speculate that Spring Grove might have been making psychedelic therapy available to powerful people in Washington who recognized its value or hoped to learn from the research or perhaps wanted to retain their own access to the drugs. But the former staff members at the center I spoke to doubt this was the case. They did confirm, however, that the center’s director, Albert Kurland, MD, besides having a sterling reputation among federal officials, was exceptionally well connected in Washington and used his connections to keep the lights

on—and obtain LSD, some of it from the government—for a decade after they had been switched off everywhere else.

Yet it turns out that the events of neither 1966 nor 1976 put an end to psychedelic research and therapy in America. Moving now underground, it went on, quietly and in secret.

Coda

In February 1979, virtually all the important figures in the first wave of American psychedelic research gathered for a reunion in Los Angeles at the home of Oscar Janiger. Someone made a videotape of the event, and though the quality is poor, most of the conversation is audible. Here in Janiger's living room we see Humphry Osmond, Sidney Cohen, Myron Stolaroff, Willis Harman, Timothy Leary, and, sitting on the couch next to him, looking distinctly uncomfortable, Captain Al Hubbard. He's seventy-seven (or eight), and he's traveled from Casa Grande, Arizona, where he lives in a trailer park. He's wearing his paramilitary getup, though I can't tell if he's carrying a sidearm.

The old men reminisce, a bit stiffly at first. Some hard feelings hang in the air. But Leary, still charming, is remarkably generous, working to put everyone at ease. Their best days are behind them; the great project to which they devoted their lives lay in ruins. But something important was accomplished, they all believe—else they wouldn't be here at this reunion. Sidney Cohen, dressed in a jacket and tie, asks the question on everyone's mind—"What does it all mean?"—and then ventures an answer: "It stirred people up. It cracked their frame of reference by the thousands—millions perhaps. And anything that does that is pretty good I think."

It's Leary, of all people, who asks the group, "Does anyone here feel that mistakes were made?"

Osmond, the unfailingly polite Englishman, his teeth now in full revolt, declines to use the word "mistake." "What I would say is . . . you could have seen other ways of doing it." Someone I don't recognize cracks, "There *was* a mistake made: nobody gave it to Nixon!"

It's Myron Stolaroff who finally confronts the elephant in the room, turning to Leary to say, "We were a little disturbed at some of the things

you were doing that [were] making it more difficult to carry on legitimate research.” Leary reminds him that as he told them then, he had a different role to play: “Let us be the far-out explorers. The farther out we go, the more ground it gives the people at Spring Grove to denounce us.” And so appear responsible.

“And I just wish, I hope we all understand that we’ve all been playing parts that have been assigned to us, and there’s no good-guy/bad-guy, or credit or blame, whatever . . .”

“Well, I think we need people like Tim and Al,” Sidney Cohen offers, genially accepting Leary’s framing. “They’re absolutely necessary to get out, way out, too far out in fact—in order to move the ship . . . [turn] things around.” Then, turning to Osmond: “And we need people like you, to be reflective about it and to study it. And little by little, a slight movement is made in the totality. So, you know, I can’t think of how it could have worked out otherwise.”

Al Hubbard listens intently to all this but has little to add; he fiddles with a hardback book in his lap. At one point, he pipes up to suggest the work should go on, drug laws be damned: We should “just keep on doing it. Wake people up! Let them see for themselves what they are. I think old Carter could stand a good dose!” Carter’s defense secretary, Harold Brown, and CIA director, Stansfield Turner, too. But Hubbard’s not at all sure he wants to be on this couch with Timothy Leary and is less willing than the others to let bygones be bygones, or Leary off the hook, no matter how solicitous he is of the Captain.

“Oh, Al! I owe everything to you,” Leary offers at one point, beaming his most excellent smile at Hubbard. “The galactic center sent you down just at the right moment.”

Hubbard doesn’t crack a smile. And then, a few minutes later:
“You sure as heck contributed your part.”