
Forest Anthony-Muran, The University of Western Ontario

Supervisor: Jonathan De Souza, The University of Western Ontario

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Music degree in Music

© Forest Anthony-Muran 2022

Follow this and additional works at: https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd

Part of the Buddhist Studies Commons, Christianity Commons, Cognition and Perception Commons, Cognitive Psychology Commons, Comparative Methodologies and Theories Commons, Ethnomusicology Commons, Musicology Commons, Music Therapy Commons, New Religious Movements Commons, and the Other Chemicals and Drugs Commons

Recommended Citation

https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd/8515

This Dissertation/Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Scholarship@Western. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Thesis and Dissertation Repository by an authorized administrator of Scholarship@Western. For more information, please contact wlsadmin@uwo.ca.
Abstract

This thesis investigates the relationships between altered states of consciousness and the musical experience in religious tradition and practice. A common accompaniment to religious worship and ceremony, music is often used as a way of attempting to capture something of the ineffable and to help bring about a mystical experience. In this thesis, I make use of three contrasting case studies – the Brazilian syncretic religion Santo Daime, the historical branch of Zen Buddhism Fuke-shū, and the psychedelic rock of 1960s counterculture – to paint a portrait of the variety of ways that music has been used in different musical traditions to evoke mystical experience and how those experiences are expressed and understood in their cultural contexts. In these case studies, I explore the ways that music is used as an aid to other means of consciousness alteration, such as the entheogenic brew ayahuasca or Zen meditation. I also make the sustained argument that the ineffability of the musical experience itself can evoke a kind of “micro-mysticism” and that religious traditions which do not make use of entheogenic compounds or meditative techniques can still use music as a means of producing a milder form of consciousness alteration for the purpose of accessing mystical states.

Keywords
Mysticism, religious music, psychedelics, meditation, Buddhism, altered states of consciousness
Summary for a Lay Audience

This thesis investigates how different religions use music as a way of modifying conscious states. Music is often used in religious ceremonies in an attempt to express inexpressible ideas. In this thesis, I look at three spiritual traditions – the Brazilian Santo Daime, the Japanese Fuke-shū, and the American and British psychedelic rock of 1960s counterculture – to paint a picture of how different religions evoke a mystical experience using music. In these case studies, I discuss how music is used in combination with other tools for modifying consciousness, such as the psychedelic brew ayahuasca or Zen meditation. I also argue that music on its own conveys a kind of “micro-mysticism” and that religions that do not use mind-altering substances or intense meditative practices still often try to evoke profound religious experiences through the milder method of musical experience.
### Table of Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................... ii
Summary for Lay Audience ....................................................................................... iii
Table of Contents ...................................................................................................... iv
Introduction .............................................................................................................. 1

**Chapter I: Altered States, Mysticism, and Music** .............................................. 9
  - Altered States of Consciousness .................................................................... 9
  - Defining Mysticism ....................................................................................... 15
  - Mysticism and Music ..................................................................................... 25
  - Concluding Remarks ...................................................................................... 31

**Chapter II: The Hinos of Santo Daime** ............................................................ 32
  - Santo Daime and its Sacrament .................................................................... 33
  - Music and Religion as Technology ................................................................. 35
  - The Psychedelic Music-Mystical Feedback Loop ......................................... 39
  - Music, Archetypes, and the Machine Elves ................................................... 46
  - *Eu Tomo Esta Bebida* .................................................................................. 58
  - Concluding Remarks ...................................................................................... 62

**Chapter III: Fuke-shū, the Shakuhachi, and Honkyoku** ............................... 64
  - Shakuhachi Ontology ..................................................................................... 64
  - Representing the Void .................................................................................... 70
  - Sound, Technics, and Peering Behind the Veil ............................................ 77
  - Concluding Remarks ...................................................................................... 86

**Chapter IV: Psychedelic Rock and 1960s Counterculture** .......................... 88
  - A Tale of Two Commodities: Drugs and Music in the 1960s ..................... 88
  - Transformation and Transcendence through the Reconfiguration of Self .... 94
  - After the Revolution: Hard Drugs, the Acid Casualty, and Eastern Religion 101
  - Concluding Remarks ..................................................................................... 113

Conclusion ............................................................................................................. 116
Bibliography .......................................................................................................... 120
Curriculum Vitae ..................................................................................................... 129
This thesis aims to open our eyes to the power and strangeness of the musical experience. Perhaps for some a reminder of the depths achievable through musical listening is not necessary. Nevertheless, despite the ubiquity of music in our age of recording and reproduction, the force of the musical experience has undoubtedly been diluted, or at least altered. For many in the modern world, music has been reduced to, at best, a commodity to be tasted, reviewed, and discussed, and at worst an insidious background detail broadcast as a means of manipulating behaviour. There is perhaps social value in a more obviously pragmatic treatment of music, but in merging music with the mundane we tend to reduce it to yet another background distraction in everyday life.

The history of musical use throughout the world's cultures, however, can hardly be described as mundane. On all the earth's continents we find musical expression paired with religious ritual and the explorations of mystical states of consciousness. The most fundamental questions of the nature of human existence – questions of why, how, and by whom, dealt with through practices of religion and ritual – are also outlined in religious traditions through musical expression. The same sense of wonder, and perhaps fear, that motivated creation myths and cosmic ontologies also motivated the organization of pitch and rhythm in expressions of the divine. There is of course a good reason for why music is so often turned to as a tool for evoking these foundational questions of existence. As Vladimir Jankélévitch writes, “the musical mystery is not 'what cannot be spoken of,' the untellable, but the ineffable.”¹ Music, perhaps better than any other form of creative expression, is able to hint at the inexpressible mysteries at the heart of Being precisely because of its capacity to seemingly say something without overtly saying anything at all. There is a kind of paradox in the musical experience that reflects something of the ineffability of mysticism. This is one of the reasons why music is so often found to accompany religious ritual.

Another reason why music so often accompanies the religious is found in its capacity to evoke and guide altered states of consciousness, states that are valued in many traditions as a link to the divine. Although other tools, such as meditation and entheogenic plants, provide an arguably more intense experience of modulated consciousness, music seems to continuously make an appearance throughout the world's religions as either a guide for those undergoing altered states, or as a tool for evoking relatively milder equivalents of those states. I refer to this latter use of music as a kind of “micro-mysticism” throughout this thesis – that is to say, music used in religious contexts to evoke

---

mild mystical experiences while avoiding some of the potential dangers associated with the classical mystical-type experience. I do not develop the concept of “micro-mysticism” at length in this thesis but use the term more as a shorthand for the use of music to evoke a sense of the mystical. The traditions dealt with in this thesis all make use of additional technologies which tend to evoke a relatively more intense mystical experience. Whether used to intimate the presence of the divine or to guide phenomenologically intense psychedelic experiences toward positive psychological outcomes, music is a valuable tool for evoking transcendent states beyond our everyday experience.

Although I do discuss Buddhist philosophy and practice at length in the third chapter of this thesis, the language I use throughout is generally based on a Western conception of the mystical. The original languages of the Buddhist texts, Sanskrit and Pāli, are arguably far richer in their repertoire of terms for discussing the mystical experience and various divisions thereof. Seeing that this thesis discusses mysticism mostly from a Western perspective, making use of clinical and psychological literature that assesses the nature of exceptional states of mind mostly from the perspective of Western mysticism and Christian theology, I refrain from drawing too extensively from ancient Indian vocabulary. Nevertheless, in other contexts assessing psychedelic and classical mystical states in terms of a Buddhist conceptual system could prove to be fruitful. The unfortunate trade-off that comes with avoiding Buddhist vocabulary is that a great deal of nuance is lost, and I am forced to categorize a variety of mental states under the general Western category of “mysticism”. That said, the generality of the term is also useful in revealing notable commonalities between the unique mental states evoked by different religious traditions.

In order to support the characterization of music as a tool for evoking the sacred argued in this thesis, I draw upon historical, anthropological, musicological, and cognitive research. Of particular help have been Benny Shanon's cognitive psychological investigation of the ayahuasca experience, Helen Bonny's writings on the healing potential of music in therapy, Varela, Thompson, and Rosch's captivating exploration of human consciousness through the lenses of phenomenology and Buddhist philosophy, Sheila Whiteley's investigation of psychedelic rock, and Joona Taipale's psychological description of music as a modifying mirror. Many commentators have suggested that we are currently

---

in the midst of a so-called “Psychedelic Renaissance,” meaning that the recently renewed interest in psychedelic compounds as potential medicines for helping treat such conditions as PTSD, anxiety, and depression has led to a new abundance of research on how psychedelic drugs affect the brain and cognition. Given the frequent comparison of the classical mystical state with certain states achievable through the use of psychedelic drugs, commentators like Ben Sessa have argued that these drugs are the perfect tools for studying the phenomenon of religious experience, reminding us “of the validity of these mental spaces.” Assuming the validity of this psychological correlation, I also draw heavily upon scientific research on psychedelic states in order to better understand the relationship between altered states, religious experience, and musical experience. Of particular use have been the psychedelic studies of Roland Griffiths, William Richards, Rick Strassman, and Mendel Kaelen. I have also gained many valuable insights from Chris Letheby’s book *Philosophy of Psychedelics* which have allowed me to better express the complexities and epistemological ambiguities of the psychedelic experience.

In order to describe some the rich variety of musical use in religious cultures, I investigate three contrasting musical traditions in this thesis: the *hinários* of the syncretic Brazilian religion Santo Daime, the *honkyoku* (本曲) of the Fuke-shū (普化宗) branch of Japanese Zen Buddhism, and the psychedelic-inspired music of the American and British 1960s counterculture. This triad provides a set whose members each emphasize in turn a unique facet of the relationship between mystical experience and musical practice. Santo Daime rituals feature the use of a psychedelic and the communication of mystical experience in a context of sacred prayer and song; Fuke-shū's practice of meditation through the playing of the shakuhachi, a kind of end-blown bamboo flute developed in 16th century Japan, demonstrates the communication of mystical experience through the cultivation of mental

---


concentration, without the use of psychoactive drugs; finally, the counterculture of the 1960s that flowered into psychedelic rock features the communication of mystical experience through psychedelics in what was, at least at face-value, a secular context. In addition, Santo Daime can be seen as representative of traditions which use both a soteriological doctrine and a psychedelic substance as a means toward evoking a mystical experience, whereas Fuke-shū employed only the former and 60s counterculture employed only the latter. Nevertheless, despite their differences, each of these case studies makes use of music as a means of communicating an experience which it associates with the sacred.

Another important idea to arise from this thesis is found in the observation that the nature of the musical experience is very much dependent on the observer. According to Taipale's characterization of music as an attuned caregiver, before any kind of meaningful experience can take place, it is first necessary for our subjective emotions to attune to the “vital quality” of the musical object. Music can only affect us when it meets us where we currently stand, in the same way that a caregiver can only influence a child's emotions after first demonstrating understanding through emotional attunement. This idea could be rephrased to suggest that we also must orient ourselves properly if we are to be open to certain musical experiences. This idea reflects the notion of the “musical eye” evoked in the title of this thesis. This phrase, borrowed from a line in William Blake's “Auguries of Innocence”, reflects the visionary poet's thoughts on the limitations of our human senses. Blake writes:

_We are led to Believe a Lie_
_When we see not Thro the Eye_
_Which was Born in a Night to perish in a Night_
_When the Soul Slept in Beams of Light_
_God Appears & God is Light_
_To those poor Souls who dwell in Night_
_But does a Human Form Display_
_To those who Dwell in Realms of day_

---

Blake is skeptical of human understanding, acknowledging that important truths may bypass the capacities of our senses, at least within our ordinary conscious states. This is made even more clear in a similar line from another Blake poem, “The Everlasting Gospel”, in which the poet clarifies that we are led to believe a lie only “When you see with, not thro-, the eye.” The “musical eye,” then, referred to in the title of this thesis, represents our limits as subjects in interacting with the musical object. The concept highlights the idea that, without proper attunement, music can mean nothing to us. We must, according to Aldous Huxley's well-known citation of Blake, come to cleanse our “doors of perception” before we can fully appreciate the musical object before us. How exactly we go about cleansing our “doors of perception”, or our “musical eye”, is not entirely clear – some cultures have proposed entheogenic compounds, for example, while others have proposed living in accordance with moral principles. The given method of cleansing the doors of perception found in a religious tradition generally seems to be associated with its soteriological goals.

As we shall see in the case of Fuke-shū Zen, it is also possible to see the reverse as true: that our doors of perception are only cleansed when we see the inherent conditionality of the musical experience beneath our illusionary experience of a unified “musical work”. What it means to see the world “clearly” has no consensus amongst religious traditions, and much of the mystical experience appears to be culturally determined. It would be a reductive mistake to assume that all religions share a “common mystic core”, but it is also short-sighted to deny the similar strategies often used to grapple with common human questions. Whatever the various religious traditions may say about the value of music and mysticism, the idea of the “musical eye” implies that there are always new ways of perceiving music, beyond our everyday experience of it. Whether we cleanse our musical eye through entheogens, meditation, or our connection with community, this concept suggests that there are potential musical experiences beyond our current subjective capacity for perception. By changing our minds, through education, entheogens, or meditation, we can influence the way we relate to the musical object and alter the depths of our experience. As Blake suggests, we can reach these profound states of musical experience when we learn to see not with, but through our senses. In other words, we ourselves

must somehow find a way to become receptive to the musical object in all its depth. We ourselves must
discover how to bridge the gap between the subject and the musical object. This thesis explores how
different musical and religious traditions have attempted to bridge this gap and how those attempts
have shaped both the music and the worldviews of the practitioners involved.

The first chapter of this thesis provides a general overview of altered states of consciousness
and the history of Western mysticism, both as a universally applied concept and as a term used in the
English language. There is an important distinction between the two, since the historical use of the term
involves a pejorative connotation associated with religious practices disapproved by the Catholic
Church. The use of the term “mysticism” frequently found in religious and psychedelic studies today
borrows much from the philosopher W. T. Stace, who devised a detailed description of what the
mystical experience entails and argued for its applicability throughout the various religious traditions.11
I also use this chapter to introduce the concept of “micro-mysticism”. By exploring the concept of
mysticism and by distinguishing it from altered states of consciousness in general this chapter sets the
stage for the kinds of religious experiences to be described in later chapters.

In the second chapter I describe the attempts of the Brazilian syncretic religion Santo Daime at
evoking mystical experiences using the psychedelic brew ayahuasca, known emically as Daimé.
Significantly, within the tradition of Santo Daime as well as in all other ayahuasca-based religious
traditions, music plays a fundamental role in guiding drinkers toward beneficial mental states. This
religion, founded by Raimundo Irineu Serra in the 1930s, combines a Christian worldview with
Brazilian Amerindian ritual in order to produce religious ceremonies that use the psychedelic
technology of ayahuasca as a means of consolidating Christian belief and providing a direct experience
of divinity, particularly in the forms of Jesus and the Virgin Mary. Santo Daime ceremonies are also
characterized by communal dancing and singing, with its evocative hymns being composed with the
phenomenology of the ayahuasca experience in mind. This chapter investigates the interaction between
mystical experience and musical experience that takes place in Santo Daime ceremonies, especially
when energized by the ingestion of the boundary-dissolving ayahuasca brew.

The third chapter of this thesis concentrates on the Japanese branch of Zen Buddhism known as
Fuke-shū. This Zen sect was defined by paradox in many ways, from its status as a branch of Buddhism

which sought awakening through musical performance (despite the prohibition of musical experience in early Buddhist doctrine) to the ontological ambiguity of the shakuhachi itself, which in the tradition existed in a vague space between being a musical instrument and a spiritual tool. Fuke-shū is no longer practiced in its original form, having been banned by the Meiji government in the late 1860s. Nevertheless, the shakuhachi remains a significant instrument in Japan and the tradition of performing Fuke-shū's original repertoire continues to be performed today and has even given rise to overseas branches. This chapter also takes the time to explore the consciousness-altering effects of Buddhist meditation and Zen shakuhachi performance, making use of the work of Varela and colleagues to suggest something about the potential value of the meditative experience in teaching us about the nature of consciousness.  

The fourth chapter of this thesis focuses on the countercultural revolution of the 1960s in England and the United States, particularly in the relationship between the newly popularized psychedelic compound LSD and the contemporaneous popular music of groups such as the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. Though the countercultural revolution was not explicitly a religious movement, it nevertheless featured many of the characteristics of one, and even had its own “high priests” in the personages of Timothy Leary and Ken Kesey, who spoke of LSD as a sacrament that would bring about a radical societal transformation. In this chapter I also analyze parts of the Beatles' album *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, drawing from an interpretive framework based around Whiteley's concept of “psychedelic coding”, the idea that aspects of the psychedelic experience were translated into musical elements and disseminated through performance and recording in the era of psychedelic rock. This chapter makes the argument, however, that the progressive, transformational goals aimed at by albums such as *Sgt. Pepper* would not have been achievable if early psychedelic rock musicians fully embraced the wild extremes of experimentation. Instead, by encompassing creative freedom within forms and patterns familiar to fans of popular music, bands like the Beatles were able to successfully attune to the wants of their audiences and act as guides leading toward the goal of transformation. I explore this aspect of the cultural and financial success of *Sgt. Pepper* in detail through Taipale's concept of music as a “modifying mirror”. This chapter also briefly explores some

---

12 Varela, *The Embodied Mind*.


14 Whiteley, *The Space Between the Notes*.

15 Taipale, “The Modifying Mirror.”
of the reasons for the ultimate “failure” of the countercultural revolution while also drawing attention to some of the cultural and musical branches that grew out of it, arguing that the ideal of societal transformation was indeed achieved, though perhaps not as the hippies had anticipated.

In the end, this thesis aims to remind its reader of the profound connection between music and meaning. Much more than a background accompaniment meant to modulate emotions, music has been used in many religious traditions as an expression of the ineffable, as a method of outlining cosmic mysteries without needing to state anything directly. Whether music is used as a method of exploring consciousness, or as a guide for directing the mind in altered states, it often acts as an accompaniment to religious ritual and practice, complimenting myth and the creation of meaning. If the true potential of music is to be recognized in clinical fields like music therapy, or even psychedelic-assisted therapy making use of music, it is important that we recognize the deep historical connections that exist between music and the sacred in human culture and acknowledge that there are ways of hearing that exist beyond our everyday state of consciousness. To truly unlock the creative and healing potentials of music, we must first learn to see not with, but through the musical eye.
Chapter I
Altered States, Mysticism, and Music

Since altered states of consciousness and mysticism are fundamental to this thesis, in this chapter I provide an investigation of the two topics and a brief history of the term “mysticism” and its usage. Later, through the works of William James, W.T. Stace, William A. Richards, and Walter Pahnke, I describe the contemporary use of the word “mysticism” in the fields of psychology and clinical psychedelic research. By means of Abraham Maslow's concept of peak-experience, I attempt to emphasize the therapeutic advantages of the mystical experience. I also propose that mystical experience encompasses a larger category than the relatively intense experiences often described in the literature, suggesting that a kind of “micro-mysticism” can be found in certain religious, artistic, and musical experiences, and that the therapeutic benefits may be similar to their more classical forms.

Altered States of Consciousness

The quality of our conscious experience appears to be highly variable. Though the familiarity of everyday life convinces us of the solidity of our identity and mental being, the extreme personal permutations we undergo as we age and mature from birth to death illustrate the variability of what we think of as the self. On a smaller timescale, we also experience dramatic changes in our conscious state when we drift into sleep, a state of consciousness which offers the equally unusual possibilities of surrealistic visions or an experiential void. Finally, even the flow of emotions we experience throughout the day imbues our consciousness with contrasting qualities which alter our perception of reality. One doesn't need to be a Vimbuza drummer in Northern Malawi, an experienced Indian Yogi, or a metropolitan psychonaut in order to have experienced an altered state of awareness – alteration appears to be a common experience for any conscious being.

That said, not all altered states of consciousness (ASCs) are alike. For this reason, it is possible


distinguish between the minor variants of everyday experience and the extreme contrasts that constitute, for example, mystical, religious, and psychedelic experiences. Charles T. Tart defines the subjective experience of ASCs as “a qualitative alteration in the overall pattern of mental functioning, such that the experiencer feels his consciousness is radically different from the way it functions ordinarily.”18 Expanding on this definition and highlighting the temporal element, Imants Barušš defines ASCs as “stable patterns of physiological, cognitive and experiential events different from those of the ordinary waking state.”19 This definition draws attention to the idea that ASCs are sustained states in which elements of conscious experience are altered from those states with which we are ordinarily familiar. Naturally, there are many elements of consciousness which may be subject to change, and the quality of consciousness experienced will inevitably depend closely on a number of variables. Early psychedelic researchers in the 1950s and 60s for example wrote at length on the importance of “set and setting”. Ido Hartogsohn observes that “the controversial Harvard psychologist” and psychedelic advocate Timothy Leary is often given credit for establishing the importance of these variables and that Leary and his colleagues would across multiple papers “make the claim that the set and setting is the most important determinant of the contents of psychedelic experiences.”20 Here “set” refers to the “internal state” of a person entering into the ASC, “including personality, preparation for the experience, intention,” while “setting” refers to environmental factors, “including the physical environment, the emotional/social environment, and finally the cultural environment – the ideas and beliefs which are prevalent in the society regarding drug effects and the world in general.”21 Although the terms “set and setting” were originally used in reference to the psychedelic experience, their use has since expanded into the study of other ASCs, such as those related to religious and mystical experience.22


21Ibid.

The importance of set and setting almost need not be mentioned. It seems obvious that our mental and environmental contexts are essential in shaping conscious experience. When viewing paintings at an exhibition, for instance, perhaps as important as the paintings themselves is the backdrop against which we view them. Marcel Duchamp and the Dadaists recognized the importance of setting in determining an artistic experience, exploiting the influence of the gallery itself in imbuing found objects, such as machine scraps or urinals, with the dignified import of high art. Similarly, Monet's *Nymphéas bleus* is likely to look far more impressive hanging in the Musée d'Orsay than above a suburban living room window. Mindset – determined by variables such as aesthetic preference, personal identity, past experience, and education - will also significantly influence any artistic experience. For this reason, it can be said that in any artistic encounter most of the overall work is actually done by the spectator. The artist merely sets in motion the potential affordances of an aesthetic experience, similar to the popular Enlightenment era notion of God as the creator of a clockwork universe. The artist shapes a horizon of possibilities, while it is the viewer who creates the actual experience.

If the role of set and setting in shaping experience is so obvious, then why has it been discussed at such length in the study of psychedelics? There is a practicality behind the answer, and a hint of it is to be found in the term “psychedelic” itself. The term was first coined by psychiatrist and LSD researcher Humphry Osmond in a correspondence with author Aldous Huxley. Both men felt that the then-popular term “psychomimetic” was insufficient, as these psychoactive drugs did far more than mimic psychosis; consequently, Osmond proposed the term “psychedelic”, stemming from the Greek words for “mind” (ψυχή) and “to manifest” (δηλείν). The resulting neologism suggests an important observation about this class of psychoactives: They are mind-manifesting.

Psychedelics, as is commonly known, began their life in the modern West as a psychotherapeutic aid. Lysergic acid diethylamide-25, before becoming popularly known as LSD, was marketed by the Sandoz corporation under the name Delysid and sold to researchers such as Osmond who were interested in its therapeutic potential. This potential of the Delysid compound stemmed

---


from its capacity to allow patients to more closely access the content of their unconscious minds. Blewett and Chwelos, in the introduction to their pioneering *Handbook for the Therapeutic Use of Lysergic Acid Diethylamide-25*, characterized the healing power of the psychoactive as follows: “On the basis of self-knowledge...the patient can, with the therapist's help, clearly see the inadequacies in the value system which has underlain his previous behaviour and can learn how to alter this in accordance with his altered understanding.”25 With this in mind, early Canadian LSD researchers from the so-called “Saskatchewan Project” put together a number of trials in order to investigate if the psychedelic could help cure such problems as alcoholism. In a 1958 study, Blewett and colleagues found that, six to eight months after guided LSD psychotherapy sessions, “ten of the sixteen patients stayed completely sober, five showed a substantial reduction in their alcohol consumption, and only one remained unchanged,” strengthening their conviction that “self-surrender and self-acceptance are more easily achieved in the LSD experience” and that this can lead to a positive psychological transformation.26

Nevertheless, the capacity of psychedelics to help reveal the operation of the mind to itself is not without danger. Negative psychedelic experiences are always a possibility and often seem to result from a lack of attention paid to set and setting. “These factors, set and setting, have such a vast effect on the overall outcome of the psychedelic experience that they absolutely cannot be disregarded,” cautions Ben Sessa. “When one hears horror stories of 'trips' gone wrong, it is invariably because a lack of attention was paid to these factors.”27 One such horror story can be read in the pages of Griffiths et al.'s psilocybin trials, in which a volunteer claimed the first session to be “the worst experience in her life and that she would rather spend three lifetimes on a mountaintop meditating than repeat what she had just experienced.”28 Accordingly, great care is paid to set and setting in psychedelic research in order to minimize fear, anxiety, or delusions.29 Although we should be aware of the importance of set

---

26Ibid., 121.
29It should be noted, however, that the volunteer persisted in the study and had a highly pleasant experience in the following session, and during a follow-up a month after the sessions ended claimed the experience to be “the single most personally meaningful and spiritually significant of her life.” Griffiths et al., “Psilocybin Occasioned Mystic-Type
and setting in shaping all of our conscious experiences, clinical trials have shown that, when it comes to psychedelics, their “mind-manifesting” character makes attention paid to these two variables an absolute necessity.

As mentioned previously, set and setting have also been applied in the study of mystical experience. In a psychological study exploring the reported experiences of individuals stationed alone in a natural setting, Ralph W. Hood Jr. investigated the correlation of set and setting with the evocation of religious feeling, finding that incongruities between stress expectation and reality often led to the evocation of a reported mystical experience. In an earlier study, John Rosegrant had found that mystical experience in nature was more often reported by individuals in a communal setting and with a low stress mindset. Although these findings are necessarily limited in scope, they nevertheless suggest that the intensity of meaning we glean from an experience is strongly determined by its context, both physical and psychological. While the connection between experience in nature and mysticism appears to be strong, the whole context must also be right for the evocation of a sense of deep meaning to take place. Similar conclusions have been reached in the field of psychedelic research. In the foundational psilocybin studies of Griffiths and colleagues, quoted above, 72.2% of volunteers reported having had a “complete mystical experience” after two guided sessions of 20 and 30 mg of the psychedelic. While the results are impressive, clearly the occasioning of mystical experience is not an exact science. Depending on a number of set-and setting-related variables, for some people and in some situations a so-called mystical experience may simply not be a possible goal to achieve.

In a more general sense, setting is also important in the cultural interpretation of mystical experience. An individual immersed in the symbolic language of Christianity might see images of Christ, heaven, and angels over the course of their journey into a mystical state. Carl Jung has written about the case of Brother Nicholas of Flüe who interpreted a “fearful and highly perturbing” mystical experience by means of a devotional booklet written by another mystic and “came to terms with his experience on the basis of dogma, then firm as a rock; and the dogma proved its powers of assimilation

Experiences.”


31 Rosegrant, “The Impact of Set and Setting on Religious Experience in Nature.”

32 Hood, Jr., “Anticipatory Set and Setting.”

33 Griffiths et al., “Psilocybin Occasioned Mystic-Type Experiences.”
by turning something horribly alive into the beautiful abstraction of the Trinity idea."

This cultural assimilation of the “horribly alive” rawness of mysticism is also interestingly said to be observable in cases of near-death experiences (NDEs), in which experiencers are said to often see visions of a numinous light which are subsequently interpreted within a particular cultural framework and reported accordingly. For example, “Christians may identify the light as Jesus, a Jewish person may identify it as an angel, whilst a person of no particular religious persuasion may simply describe it in allegedly culturally neutral and religiously non-partisan terms as a 'being of light' or some other similar phrase”. When discussing any kind of mystical experience, it is impossible to separate it from the influence of the cultural setting. For this reason, it can be argued that mysticism, at least when grappled with after a return to an ordinary state of consciousness, is a culturally conditioned phenomenon.

Although in Jung's case study, Flüe is described as having connected dogma to experience after the mystical episode, it is possible that some manner of interpretation occurs during the direct experience as well and that this interpretation further influences the progressive development of the active experience and its accompanying visions through a kind of phenomenological feedback loop. A good example of this kind of phenomenon is found in the Brazilian ayahuasca religion Santo Daime. Just as NDEs feature the cultural interpretation of an ineffable vision, a common vision following ayahuasca ingestion is that of the spiritual guide, its perceived form often being based on the cultural expectations of the drinker; Benny Shanon relates how in the Amerindian tradition, the most commonly encountered guide is the ayahuasca mama, while in the Christian-influenced Santo Daime tradition visions are often of the Holy Virgin. As such, the psychologically exceptional visions and concepts encountered in ASCs are necessarily constructed through a cognitive process of cultural recognition that likely takes place to some degree both during the experience and also upon later recollection. Here again we can see the importance of setting in shaping an ASC.

While there exist a wide variety of ASCs, including those occasioned through sleep, hypnosis, and the near death experience, this thesis will focus mostly on the altered states most often incorporated

---

into the world's religious practices: The mystical and the psychedelic state, with some references to musical trance states. Researchers such as Roland Griffiths,37 William A. Richards, and Walter Pahnke38 have ventured to draw parallels between certain varieties of the psychedelic experience and the classical mystical experience, but the overlap is not entirely obvious, particularly when a clear understanding of the term “mysticism” has not yet been reached. For this reason, the following section of this chapter will discuss the mystical experience in more detail and will attempt to develop a clearer perspective on what is being discussed with references to both the historical and phenomenological dimensions of this form of ASC.

**Defining Mysticism**

What kind of experience is a so-called “mystical experience”? While we have already explored what is meant by the phrase “altered states of consciousness”, the term “mysticism” still carries with it such a wide range of significations and such a turbulent history that it is worth grounding our understanding and defining the concept. Moreover, establishing a technical definition of the word is also important since it has over the years fallen into several pejorative senses, occasionally being taken colloquially to represent a foggy way of thinking or a form of trickery. While none of the many uses of “mysticism” are wrong per se, my use of the term will correspond to the experiential categories described in W. T. Stace's classic text *Mysticism and Philosophy*,39 a work which has informed much of the contemporary discussion involving the mystical experience in psychedelic therapy. Nevertheless, as we shall see, the use of the term “mysticism” to describe a certain psychological state, as in the work of researchers such as Griffiths and Pahnke, is a relatively recent trend, with the historical use of the term often being used in a derogatory sense to dismiss certain unorthodox approaches to religious worship. Understanding the history of the word can perhaps provide us with a clearer perspective on how mysticism has been treated in the Western world and help us distinguish between its contemporary technical and colloquial uses.

It is important to recognize the distinction between mysticism as a practice and mysticism as a

---

37Griffiths et al., “Psilocybin Occasioned Mystic-Type Experiences.”


term. Much of what we might consider to be mystical practice as described in historical texts was given the label retrospectively. This is obviously true in the cases of non-European religious traditions, in which transcendent states of mind are often described through the language of the Western mystical tradition. Characterizing mysticism as an experience in which an individual has “an intuition of a harmonious perfection in the transcendental order,” Thomas Katsaros and Nathaniel Kaplan suggest that mysticism as a practice in the West can trace its origins back to religious thought found in ancient Hebrew and Greek culture.\(^{40}\) Katsaros and Kaplan explain that “the Hebrew culture was grounded in a profound faith in the existence of a personal, monotheistic God whose sublimity was to be grasped intuitively” while “early Greek mysticism was rooted in the worship of Dionysus...and changed slowly from the practice of primitive magical rites until it became a vehicle for powerful creative expression.”\(^{41}\) From there, Greek mysticism developed into a recognition of mankind's “potential to direct and influence his own destiny in working toward the fulfillment of creation” which ultimately led to “the supreme rationalism of the later Greek philosophers.”\(^{42}\) Early Christianity then merged these two strains of religious practice, with the figure of Jesus being depicted in the Gospels as a divine mediator whose life was marked by a series of mystical revelations, principally by the ecstatic experience that “occurred at the time of Jesus' baptism when the spirit of God entered into him and he became one with the Creator.”\(^{43}\) Through the mystic figure of Jesus, the divine was thought to have been integrated within the world of human beings.

Mysticism in the Abrahamic traditions is characterized by the direct experience of a unity with God and cosmic creation, and Jesus can accordingly be seen to embody this ancient mystical ideal. Just as the ancient shaman entered ASCs in order to receive instruction from the realm of the spirits, so too did Jesus undergo his mystical experience at the baptismal scene in order to return to his community and “become the source through which the initiates can reach God.”\(^{44}\) Later, as the influence of Christianity grew, the Greek approach to mysticism came to be incorporated into Christian thought through the writings of the early Christian apologists who aimed to defend the new religion from


\(^{41}\)Ibid., 19.

\(^{42}\)Ibid.

\(^{43}\)Ibid., 113-114.

\(^{44}\)Ibid., 114.
contemporary criticism by justifying it through the cosmogony and science of ancient Greek thought. Ultimately, Christian mysticism came to embody the mystical rationalism of ancient Greece as well as the theistic striving for divine union of the ancient Hebrews. When “mysticism” is used in reference to historical religious practices in Europe, it generally refers to the striving for divine union found in Christian thought, or to the Hebrew and Greek practices which preceded it. That said, these practices are only referred to as “mystical” retrospectively, based on an understanding of mysticism that developed in the modern era. This should come as no surprise, as language is constantly changing in collaboration with history, fitting new terms and concepts onto observations about the past. Nevertheless, to understand the confusion associated with “mysticism” today, it is first necessary to examine the history of the term divided from modern definitions.

The etymology of “mysticism” paints a different picture from its retrospective historical use. One of the reasons for this is that the history of the Western idea of a direct experience of God has been marked by skepticism and fierce debate. In a detailed account of the development of the modern sense of mysticism, Leigh Schmidt describes how “mysticism” as an independent noun did not come about until the mid-eighteenth century, when it was first used to critique of the ecstatic ritual practices of Christian sects such as the Quakers and Methodists. Just as Sigmund Freud would later associate religious experience in general with psychological defense mechanisms and psychopathology, Schmidt, quoting a book by Enlightenment figure Henry Coventry, relates how the early uses of “mysticism” were meant to draw a division between “the seraphic entertainments of mysticism and extasy” with the “true spirit of acceptable religion”. For many of the Enlightened advocates of “calm rationality, moderated passions, and refined tastes”, ecstatic religious practices were seen as “one more excremental waste in the making of an enlightened, reasonable religion.” Writers such as Coventry went so far as to form a gendered distinction between mysticism and “acceptable religion”, characterizing enlightenment religious values as rational and masculine and mystical practices as the product of the frustrated passions of suppressed female sexuality. According to Coventry, in mystical

45Ibid., 126.
49Ibid., 279.
50Ibid., 279.
practice “the divine object was necessarily 'an imaginary and artificial contrivance, a mistaken substitute, a product of the wantonest appetites and wishes.’”51 As a result, for much of the history of the Christian West, the word “mysticism” was used in a negative sense to refer to ecstatic practices that offended the more reserved religious attitudes of the dominant culture. It is from this negative attitude toward ecstatic religious worship that our colloquial pejorative use of the term derives.

A mistrust for the mystical is perhaps to be expected in a culture which values knowledge over direct experience. Although the practices of divine communion stemming from the Greek and Hebrew traditions persisted to some degree in Christian thought, direct experience was nevertheless increasingly demonized as the Catholic Church amassed political power. For instance, some commentators have suggested that the Church's crusade against paganism also had much to do with a desire to suppress the volatile forces of mystical practices. Writing on the historical suppression of psychedelic plants in Europe, Ben Sessa suggests that the modern image of the witch can be traced back to persistent pagan practices that the Catholic Church struggled to abolish, and that “the fact they were carried out over such a long period of history suggests that these non-Christian religions were very well established and difficult to eradicate.”52 “In some cases,” Sessa continues, “the so-called witches were intentionally practicing forms of shamanism that incorporated the use of entheogens.”53 The use of dance, entheogens (psychedelic plants), and music common to ancient mystical practices may have appeared as threatening to the monolithic authority of the Church, and so ecstatic practices were persecuted. As a result, the pursuit of a direct experience of God came to be stigmatized and associated with pathology and paganism.

Surviving despite the efforts of the medieval Church, the Dionysian urge toward ecstatic communion continued to thrive in surviving pagan practices and in mystical Christian sects. Ethnobotanist and psychedelic advocate Terrence McKenna suggests that “the fourth century witnessed the suppression of the mystery religions – the cults of Bacchus and Diana, of Attis and Cybele... Christianity triumphed over the Gnostic sects...which where the last bastions of paganisms.”54

51Ibid., 278.
52Sessa, The Psychedelic Renaissance, 88.
53Ibid.
Nevertheless, pagan practices of ritual ecstasy were never entirely lost, and “the gnosis of entering parallel dimensions by altering brain chemistry” was carried on in the tradition of European witchcraft through the use of such plants as thorn apple, mandrake, and nightshade which “did not contain indole hallucinogens [as do psilocybin and lysergic acid] but where nevertheless capable of inducing intense altered states of consciousness.”

Outside of the persistence of pagan practice in Europe, original Christian sects founded on a mystical ideal also developed independently, such as the French Quietists and the English Quakers and Methodists. Both mystical and psychedelic practices were suppressed by the Catholic Church, arguably because the latter was associated with the former, and because both threatened the Church's highly stratified religious system. Mysticism and paganism were seen not only as heretical but also as destabilizing to the established social order.

Despite Henry Coventry's characterization of mysticism as a universally applicable label, Schmidt nevertheless insists that most eighteenth century texts tended to retain a narrow use of the term and that contemporary encyclopedias were “largely uninterested in using these terms as global constructs.”

Eighteenth-century sources tended to maintain the use of “mysticism” as a pejorative to support “the Roman Catholic polemic against the mystical practices of Quietists” and “their misbegotten English successors” – namely, the Quakers and Methodist. Around the mid-nineteenth century, however, the term's semantic trajectory began to shift. Taking the entries on mysticism from the sixth and sevenths editions of the Encyclopedia Britannica as representative of this shift, Schmidt relates how the definition began to point toward universalism, describing mysticism as “a form of error... which mistakes the operations of a merely human faculty for a Divine manifestation” and that “its main characteristics are constantly the same, whether they find expression in the Bagvat-Gita...or the writings of Emmanuel Swedenborg.”

This universalist definition of mysticism is much closer to the contemporary technical use of the term, though it still carries with it an expressly pejorative connotation. It is also interesting to note that the criticism of mysticism as being a state which “mistakes the operation of a merely human faculty” for an experience of the sacred is also often applied in arguments against the validity of chemically induced mystical experiences, such as those of Catholic academic R.C. Zaehner who argued, in Sessa's summary, that “any mystical state other than those that

---

55Ibid., 224.
57Ibid., 279-280.
58Ibid., 282.
are theistic or attached to an organized religious must be inherently amoral.”59 In many ways the historical attack on mysticism has persisted in the modern age in the denial that psychedelic drugs have the capacity to evoke a religious experience. The exact nature of that experience is far from clear, but modern psychological thought and clinical research suggest a similar phenomenology between certain psychedelic states and religious mysticism. The entheogenic use of mind-altering medicines throughout human cultures also suggests a correlation between psychedelic and religious states.

In the early twentieth century, thinkers such as the philosopher and early psychologist William James began to increasingly generalize the use of the term, making “mysticism universal and timeless by turning it into a solitary subjectivity and largely shearing it of distinct practices.”60 James himself writes in his influential The Varieties of Religious Experience that ”in Hinduism, in Neoplatonism, in Sufism, in Christian mysticism, in Whitmanism, we find the same recurring note.”61 For James, mysticism was to be seen less as a cultural practice and more as a psychological state, which he considered to be of immense interest and value in the study of the mind and consciousness. What's more, James developed the idea that the experience of mystical states actually precedes the establishment of organized religion. “One may truly say,” writes James, beginning his chapter on mysticism in The Varieties of Religious Experience, “that personal religious experience has its root and centre in mystical states of consciousness”.62 Attempting to defend his use of the word from those who see “mysticism” and “mystical” as “terms of mere reproach”, James then sets out to clarify his intent and define what he means by “mystical experience”.63 Doing so, James describes the mystical experience as describable through the following four elements: ineffability, a noetic quality, transiency, and passivity.64 These qualities, adapted from the work of W. T. Stace, also serve as the foundation for many contemporary definitions of the mystical experience found in clinical literature, such as the psilocybin research of Griffiths and colleagues.65

---

59William James, quoted in Sessa, The Psychedelic Renaissance, 67-68.
61Ibid.
63Ibid., 369-370.
64Ibid., 370.
65Griffiths et al., “Psilocybin Occasioned Mystic-Type Experiences.”
The first two of James's descriptors, which he considered to be the most essential, are worth considering in more depth. As with psychedelic states, at a descriptive level it is difficult to distinguish between James's description of the mystical experience and ordinary, everyday experience. Even an experience as simple as observing a red rose evokes James's descriptors. Discussing the ineffability of the mystical, James writes that “no one can make clear to another who has never had a certain feeling, in what the quality or worth of it consists.” This is to some extent the case with any form of direct experience. To illustrate this, James brings up the example of musical experience as another mental state that can never be fully conveyed through language, proposing that “the mystic finds that most of us accord to his experiences an equally incompetent treatment.” It is possible that the mystical experience is difficult to describe through language simply because it is not a common experience. That said, to a certain extent language never has the capacity to capture the qualia of actual lived experience and can only ever succeed in adumbrated abstractions when attempting to do so. It is true that language can also be used to create experiences on its own, as it does in literature. When it comes to expressing our direct experience, however, language can only outline it. This is true for any lived experience, but certain experiences do seem to escape linguistic description more than others, such as encounters with music and mysticism. Vladimir Jankélévitch discusses the language-music divide at length in his book *Music and the Ineffable*, in which he observes that “the musical universe, not signifying any particular meaning, is first of all the antipode to any coherent system.” The same can be said for the mystical experience which, like music, exemplifies Nietzsche’s fear of Dionysian disorder, of “Romanticism's poisonous mushrooms, which spring up in the quagmires where fever and languor are lurking.” The “twilight dreams” and “inexplicable thoughts” found in the disordered soul of the lover of music are also found in the meditations of the mystic. The rational forms a coherent, communicable system; music and mysticism, however, defy communication.

The “noetic quality” of mystical experience refers to the phenomenon that, as James writes, “although so similar to states of feeling, mystical states seem to those who experience them to be also states of knowledge.” Moreover, these mystical experiences can seem to be “states of insight into

---

66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
69 Ibid., 8.
70 Ibid.
71 Ibid.
depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect.” Aldous Huxley offers a similar reflection regarding the psychedelic experience when he writes of the “obscure knowledge' that All is in all – that All is actually each” that can arise during psychedelic states – a mode of feeling which nevertheless appears before the mind as a kind of knowledge. Benny Shanon has also written about the quality of meaningfulness often found in the ayahuasca experience, describing how “under the Ayahuasca inebriation, things seem to be ingrained with meaning...under the intoxication, it dawns upon one that there is sense and reason to it all.” Shanon also emphasizes the otherworldliness of the ayahuasca experience, the feeling that “things are not as they used to be and one has the sense of entering into another, heretofore unknown, reality.” These accounts all reflect the unusual twilight zone of experience which exists between the categories of knowledge and perception – in all of these cases, the perceptual stimulus itself has not changed, but the way we perceive it has. That said, it is likely that this unity of feeling and knowledge is to be found in everyday experience as well, the sudden contrasts of ASCs only serving to throw our awareness of it into relief. The distinction between knowledge and experience, and whether one can come by the former without the latter, is a complicated philosophical topic that will not be addressed in depth here. Suffice it to say, certain ASCs seem, according to James and other commentators, to convey a noetic quality which extends beyond simple sensation. At least for the duration of the mystical or drug experience, an individual feels that they have arrived at a profound knowledge, the nature of which is often difficult to put into words. Arguably, this sense of new knowledge might have much to do with the change in perspective gained from an ASC, the noetic quality being reflective of an awareness of a new mind-state, a novel mode of being in the world.

The pejorative connotation of “mysticism” persists today in its colloquial use. For example, journalist Clive James has criticized Aldous Huxley for grappling with the difficult existential questions of his age in a way that “drove him to mysticism in the end” and that “if we don't want them to do the same to us, we had better find out how so brilliant a man should come to believe in the All, the Good, the Transcendental, and a lot of other loftily capitalized words that look like panic disguised as tranquility.” As with Nietzsche’s wariness for Romanticism, Clive James's warning represents a

72 Ibid.
74 Shanon, The Antipodes of the Mind, 60.
75 Ibid., 59.
disavowal of the mystical realm “of twilight dreams” which, as Jankélévitch describes regarding music, can serve as a “sterile malaise that enervates and smothers conscience.”\(^7^7\) This negative attitude toward mysticism appears to have its roots in the historical opposition between the allegedly masculine rationality of Enlightenment deism and the feminine ecstasies of mystical rites. From this skeptical position, mysticism is seen as idealistic, irrational, and ultimately ineffectual, whereas “proper” religion is seen as restrained and intellectual and, as such, does not allow for the creative disorder of the direct experience of the divine. There is certainly merit to this argument. Music, mysticism, and the arts can after all lead to “the bad conscience of an introverted populace, which finds a substitute for their need to take civic action in works that are merely instrumental or vocal.”\(^7^8\) In other words, too much time spent in twilight dreams can lead to an apathy for practical reality. Nevertheless, if we are to make the conceptual connection between the mystical experience and certain kinds of psychedelic experiences, it becomes clear that there is much more to mysticism than an escape from existential panic. Rather than serving as an escape from everyday reality, the mystical experience often has the effect of strengthening an individual's connection with it, opening new perspectives which can lead to a more fulfilling engagement with one's community and sense of life purpose. This is true whether we speak of the twilight realms of religious mysticism, psychedelic experiences, or music. What is important is establishing a balance between Apollonian order and Dionysian chaos.

Beyond the alleged religious benefits of the mystical experience, contemporary research is gradually piecing together an empirical argument for its mental health benefits as well. One of the first thinkers to attempt to incorporate the mystical experience into a scientific framework was psychologist Abraham Maslow, whose category of “peak experience” was created to incorporate a wide number highly significant personal experiences. As Mark S. Ferrara describes, “Maslow found that self-actualizers – healthy, creative, and resilient people – shared one thing in common: They reported having mystical experiences that resulted in more efficient perceptions of reality, spontaneity, task-centeredness, autonomy, acceptance of self and others, appreciation of life's basic goodness, and comfort with solitude.”\(^7^9\) More recent empirical studies involving psychedelic-occasioned mystical

\(^7^7\) Jankélévitch, *Music and the Ineffable*, 8.
\(^7^8\) Ibid.
experiences for the treatment for conditions such as end-of-life anxiety⁸⁰ and treatment-resistant depression⁸¹ have demonstrated immense long-term success for the self-reported well-being of the volunteers involved. While opinions differ over the mechanisms of psychedelic therapy, the research does seem to show that “patients and subjects who show the greatest psychological benefit from psychedelic experiences tend to be those who report a mystical experience, as defined by widely used psychometric questionnaires, and often the degree of mystical experience predicts the degree of benefit.”⁸² This fact alone should be enough to encourage us to take the mystical experience more seriously and regard it as more than a mere escape from reality. That said, Kaelen and colleagues draw attention to the fact that, although “music listening is a consistent feature” in psychedelic therapy, the role of music itself in facilitating the mystical experience is rarely considered.⁸³ Kaelen's study, however, has shown that the presence of music and the type of music used can significantly influence whether or not a patient reports having had a mystical experience.⁸⁴ This suggests that, while psychedelic therapy might have potentially powerful psychological benefits, music itself has a healing power which also needs to be investigated more carefully.

The debate surrounding the validity of religious belief often centres around its epistemological validity, but supernatural beliefs constitute only a single dimension of religious life. As James suggests, “the personal religious experience has its root and centre in mystical states of consciousness”⁸⁵ - religious worship does more than provide a mythology for making sense of the world; it grants access to mystical states of mind which evidence suggests can lead to increased personal well-being. Just as certain psychedelic plants have been used medicinally throughout human history, religion itself has a medicinal quality, for both the self and the larger community. Even in traditions which disavow ecstatic

---


⁸⁴Ibid.

and mystical states we can often find another form of mystical experience in their use of music. This softer form of evoking the mystical experience, without the health risks and existential intensities of psychedelics or mystical exercises, can be referred to as a kind of “micro-mysticism”. The idea of music as a gentle guide into the twilight realms of mystical experience can serve as a highly useful model for understanding how and why music almost always accompanies religious ritual in human societies. Combined with entheogens, music can act as a guide toward higher states of ecstatic experience; on its own, music can also act as a unifying force to collectively lift the hearts of worshippers toward an abstract, guiding ideal. According to the idea of micro-mysticism, music serves to connect us with the abstract realm of mystical chaos which threads its way through the rational order of worldly existence. Music acts as an inconspicuous mediator between the worldly and the divine.

Mysticism and Music

If we pause to think about what music is beyond our everyday practical understanding of it, we are likely to be struck by its remoteness to the rest of our everyday experience. Although the connection between music and language has been made countless times before, whether by philosophers such as Theodor Adorno or by scientists such as Savage and colleagues, there is nevertheless something in music that appears to be inherently non-linguistic, at least in the ordinary sense of the word. Language has the capacity to communicate a clear statement about relationships in the world. As we have already seen Jankélévitch state, “the musical universe … is first of all the antipode to any coherent system.” Music dwells in the “simultaneity of opposites” and in “the impossible”. It appears to communicate something but at the same time does not. Music appears to communicate nothing beyond its own content. As Adorno puts it, “what is said cannot be abstracted from the music; it does not form a system of signs.” Although we can translate the word “rose” into French, German, or Chinese with practical ease, it would be a futile effort to try translating Beethoven's Fifth Symphony into, for example, the language of the Indonesian Gamelan. As soon as we begin to alter the elements of the original composition – be it harmony, melody, timbre, rhythm, form – the communicated “message” also seems

88Jankélévitch, Music and the Ineffable, 18.
89Ibid., 18-19.
90Adorno, "Music, Language, and Composition," 401
to shift. This differs from language proper, in which a phrase can be represented in various forms without altering the core meaning we extract from it. That is to say, the linguistic strategies we employ every day when communicating enable us to make statements expressing the same general meaning, though with slightly different phrasing, while still retaining the same essential idea. This is why paraphrasing and translation seem to be far simpler to achieve in language than in music.

The ineffability of the musical experience makes it an ideal companion to the mystical experience, particularly those brought about in entheogenic rituals. In the anthropological literature, Marlene Dobkin De Rios and Fred Katz have observed the function of music as a “set of banisters and pathways through which the drug user in a non-Western ritual setting negotiates his way” for the purpose of obtaining “a stereotypic visionary experience programmed by his culture.” In the field of cognitive psychology, Shanon has explored the relationship between music and ayahuasca ritual, writing that “in many musical cultures, music is strongly associated with eliciting, enhancing, and shaping a range of powerful moods and emotions” and that “these effects are experienced with music even in the ordinary state of consciousness; with ayahuasca they are all greatly accentuated and amplified.” Shanon later emphasizes the relationship when he writes that, “ayahuasca amplifies the effect intrinsic to music, and in turn, music provides extra fuel for ayahuasca's psychoactive effects.”

The literature suggests that music often serves the dual purposes of both guiding and amplifying the psychedelic experience, with the formal structure of the music serving as a scaffolding on which the content of the psychedelic visions are directed and developed.

91It is of course possible to argue that musical transcriptions and arrangements can be seen as analogous to linguist translation and paraphrase. Nevertheless, it is difficult to deny the rhetorical contrast between a melody played on a piccolo versus a tuba. Interestingly, dialects and phrasings within a particular language can also come with their own connotations. Formal versus casual systems of expression are obvious examples, perhaps with parallels in our cultural attitudes toward formal ensembles (the concert orchestra) versus informal ensembles (the rock band). Obviously, there is a distinction to be made between what is said and how it is said – both music and language share the “how”, but music does seem to be lacking the “what”, at least in the sense of linguistic content. It could be argued that the connotation of music and its content are equivalent, while language is clearer in its distinction between the two.


94Ibid.
Musical experience on its own is also often associated with mystical states. For example, music therapist Helen L. Bonny insists in her music therapy manual that “music listening in altered states of consciousness can bring out things in you that nothing or no one has ever previously elicited. Many describe the experience as full of insight...some let the music take them to unexplored provinces of the psyche.”

Bonny also mentions how deep listening in a therapeutic setting has the capacity to provoke similar effects on the consciousness as experienced by those who have taken psychedelic drugs or “sought the help of a hypnotist, retired to monastic solitude, or became disciples of some Far Eastern school of Zen or Tao.” Whether the effects of music therapy on consciousness can attain the same intensity as psychedelic or meditative experiences is debatable, but Bonny's work nevertheless implies that music, when used in a therapeutic context, can bring about powerful altered states comparable to those evoked by psychedelics or meditation.

The way we talk and think about music also sometimes verges on the mystical. Carl Gombrich has observed the paradoxical manner in which music is discussed in Romantic discourse, arguing that “the closer the music is felt to take the subject to mystical experience, the more the language will have in common with the language of the mystics...a crucial element in all these descriptions is the way in which contradictions are used in the attempt to capture something of the experience.”

Gombrich cites such mystical statements as “God is a brilliant darkness”, used to convey something of the impossibility of representing divine nature using only a single metaphor, alongside such musical metaphors as theologian Karl Barth's description of Mozart's music as demonstrating a “lightness [that] possesses something very demanding, disturbing, almost provocative even, in the most radiant, most childlike, most joyful moments.”

Gombrich emphasizes the frequent use of oxymoron when describing deep musical experiences, perhaps suggesting something of a homology with the mystical experience proper. Similar to Jankélévitch, Gombrich reveals that the Romantics treated music as a “simultaneity of opposites” using rhetorical devices designed to describe the indescribable.

---

96Ibid.
98Ibid.
99Jankélévitch, Music and the Ineffable, 18.
This characterization of the mystical experience as being defined by paradox is echoed in W.T. Stace's foundational philosophical study of mysticism, in which he mentions the examples “of the positive-negative or plenum-vacuum paradox with its three aspects, that the One or the Universal Mind is both qualified and unqualified, both personal and impersonal, both static and dynamic; of the paradox of the dissolution of individuality wherein I cease to be individual and yet retain my individuality; of the paradox that he who reaches nirvana neither exists nor does not exist...”  

This characterization must of course also remind us of the descriptive oxymorons mentioned above by Gombrich in relation to both mystical and musical literature. Nevertheless, attempting to avoid logical contradiction, W.T. Stace offers a number of theories by way of explaining the seemingly paradoxical nature of mystical experience, suggesting that such descriptions could simply be rhetorical, examples of misdescription, double location, or attempts at creating a sense of ambiguity.  

Another gloss of this paradoxicality is offered by Eugene G. d'Aquili and Andrew B. Newberg, who suggest that in mystical experience “pairs of opposites such as good and evil are suddenly understood as being two different ways of looking at the same thing. The dualities are broken down, and the opposites are unified in a single nature.”  

D'Aquili and Newberg also apply this paradoxical thinking to their description of the relationship between the mind and brain, explaining that “they are merely two different ways of looking at the same thing.” The mystical state may thus not be one which transcends logic, but one which allows for the perception of multiple perspectives simultaneously. Any object will of course appear different based on the angle from which we view it – the mystical experience may simply offer the perspective of multiple angles at once.

Paradoxicality is also one of the characteristics of mystical experience offered by William A. Richards and Walter N. Pahnke in their 1966 paper on the relationship between LSD and mysticism. Richards and Pahnke's definition came out of a “historical survey of the literature of spontaneous mysticism,” including the work of James and W.T. Stace, and reads as a more precise articulation of James's categorization. Richards and Pahnke emphasize, however, that their categories do not apply

---

101Ibid.
103Ibid.
to the entire range of the psychedelic experience, but only a “specific form of psychedelic experience that is frequently reported when relatively high dosage is administered to normal subjects or selected mental patients in supportive settings. For want of a better term, we have called this form of experience mystical consciousness.” According to Richards and Pahnke's criteria, not all psychedelic experiences can be considered proper mystical experiences. Nevertheless, psychedelic drugs may be the most reliable tools we have for evoking powerful mystical experiences for the purpose of psychological research.

As I have suggested, it is possible that some less intense experiences of ASCs can be considered to constitute a kind of micro-mystical state, such as musical experience. That said, the categories of “mystical consciousness” proposed by Richards and Pahnke reflect the following experiential elements: Unity, Objectivity and Reality, Transcendence of Space and Time, Sense of Sacredness, Deeply-Felt Positive Mood, Paradoxicality, Alleged Ineffability, Transiency, Positive Changes in Attitude and/or Behavior. The last of these categories represent an important addition to those of James. While James highlighted the experiential qualities of mysticism, Richards and Pahnke argue that psychological change must also derive from the experience for it to be considered properly mystical. Robert E. L. Masters and Jean Houston in their *The Varieties of Psychedelic Experience* adopt a similar attitude, cautioning that “there are various odd and pathologicomimetic states of mind which seem to be especially productive of unfounded claims of religious and mystical experience. Depersonalization and empathy, for instance, can cause an ordinary secular-minded subject to sound like a garrulous Hindu sage who has been transplanted into Southern California.” As a result, Masters and Houston devised three criteria for deciding on the legitimacy of an alleged mystical experience. Their criteria, described in the language of transpersonal psychology, are as follows: “Encounter with the Other on the integral level; transformation of the self; and, in most cases, a process of phenomenological progression through the sensory, recollective-analytic and symbolic levels before passing into the integral.” Here, too, the criterion of psychological transformation is emphasized as being fundamental to the mystical experience. As Stace writes, the mystics “have often been subject to visions and voices but have usually

---

105Ibid.
106Ibid.
discounted them as of doubtful value or importance and at any rate as not to be confused with genuine mystical experiences.” Stace continues: “The main point is that the most typical as well as the most important type of mystical experience is nonsensuous, whereas visions and voices have the character of sensuous imagery. The introvertive kind of mystical states are, according to all the accounts we have of them, entirely devoid of all imagery.” Chemically induced hallucinations are in themselves not evidence of a mystical experience. Rather, the true mystical experience will demonstrate itself empirically in the form of a beneficial psychological transformation.

Having assembled these basic elements, I now want to offer a definition of mysticism to be used throughout this paper. Following James, Richards, and Pahnke, I use the term “mysticism” to refer to a psychological state which has been characterized by experiencers as possessing such qualities as Unity, Objectivity and Reality, Transcendence of Space and Time, Sense of Sacredness, Deeply Felt Positive Mood, Paradoxicality, Alleged Ineffability, Transiency, and Positive Changes in Attitude and/or Behavior. Of course, basing a definition of the allegedly ineffable on descriptions conveyed through everyday language is inevitably limiting; this is nevertheless the consequence of investigating the experience of mysticism from a psychological perspective, rather than attempting to dig directly into it (to whatever degree that is possible) through philosophical or theological approaches and rhetoric. The psychological definition I use touches the edges of the mystical experience, conveyed through the utterances of third-party experiencers, but does not attempt the perhaps impossible task of pinning down the paradoxical mystical state itself using descriptive language.

Following Masters and Houston, I also wish to emphasize the importance of self-transformation when assessing whether a person has experienced a true mystical state. Moreover, seeing mysticism through the lens of Maslow's notion of peak-experience can be helpful in allowing us to think about how such experiences can lead to positive changes in perspective and an improved sense of well-being. I also use the term “mysticism” in somewhat of a broader sense than all these thinkers when I suggest that the mystical experience can be present to varying degrees, such as in the case of the micro-mysticism possible through musical experience. This perspective is also hinted at in the research of d'Aquili and Newberg in their neuroscientific investigation of mystical experience, which suggests that “it may be that profound mystical experiences deriving from meditation involve neural pathways very

109Stace, Mysticism and Philosophy, 47.
110Ibid., 49.
similar to those involved in ritual and 'lesser' mystical states." I propose that profound musical experience has the capacity to affect us in a similar way as meditation, religious ritual, and other mystical-type experiences. In this paper, I use the term “mysticism” to represents a broad category of altered states of consciousness characterized by a sense of unity, a sense of sacredness, and lasting therapeutic benefit, which spans everything from profound musical experience to classical mysticism and finds a relatively reproducible equivalent in ASCs induced through psychedelic drugs such as LSD, psilocybin and DMT. In other words, to adapt a metaphor from Huxley, mystical experience offers a key to the mind's antipodes. Music likewise offers a glimpse into these remote regions of consciousness.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter has explored the immense importance of set and setting in shaping not only the course of the psychedelic experience, but the mystical experience as well. The chapter then proceeded to provide a brief history of the term “mysticism” and then described a detailed definition which encompasses thoughts on the subject from the fields of psychological and psychedelic research. The relationship between mysticism, psychedelic experience, peak-experience, and musical experience has been suggested, especially in reference to the idea that mystical experience can be understood in terms of its degree of intensity, with minor mystical experiences perhaps being found in ritual practice and musical listening. The immense therapeutic benefit of mystical experience has also been described through the lens of Maslow's notion of peak-experience and recent clinical trials using psychedelic-occasioned mystical experiences to treat mental ailments such as anxiety and depression, suggesting that mystical experiences have the capacity to lead to beneficial changes in perspective. Accordingly, the understanding of mysticism offered in this paper describes the term as a broad category of psychological experience characterized by a sense of unity, sacredness, and the capacity to lead to long-term beneficial psychological transformation.

111 Due to the nature of the source material drawn upon in the writing of this thesis, the philosophical position I take regarding the exceptional states of mind discussed is generally naturalistic, and I assume the ontological stability of our consensus material reality. That said, Shanon has discussed the philosophical implications of the ayahuasca experience in detail, particularly those implications demanded by hallucinatory experiences purported to have felt “more real than real.” Ultimately, the question of the nature of reality is a difficult one to grapple with, and I mainly avoid the philosophical problem in this thesis by approaching the mystical experience indirectly by drawing mostly on sources which take a psychological and phenomenological approach in its investigation. See Shanon, The Antipodes of the Mind, 264-9.
Chapter II
The Hinos of Santo Daime

In this chapter I will examine an example of a religion that in many ways exemplifies the use of cultural technology as a means for evoking a mystical-type experience: the Church of Santo Daime. This religion, having grown out of a combination of aboriginal and Christian practices, makes use of multiple means for evoking religious feelings and states, all of them working together in harmony to augment each other's effects. The two main cultural “technologies” employed by Santo Daime are music and the ancient psychedelic brew known as ayahuasca (known emically within the religion as Daime).

Ayahuasca, a brew consisting of the psychoactive drug DMT coupled with a MAO inhibitor, is known to modify the phenomenology of the musical experience, leading to a feedback loop of mutual influence between the two with the potential to occasion alleged mystical experiences. In this chapter I make use of the arguments of Joel Krueger and Joona Taipale relating to music and affective scaffolding in order to outline the mechanisms of this process and describe how it enables communal singing under the intoxication of Daime to lead to increasing states of religious ecstasy.\textsuperscript{112} I also make significant use of Benny Shanon's phenomenological investigation of the cognitive effects of ayahuasca as well as Benjamin Blocksom's dissertation on the rituals and music of Santo Daime itself to support my analysis of the feedback loop at work in these rituals.\textsuperscript{113} As an adjacent argument, I also make use of Rick Strassman's\textsuperscript{114} influential study on the compound of DMT itself in order to propose that there exists a deep archetypal connection between music and religious concepts. Finally, I conclude the chapter with an analysis of a Santo Daime hymn and use it to illustrate many of these previously explored concepts, including how the formal aspects of the music can act as a guiding force for worshippers during Santo Daime rituals.


Santo Daime and its Sacrament

Este segredo profundo
Está em toda humanidade
Se todos se conhecerem
Aquí dentro da verdade

“This profound secret / Is in all of humanity / If everyone knew themselves / Here within the Truth; “Flor Das Águas,” Nossa Irmandade, accessed March 8, 2022, https://www.nossairmandade.com/hymn/94/FlorDas%C3%81guas.

Santo Daime was founded by Brazilian rubber-tapper Raimundo Irineu Serra in the 1930s as a union of the folk Christianity of the nordestinos (Brazilian northeasterners) and the ritual practices of Brazilian Amerindians. In other words, Serra's new religious movement grafted a Christian worldview onto a psychedelically informed spiritual practice, resulting in a fresh approach to Christian belief. Santo Daime, a religion in which music, dance, and entheogenic medicine play a significant role in ritual, emphasizes the immediate experience of the ineffable over mediated doctrine. While ordinary Christian practice tends to rely on text and codified doctrine, Santo Daime attempts to merge Christian concepts and symbols with the priority of first-hand experience valued in the Amerindian ayahuasca tradition.

Serra, the founder of the religion, was a rubber-tapper (a seringuiro) who, along with many other nordestinos migrated from the northeast of Brazil to the state of Acre, “lured by the economic promise of the rubber boom.” While working in Acre, the traditionally Christian nordestinos, such as Serra, eventually encountered the Amerindian practices of the Amazon rainforest, most notably their sacramental use of the tea ayahuasca. In the 1930s, the Brazilian rubber industry collapsed and many of the seringuieros fell into poverty. In an attempt to consolidate the rubber-tapper communities and their families, Serra (known within Santo Daime as Mestre Irineu, or Master Irineu) “founded a prayer cult

115 This profound secret / Is in all of humanity / If everyone knew themselves / Here within the Truth; “Flor Das Águas,” Nossa Irmandade, accessed March 8, 2022, https://www.nossairmandade.com/hymn/94/FlorDas%C3%81guas.
117 Ibid., 2-3.
that translated the Amerindian context of drinking ayahuasca to a Western context and ideology.”\textsuperscript{118} In Portuguese, “daime” literally translates as “give-me”, reflecting the instructional nature of the sacrament within the religion. As Shanon writes, Daime “refers not only to the brew, but also to the animated force believed to reside within the brew.”\textsuperscript{119} Within the context of Mestre Irineu's syncretic practice, ayahuasca is always referred to as “Daime”, with the religion itself generally being referred to as “Santo Daime”.\textsuperscript{120}

The tea that Mestre Irineu adopted from the spiritual practices of the Amazon Amerindians was known for its healing properties and capacity to evoke an experience of the divine. While many Christians may have seen Amerindian practice as incompatible with their own, Mestre Irineu seemed to have perceived ayahuasca in a technological light, seeing it not as a pagan superstition inextricably tied to a set of Amazonian beliefs, but as a unique tool for communicating with the sacred, whatever form it might take. As a result, Mestre Irineu ended up adopting the use of ayahuasca into his Christian worldview as a sacrament and gave it the new name Daime.

The ayahuasca brew, which has a long history of use in Amazonian cultures, usually consists of two main ingredients: the Banisteriopsis caapi vine and the leaves of Psychotria viridis (the chacruna tree). The main psychoactive ingredient in ayahuasca is N, N-Dimethyltryptamine, otherwise known as DMT. It is the leaves of Psychotria viridis that contain the psychedelic compound, but notably, as Shanon relates, in order to bring about any visionary effect, “it is necessary to join the two indicated plants (or their functional equivalents) so that both DMT and MAO inhibitors are present.”\textsuperscript{121} The reason for this is that DMT is not orally active.\textsuperscript{122} In order for orally consumed DMT to take effect, a beta-carboline harmala alkaloid acting as an MAO (monoamine oxidase) inhibitor, such as those found in Banisteriopsis caapi, is required to prevent MAO enzymes from degrading DMT as it enters the body.\textsuperscript{123} Shanon describes the marvel of this having somehow been discovered by ancient Amazonian medicine: “When one thinks about it, the discovery of Ayahuasca is indeed amazing. The number of

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{118}Ibid. 3.  \\
\textsuperscript{119}Shanon, The Antipodes of the Mind, 21.  \\
\textsuperscript{120}Blocksom, “Music, Trance, and Transmission in The Santo Daime,” 2.  \\
\textsuperscript{121}Shanon, The Antipodes of the Mind, 16.  \\
\textsuperscript{122}Theresa M. Carbonaro and Michael B Gatch, “Neuropharmacology of N,N-Dimethyltryptamine,” Brain Research Bulletin 126, no. 1 (2016).  \\
\textsuperscript{123}Ibid.
\end{flushright}
plants in the rain forest is enormous; the number of their possible pairings is astronomical. The commonsense method of trial and error would not seem to apply.”¹²⁴ However the discovery of the brew was first made, whether through trial and error or, as some believe, divine intervention, it has served a sacred role in indigenous Amazonian cultures for millennia.¹²⁵

Music and Religion as Technology

Eu tomo Daime eu tomo Daime
Não tenho medo de tomar

Eu estando com meu Mestre
Nele eu posso me firmar

“Tomo Daime”, O Assessor #4¹²⁶

It is difficult for us to grasp the grand scope of historical change from our everyday perspective. While we can easily perceive the undulations of a wave or the drifting and morphing of a cloud, it is far more difficult for us to wrap our minds around the fluidity of the geological movement of mountains or the titanic dances of the continents. In a similar way, it is easy to become short-sighted when it comes to thinking about our own cultural institutions. We can easily get lost in the seeming timelessness of Christian symbols for example, but in doing so fail to acknowledge the relative youth of this religious movement. The two millennia that marked the influence of Christianity in modern Europe are but a drop in the sea of the approximately 200,000 years that Homo sapiens have dwelled on this planet and, conceivably, have entertained religious notions and philosophical speculation. While from our earthen perspective the major religions may appear as ancient repositories of timeless wisdom, and perhaps to some timeless superstition, if we were to take a step back and view the evolution of religion through a wider lens, we would be able to see it stretch, contract, and morph with the same flexibility of a cloud in the sky. Religious practice adapts to cultural circumstances, often reflecting the necessities of a

¹²⁴Shanon, _The Antipodes of the Mind_, 16.
¹²⁵Ibid., 14.
¹²⁶I take Daime, I take Daime / I have no fear taking it / I am with my Master / In him I can stand;

community and its environment. Religion also adapts to the technology available, whether it be computational, linguistic, or psychological. Taking an even wider stance, religion itself can be seen as a kind of practical technology, employed for the purpose of achieving mystical states. While there is doubtlessly more to the religious experience than purely practical concerns, by referring to this mode of human culture as a “technology”, we can highlight the tendency of religions to arise in human cultures in response to certain psychological and spiritual needs. This perspective of course assumes that there is something necessary about religion and mystical experience for the human psyche. While this thesis does not explore this position in the depth it perhaps deserves, I do assume that, because of the ubiquity of religion in human societies, there must be something in the religious experience that us human beings have found to be extremely valuable to our lives and cultures.

As with most technologies it must be acknowledged, however, that religion likely can be seen to serve more than a single easily delineated purpose. If the origin of religion did indeed stem from an impulse to transmit the revelations of mystical states through ritual, then it is likely that this new technology of ritual practice also branched out to encompass many other functions, including those that supported the social needs of the community and those that allowed for the consolidation of political power. Nevertheless, the mystical state of mind, which I have described as being a unique form of ASC in which our ordinary sense of time, space, and identity break down, seems to be central to religious practices throughout the world, at least amongst their elite practitioners. As I have argued in the previous chapter, where extreme forms of mystical experience are not to be found, we might expect a religion to feature a gentler approach in the form of micro-mysticism, such as the ritual use of art or music for evoking analogous states of mind. It is important to note, however, that religions often function to provide more than the evocation of a mystical state of mind. Nevertheless, evoking mystical states seems to be at the core of many religious practices, with their moral and communal aspects either stemming from such direct experience or guiding toward it.

The main arguments I would suggest support the centrality of mysticism to religious practice are as follows. As Erika Bourguignon has observed, ASCs are very much prevalent in the world's spiritual practices, with the use of states of “trance and/or possession” being found in ninety percent of world cultures. The close link between drug-induced ASCs and religious practice throughout the

---

world also supports this idea, especially considering that psychedelic drugs (i.e. entheogens) provide perhaps the most reliable means of inducing religious and mystical feelings and states. The second argument centres on the content of most religious doctrines, which in many cases mirror the phenomenology of the mystical experience, characterized by a sense of universal unity and the insubstantial nature of our worldly sense of self. The connection between the phenomenology of mysticism and the doctrine of religious beliefs is strong enough to suggest that religion, as a technology, serves as a kind of worldly concretization of the mystical experience, a translation of an ungraspable experience into something relatively concrete and practicable. This elucidates the reason for the variations in religious doctrine and the variety in their casts of transcendent personalities – there is no limit to the ways we can translate the ineffable. Moreover, according to the factors of set and setting, the mystical experience will likely be interpreted through the cultural suggestions of the dominant culture. As a result, a feedback loop can be reasonably imagined to occur in which cultural symbols give rise to mystical visions, and mystical visions further consolidate cultural beliefs. This pattern is clearly observable in entheogen-employed religious traditions, in which advanced states of mysticism are often the explicit goal of ritual practice. A particularly instructive example is that of the Brazilian ayahuasca religion Santo Daime.

The religion of Santo Daime can also serve to introduce the immense value of music as a mind-altering technology since, in this practice, music is the primary means of communicating doctrine. According to Blocksom, “musical expression is a key element of all Santo Daime rituals, which lack long sermons or readings—doctrine is taught in large part through collective singing.”\(^\text{128}\) One of the reasons for this is that the early followers of the religion “were illiterate or nearly so. People learned the hymns during the spiritual 'works', by ear, with the Daime reportedly facilitating their memorization.”\(^\text{129}\) This interesting suggestion as to ayahuasca's role as a memory aid echoes Krueger's observation that music in sacred contexts often serves not just as a scaffold for emotional consciousness, but also as a “memory technology that scaffolds the processes of learning, retrieving, remembering, and reconstructing” the contents of religious rituals.\(^\text{130}\) Whether the brew also functions as a memory technology, especially in conjunction with religious ritual, would perhaps be an


\(^{129}\)Beatrix Caluby Labate and Gustavo Pacheco, Opening the Portals to Heaven: Brazilian Ayahuasca Music (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2011), 29.

\(^{130}\)Krueger, “Music as Affective Scaffolding,” 62.
interesting subject for empirical study. Nevertheless, it is entirely possible that the heightened musical sensitivity arrived at through the consumption of ayahuasca could help increase not only the intensity of the emotional scaffolding of music but its aid to ritual memory as well.

Another reason for the emphasis on musical performance in Santo Daime may come from the physiological and psychological effects of the entheogenic sacrament itself. Shanon has emphasized that the often-reported side effect of vomiting after drinking ayahuasca is abated through the focused action of singing. Shanon writes, “many times I have felt that music helped me to resist the physical sickness that is a common response to drinking ayahuasca: instead of vomiting, I would pour music out of my mouth.”131 As for psychological properties, Shanon observes that “ayahuasca often makes people sing, and this appears to be a special characteristic of ayahuasca that distinguishes it from other psychoactive agents.”132 Moreover, group singing has the effect of guiding the actions and thoughts of participants, providing the mind with something to focus on and keeping everyone engaged in a common activity while the brew's psychoactive properties take effect.133 In a different context, Eric Clarke and colleagues have commented on how the physiological and psychological requirements of the act of singing, such as deep breathing, increased muscle tone, and concentration, function to help “people cope with, and overcome, strong negative emotions.”134 Considering the importance of maintaining a positive mental state during the psychedelic experience, it is clear that song can be a highly useful tool for staving off fearful emotions. The same goal is strived for lyrically as well. In the hino (hymn) quoted at the beginning of this section, worshippers collectively sing “Não tenho medo de tomar” (I have no fear taking it) and “Eu estando com meu Mestre / Nele eu posso me firmar” (I am with my Master / In him I can stand). The physical act of singing, the uplifting content of the lyrics, and the supporting nature of the music all function together to help worshippers navigate the potentially frightening effects of ayahuasca intoxication and encourage the evocation of a mystical experience.

Characterized in this way, we can see music as a technology used for tempering and guiding the ASC brought about by ayahuasca consumption. Ayahuasca itself can also be seen as a technology for

---

132 Ibid., 287.
133 Ibid., 288.
facilitating mystical experience in a religious context and for heightening the psychological effects of music. That said, the role of music in Santo Daime ritual expands beyond the facilitation of group dynamics. The symbolic network of the Santo Daime worldview as well as the music it employs can both be seen as frames for supporting the core experience of the daime (ayahuasca) brew; however, such an understanding would be a gross simplification since daime itself is also used in order to amplify the symbolic network and musical experience. I will investigate this feedback-based relationship in more detail in the following section of this chapter.

**The Psychedelic Music-Mystical Feedback Loop**

Subi, subi, subi

Subi foi com alegria

Quando eu chequei nas alturas

Encontrei com a Virgem Maria

“Eu Tomo Esta Bebida”, *O Cruzeiro* #124

In order to better understand the psychology of the musical experience under ayahuasca intoxication, it is important that we first consider to some extent the relationship between music and the emotions. Much has been written on the topic, and many theories have been espoused from both psychological and philosophical perspectives. Drawing from the approach of embodied cognition, Joel Krueger for example has written about the function of music as an “aesthetic technology” which allows for the scaffolding of “new forms of thought, experiences, and behaviour.”\(^{136}\) Krueger specifically concentrates on the virtual, “worldmaking” character of music as well as the way it “drives, structures, and regulates the character and development of our emotional consciousness.”\(^{137}\) According to Krueger, in order to help reduce mental processing, we often use music as a means of “emotional offloading,” letting the music in our environment act as an externally extended expression of our internal emotional

---


136 Joel Krueger, 55-56.

state.\textsuperscript{138} Krueger specifically expresses the value of this quality in the context of religious worship. Taking hold of our bodies as well as our minds, Krueger characterizes rhythm, melody, and pulse as ordering “the temporal sequence of a service” and organizing “behavioural coordination between participants.”\textsuperscript{139}

Krueger’s observations are particularly relevant in the context of Santo Daime rituals in which, were it not for the structuring force of the Daime hymns and dances, the psychedelic nature of the sacrament might lead to disruptive behaviour amongst worshippers. Shanon relates how ayahuasca may cause some to “engage in overt behaviours that bother other participants in the session: over-exuberant dancing, the production of all sorts of sounds, and inappropriate interpersonal interactions. Singing offers a readily available channel of action and thus provides a solution.”\textsuperscript{140} Although Shanon focuses on mental concentration through song as the regulatory force in Santo Daime rituals, it is also easy to recognize how the regulatory character of extended musical cognition might allow the body and mind to offload otherwise conscious work onto an external expressive source. Doing so thus creates an emotionally efficient setting for experiencing the psychedelic effects of Daime. If mental and physical movements are already accounted for by external ritual and music, then worshippers are better able to journey inward toward mystical states without needing to concern themselves with the moment-to-moment conscious decision-making process. Since the conscious mind is securely engaged in a predictable task, the unconscious mind is then free to unfold itself, leading to the occasioning of a collective trance state.

Developing on Krueger’s work, Taipale has suggested that we can also view emotional scaffolding in music as analogous to the child/caregiver relationship. In order to explain this comparison, Taipale draws a connection between the relationships of child/caregiver and listener му sic through two main functions: the “mirror function” and the “regulating function.” In the context of caregiving, Taipale describes the mirror function as consisting of the child perceiving something of its emotional state in the face of the caregiver - “in this manner, she puts the infant's feeling 'into her own words', as it were.”\textsuperscript{141} In a sense, the mirror function is one of translation, expressing a “vital”

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{138} Krueger, “Music as Affective Scaffolding,” 60.
  \item \textsuperscript{139} Ibid., 61.
  \item \textsuperscript{140} Shanon, “Music and Ayahuasca,” 288.
  \item \textsuperscript{141} Taipale, “The Modifying Mirror,” 10.
\end{itemize}
emotional core using one's own expressive resources.

The regulating function consists in the caregiver using the state of affective attunement, in which the infant identifies its emotional state in the face of the other, in order to make further adjustments to the child's state. In other words, as Taipale describes, “by gesticulating in a manner that matches the vital quality of the child's expression, the caregiver not only imitates the child's external comportment, but gives an alternative expression to the child's feelings.”\(^{142}\) In this way, the child is able to arrive at a more sophisticated understanding of its own emotional state through observations of the other, and the other is able to guide the emotions of the child toward a more beneficial state. Taipale offers the example of a child who has fallen down and has begun to cry, writing that, “instead of merely attuning to the child’s plight, and hence mirroring back what is offered as it were, the caregiver takes an active role in modifying the expressed feeling of his child.”\(^{143}\) Importantly, the caregiver must attune to the child's emotions and “must fit into the 'parameters' of the child's experiential situation,” otherwise the mismatch between the two actors can cause the relationship to feel “misattuned, artificial, and potentially traumatic in the sense of abandoning.”\(^{144}\) For this reason, emotional regulation can only occur once a degree of attunement has been reached. The “vitality forms” (latent emotional content) of the caregiver's expression must register as similar enough to the child's own for regulation to take place. Only when mirroring leads to regulation can the caregiver begin to comfort the child and act as a “modifying mirror”.\(^{145}\)

Essential to Taipale's argument is the idea that music also acts as a “modifying mirror” for the listener in a way similar to the caregiver for the infant. As such, Taipale suggests that “music can not only be used to regulate one's feeling, but also to clarify how one feels” and that music is not only “a tool for emotional regulation, but also a tool for emotional articulation.”\(^{146}\) In other words, music, when properly attuned to our affective state, can not only help us adjust our emotions, but can help us understand our emotional states in a more nuanced way as well. Music, like the face of an infant's caregiver, can provide us with insight into aspects of ourselves that we were not previously entirely

\(^{142}\)Ibid, 11.
\(^{143}\)Ibid., 12.
\(^{144}\)Ibid.
\(^{145}\)Ibid., 12.
\(^{146}\)Ibid., 3.
aware of. This relationship is reminiscent of the role played by LSD in early psychedelic therapy. We have already encountered Blewett and Chwelos's statement on the source of the compound's healing function: “On the basis of self-knowledge...the patient can, with the therapist's help, clearly see the inadequacies in the value system which has underlain his previous behaviour and can learn how to alter this in accordance with his altered understanding.”\(^{147}\) In other words, LSD in psychotherapy is, similar to music, used as a tool for emotional articulation, for clarifying the patient's emotional state. Obviously, these tools are therapeutic aids and not psychological panaceas. They can, however, with proper guidance, be effective ways of navigating latent content in the unconscious.

Music itself is also a frequent element used to accompany psychedelic therapy sessions. A study by Mendel Kaelen and colleagues on the influence of music on psilocybin therapy for treatment-resistant depression found that, in general, music provided an “intensification of emotions and mental imagery” and that music was felt to be helpful in evoking an “attitude of openness towards negative music-evoked emotions” which participants claimed to be “helpful in bringing to expression inner psychological conflicts that might then be resolved.”\(^{148}\) In Kaelen's study, the collaborative role of music and psychedelics in “bringing to expression” certain hidden corners of self-knowledge appears as a central theme. Another fascinating element of Kaelen's study, however, is found in the participants who reacted adversely to the presence of music during therapy, describing the feeling as, revealingly, an unwelcomed “sense of misguidance.”\(^{149}\) As Kaelen and colleagues write, “in these situations, the music was most often described as being dissonant with the patient's emotions and thoughts.”\(^{150}\) After being pulled into a disturbing mental space, one participant even remembered thinking, “this is beautiful music, why am I going to this dark place?” and that the musical mismatch caused them to feel that they were “being manipulated, being duped almost.”\(^{151}\) It is highly suggestive that the only times when music was not welcomed during the psilocybin therapy sessions was when it failed to result in a relationship of attunement; just as with the caregiver who tries to smile and laugh in order to cheer up a crying child, the emotionally sensitive patients plunged into the dark regions of the psychedelic

\(^{147}\) P.W. Barber, *Psychedelic Revolutionaries: LSD and the Birth of Hallucinogenic Research* (Saskatchewan: University of Regina Press, 2018), 120.


\(^{149}\) Ibid.

\(^{150}\) Ibid.

\(^{151}\) Ibid.
experience felt betrayed by the emotional mismatch of the music they were experiencing. Music can indeed function as a modifying mirror and lead to emotional transformation and personal insight, but only when it reaches a certain degree of correspondence with our current emotional state. The music needs to agree with us to some extent. Otherwise, we merely find ourselves confronted with a cold, apathetic wall of sound demanding emotions that we do not necessarily want to feel.

Krueger evokes the notion of musical feedback loops in his essay on affective scaffolding. Arguing that the music we surround ourselves with often acts as an extension of our consciousness into the environment to help with everyday tasks, such as emotional regulation (“because music is an aesthetic technology especially well-suited for this task”), Krueger writes that “musicking enacts continuous feedback loops of musical 're-soundings'... from vibrations in our bones and muscles to complex patterns of neurophysiological and behavioural entrainment,” and that “we are quite literally bodily and affectively captured by the musical worlds we construct and inhabit. These worlds pull emotional responses out of us and regulate the character of their unfolding.”¹⁵² The function of “pulling out” emotion is of course a function of the musical “feedback loop.” We are “captured” by musical stimuli in the sense that, once we attune and it begins to regulate our emotional state, we can't help but be pulled along for the ride. Each moment in a musical space reflects a variation on the previous, continuously feeding our prior emotional state and leading into the next. When we attune to what Taipale calls the “vital form” of the piece (how something is expressed rather than its content – an idea borrowed from developmental psychologist Daniel Stern) we enter a relationship with the modifying mirror – and it is difficult to look away.¹⁵³

The ordinary feedback loop of musical experience can reasonably be expected to be more intense when paired with the psychedelic experience. Seeking a neurological explanation, Kaelen and colleagues suggest that the function of psychedelics in disregulating “brain mechanisms that normally regulate emotion” could “underlie the enhanced emotional responsiveness to emotionally evocative stimuli” thus leading to an “enhanced receptivity to music.”¹⁵⁴ Moreover, Kaelen argues that this enhanced receptivity “may play the important function of activating emotionality, thoughts, and memories that are most personally salient. Thereby, music can guide the patient's experience into

¹⁵⁴Kaelen, “The Hidden Therapist.”
directions that are most therapeutically significant.” Under the influence of psychedelics, the brain's emotional responsiveness is heightened, resulting in a more intense musical experience; at the same time, musical experience, as Krueger suggests, creates a feedback loop through affective scaffolding, leading to a state of emotional regulation; this emotional regulation then feeds back into the psychedelic experience, further intensifying, as Kaelen observed, emotions and mental imagery. The result is a psychedelic music-feedback loop.

An exciting finding from the study of Kaelen and colleagues also suggests that a strong correlation exists between the use of music in psychedelic therapy and the facilitation of mystical experience. As Kaelen writes, “although these studies [by Garcia-Romeu et al., Griffiths et al., and Roseman et al.,] incorporated music-listening in combination with psilocybin, this study is the first to demonstrate that the music experience during these sessions relates to the occurrence of mystical experience.” Although much of the conversation surrounding the potential of psychedelic therapy surround the alleged evocation of “mystical-type experiences” demonstrated in studies such as those conducted by Griffiths and colleagues, Kaelen's study is notable in its proposition that the psychedelic compound may just be part of the therapeutic formula. On the other hand, perhaps this idea should not be so surprising after all. Anthropologists such as De Rios and Katz have been arguing for decades that “music, indeed, is not tangential to the drug experience, be it for purposes of healing, achieving contact with the supernatural, divining the future, for recreational or pleasurable effects.” Echoing Shanon's explication of the role of song in Santo Daime, De Rios and Katz explain that, “given the way in which hallucinogens cause dissolution of ego boundaries and the concomitant biochemical effects of generation of extreme anxiety – music replaces with its own implicit structure a set of banisters and pathways through which the drug user in a non-Western ritual setting negotiates his way.” In other words, music provides an emotional scaffolding – or according to De Rios and Katz's paper, a “jungle gym” - which allows for the cognitive offloading of intense and sometimes

155 Ibid.
156 Ibid.
159 Ibid., 65.
160 Ibid., 68.
frightening and disturbing emotions, allowing the user to better navigate the emotional and healing worlds the substances reveal. Naturally, as we have seen, the beneficial effects of music are only apparent when there is a degree of attunement. This would suggest that music in a style that is familiar and enjoyed by the participant is more likely to evoke mystical-type experiences, and that unfamiliar or alien sounding music might be more likely to produce feelings of anxiety and disconnection.\footnote{This is not to say, however, that all unfamiliar elements would be unwelcome in a psychedelic, or even sober, listening experience. Part of the dynamic force of the musical experiences comes from an interplay between the conventional and the surprising, the expected and the unexpected. It is rather likely more so a question of style. Similar to how a conversation in a foreign conversation could lead to unease (especially if you don’t understand a word of it), an experience of an unfamiliar musical tradition could also provoke feelings of alienation and confusion. Unfamiliarity at the level of particular details is generally welcomed within the confines of a shared musical vocabulary, however.}

Santo Daime provides an excellent model for the use of the psychedelic music-mystical feedback loop in a ritual context. Structurally, Shanon informs us that in Santo Daime rituals “the hymns manifest a progression that parallels the progression exhibited by the difference stages of Ayahuasca inebriation.”\footnote{Shanon, \textit{The Antipodes of the Mind}, 23.} Shanon elaborates this point, describing how, “usually, the first hymns are benedictions and blessings for a good session, then come hymns expressing difficulty and struggle. Later in the sequence are hymns describing visions and religious devotion. The concluding hymns are usually songs of praise and jubilation.”\footnote{Ibid.} Shanon's description of the progression of Santo Daime hymns suggests a sensitivity to the vital forms being experienced by the intoxicated participants. Anticipating an emotional progression from excited expectation to struggle to religious devotion and finally to religious ecstasy, the structure of a typical Santo Daime ritual attempts to, much in the manner of a caregiver with an infant, mirror the emotions of the worshippers and help them to regulate their emotions in a positive direction, ideally culminating in a mystical experience. That said, within the religion, the hymns, which are “the only written teachings of the church and are said to present the doctrine of Santo Daime,” are believed to contain “additional readings” that are able to be understood only under intoxication and are “viewed as presenting hidden esoteric wisdom.”\footnote{Ibid.} While the hymns of Santo Daime are beautiful enough when listened to or performed in an ordinary state of consciousness, it is clear that they also serve the practical purpose of guiding and illuminate worshippers as they participate in the sacrament of Daime. This notion of hidden knowledge
reflects the noetic quality of the mystical experience described by figures such as William James and Walter Pahnke – that is, according to the religion, a certain kind of musical knowledge can only be arrived at when partaking in Daime and listening to the *hinos*.\(^{165}\) This noetic quality is another factor of the psychedelic music-mystical feedback loop. When the conditions are right, the set and setting are appropriate, and the listener has attained a degree of attunement with the musical source, the listener will then be able to undergo the escalating effects of the feedback loop which will lead to the mystical-type experiences sought after in Santo Daime rituals. This is the “segredo profundo” referred to in the hino quoted above, the unique noetic understanding that occurs at the height of the mystical experience which encompasses a new kind of knowledge of both the self and other – in this case, the musical other.

**Music, Archetypes, and the Machine Elves**

Quem procurar esta casa  
Que aqui nela chegar  
Encontra com a Virgem Maria  
Sua saúde Ela dá

“Quem Procurar Esta Casa”, *O Cruzeiro* #122\(^{166}\)

There are significant differences between the experiences of DMT received orally (in the form of ayahuasca) and DMT received by other means. Rick Strassman, often credited with instigating the “psychedelic renaissance” with his research into DMT’s effects on humans in the early 1990s, chose to conduct his study by administering the compound intravenously, which resulted in a surprisingly brief period of activity. Most of Strassman's volunteers felt the strongest effects of the drug after one to two minutes, and returned to their baseline consciousness after only twenty to thirty minutes.\(^{167}\) This period of activity significantly contrasts with that of DMT received orally, with the aid of a MAO inhibitor,

---


\(^{166}\)Whoever seeks this house / And arrives here / Encounters the Virgin Mary / She gives you your health;  

\(^{167}\)Strassman, *DMT*, 38.
which has been found to last up to four hours after ingestion. This traditional method of administering the compound orally is probably the most efficient for therapeutic purposes, seeing that, as Strassman relates, “the brevity of DMT's action seemed to limit its usefulness as a tool for any inner psychological or spiritual work. All one could do was hold on tight through the rush. By the time volunteers got their bearings, they were already coming down.” The difference in effect between the two methods of administration seems to be mostly a matter of intensity and duration.

Despite temporal and qualitative differences, many of the experiences reported in Strassman's book occasioned by intravascularly received DMT are highly reminiscent of those reported in Shanon's cognitive psychological account of the ayahuasca experience. This is hardly surprising, seeing that we are referring to different methods of receiving the same compound. Nevertheless, the differences in intensity and duration are distinct enough to warrant discussion. Both Shanon and Strassman’s books explore the noetic quality of the experience. In his book, Shanon relates how, “people very often feel that Ayahuasca puts them in touch with the ultimate reality of being, and thereby reveals to them the deeper meaning of things” and that throughout the indigenous cultures of the Amazon “the world revealed through the consumption of these agents [including ayahuasca and other entheogens] is taken to be real whereas the ordinary 'real' world is often regarded as illusory.” Strassman similarly emphasizes how his volunteers often reported that, during their DMT-induced experiences, there was “no doubt in their minds that it is really happening. Thus, they describe their experiences as 'more real than real'.”

This naturally can lead to some of the trauma that is occasionally associated with ayahuasca and DMT experiences, such as the case of one of Strassman's volunteers who reports having been sexually attacked by two crocodiles, stating that, “at first I thought I was dreaming, having a nightmare. Then I

169 Strassman, DMT, 137.
170 Shanon, The Antipodes of the Mind, 251.
171 Strassman, DMT, 217; Chris Letheby has commented on this sense of the hyper-real in the psychedelic experience, arguing that our sense of the reality of an experience is just another variable component of consciousness and that this sense is also “modulated ... in pathologies such as depersonalisation disorder.” Chris Letheby, Philosophy of Psychedelics, International Perspectives in Philosophy and Psychiatry (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 195.
realized it was really happening … it was the most scared I've ever been in my life.” Shanon also evokes the strong potential for fear in ayahuasca intoxication when he states that, “with its exuberant bewitchment the Ayahuasca situation often evokes an overall ambience of evil.” Of course the value of the variables of set and setting still apply in reducing the potentially harmful psychological effects of DMT intoxication and the degrees of fear experienced. Nevertheless, the inherently alien nature of the DMT experience, whether received orally or through other means, often cannot help but evoke a certain degree of cosmic terror. As Strassman warns, “a high dose of DMT shares many features with physical and psychological trauma.”

One of the more unusual findings to come out of Strassman's research with DMT is the preponderance of encounters with “otherworldly entities.” Many of Strassman's volunteers reported that they had at the height of their DMT experience met and communicated with “‘entities,' 'beings,' 'guides,' and 'helpers’” who took on various and strange forms, including “clowns, reptiles, mantises, bees, spiders, cacti, and stick figures.” One volunteer, for example, reported having seen “dolls in 1890s outfits, life-sized, men and women … The women had red circles painted on their cheeks, and there was calliope music in the background. And there were some clowns, flitting in and out, not really the main characters, but busier, somehow more aware of me than the mannequins.” Another volunteer reported communicating with the entities he encountered: “There were lots of beings. They were talking to me, but they weren't making a sound. It was more as if they were blessing me, the spirits of life were blessing me. They were saying that life is good.” My personal favourite encounter described in Strassman's book came from a volunteer who found himself in a “high-tech nursery with a single Gumby, three feet tall, attending me. I felt like an infant … an infant relative to the intelligences represented by the Gumby. It was aware of me, but not particularly concerned … I heard two to three male voices talking. I heard one of them say, 'He's arrived.'” What is especially startling about this phenomenon is that at least half of Strassman's volunteers claimed to have encountered these entities in

172 Ibid., 252.
175 Ibid., 185.
176 Ibid., 164.
177 Ibid., 190.
178 Ibid., 193.
“one form or another.” 179 This property of reliably facilitating contact with otherworldly entities appears to be a property unique to the psychedelic compound DMT. As Strassman writes, “what is even more striking is that I have been unable to locate any similar reports in research subjects taking other psychedelics. Only with DMT do people meet up with 'them,' with other beings in a nonmaterial world.” 180

The tendency to encounter otherworldly entities is by no means limited to Strassman's studies. Shanon also reports a preponderance of encounters and communications with seemingly otherworldly entities in his investigation. Shanon refers to these beings as “mythological and phantasmagoric beings and creatures” which take the shape of such beings as, according Shanon's informants, “little green men, gnomes and elves, fairies, and monsters of all sorts.” 181 Shanon also writes that “many times, the creatures seen are said to be playful and mischievous (but at the same time benevolent),” a description which matches many of the reports found in Strassman's study. 182 Many of the entity reports in Strassman's book also seem to describe entities similar to the “guides and teachers” mentioned by Shanon. For example, several of Shanon's informants reported encounters with “guides, guardians, teachers, and other wise men and women. Non-human beings (notably fairies and angels) can serve in these functions too.” 183 Notably, however, experiences of having “arrived” in another world and being greeted by these alien entities do not feature as prominently in Shanon's account of the ayahuasca experience. Nevertheless, it seems to be the case that encounters with otherworldly entities are also frequent in the ayahuasca experience, though potentially with less of the intensity and directness found in the experience of pure DMT.

Observations about the strange entities encountered under DMT intoxication had been made prior to the publication of Strassman's research by ethnobotanist and psychedelic cultural icon Terrence McKenna, a figure who Strassman credits with having “raised awareness of DMT, through lectures, books, interviews, and recordings, to its present unprecedented level.” 184 Prior to both Strassman and McKenna's influence, the “uncertainty of DMT's effects helped the drug remain relatively obscure”

179Ibid., 185.
180Ibid., 187.
182Ibid.
183Ibid., 115.
184Strassman, DMT, 349.
since its initial synthesis by Canadian chemist R. Manske, who first published his paper involving the compound in 1931. Reporting on DMT's effects, McKenna poetically illustrates the DMT experience as causing the world to appear as “an Arabian labyrinth, a palace, a more than possible Martian Jewel … it is an audience with alien nuncio … in the midst of this experience, apparently at the end of human history, guarding gates that seem surely to open on the howling maelstrom of the unspeakable emptiness between the stars, is the Aeon.”

The Aeon, as Heraclitus presciently observed, is a child at play with colored balls. Many diminutive beings are present there – the tykes, the self-transforming machine elves of hyperspace. Are they the children destined to be father to the man? One has the impression of entering into an ecology of souls that lies beyond the portals of what we naively call death. I do not know. Are they the synesthetic embodiment of ourselves as the Other, or of the Other as ourselves? Are they the elves lost to us since the fading of the magic light of childhood? Here is a tremendum barely to be told, an epiphany beyond our wildest dreams.

As a result of McKenna's influence, the types of strange, playful, and welcoming entities encountered at the height of many DMT experiences, the diminutive “tykes” of “hyperspace” as McKenna calls them, came to become popularly known as “machine elves” within psychedelic subcultures. McKenna's uncertain speculation as to the phenomenon's source parallels Strassman's own misgivings throughout his study. Faced with volunteers who often claimed that their experience “wasn't a dream, or a hallucination. It was real,” Strassman was eventually forced to confront the tension between “the volunteer's experiences and my ability to respond to them,” resulting in an approach to working with volunteers that took their reports at face-value, without attempting to subsume them within extant explanatory models.

Given the importance of set and setting in determining a psychedelic experience, it is possible
to argue that McKenna's eloquent evocations of the DMT experience may have significantly influenced the expectations of many of Strassman's volunteers, resulting in the preponderance of visions of otherworldly elf-like entities. Strassman denies this possibility, however, arguing that McKenna's work was not “especially popular when we first started hearing these unusual reports from our research subjects. I often asked volunteers about being familiar with popular accounts of DMT-mediated encounters with elves or insectoid aliens. Few if any were. Thus, I don't think these reports were a type of mass hysteria or a self-fulfilling prophecy.”\textsuperscript{189} Moreover, Strassman reports how early studies of the effects of DMT on humans also often included descriptions of encounters with entities, such as Stephen Szára’s studies in the 1950s which mention the encounter of a patient with schizophrenia who, while intoxicated with DMT, reported that they “saw strange creatures, dwarves or something, they were black and moved about.”\textsuperscript{190} While it is difficult to say conclusively whether encounters with the so-called machine elves are due to cultural influences or not, the reports of these visions of the potentially “synesthetic embodiment of ourselves as the Other, or of the Other as ourselves” do seem to nevertheless trace back further than Strassman and McKenna's writings, back to early human encounters with the strange tryptamine molecule in the form of ayahuasca.

Whether encounters with entities are an intrinsic part of the psychological effects of DMT intoxication or not, one thing is for certain: The forms of the entities encountered are culturally determined. If one were to seriously make the claim that DMT is a technology which allows for communication with interdimensional beings, it would still be necessary to contend with the fact that these encounters take the form of figures such as European clowns or American animated characters such as Gumby. Without a doubt the phenomenon is an immensely strange one and requires further research before satisfactory explanatory models can be constructed. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this chapter I simply wish to draw attention to the apparent fact that, under DMT intoxication, whether received orally or intravascularly, the brain has the seeming capacity to create particular categories of visions which nevertheless manifest themselves in a variety of divergent forms. That is to say, many people have reported encounters with wise, welcoming entities, but these entities have taken on a staggering variety of guises – from clowns to elves to dwarves to Gumby. This observation would suggest an underlying substrate of psychological categories that come to manifest in a variety of ways

\textsuperscript{189}Ibid., 357.

based on an individual's personal cultural background. The explanatory model that can for the time being best help us make sense of this phenomenon is perhaps Carl Jung's theory of psychological archetypes.

Often misunderstood as describing concrete forms and figures, Jung is clear to articulate that his theory deals with the “archaic remnants” of instinctual thought that “manifest themselves in fantasies and often reveal their presence only by symbolic images.” In other words, Jungian archetypes are abstract, fluid categories that constitute our instinctual system of perception, which come to reveal themselves in our creative works. In Jung's theory, mythological images or motifs are “conscious representations” of a more fundamental psychological substrate, meaning that a single instinctual archetype can manifest itself in variegated forms in the fruits of the human imagination, relative to the culture and individual. If we consider the machine elf phenomenon through the lens of Jungian psychology, it would suggest that there is an archetypal category deep in the substrate of the human psyche that is variously manifested as clowns, elves, and cartoon characters. What is intriguing about this idea is that it perhaps sheds some light on the psychological power and confluence of such variable cultural products as the circus, high fantasy, cartoons, and videogames. The fact that these reports of entity encounters are often associated with spiritual and healing experiences also suggests something about the role of elf-like figures and cartoons in the imagination. Could these cultural products be more than idle diversions, but a mass movement toward the mending of cultural wounds? Could the popularity of animated films and colourful videogame worlds stem from an inherent desire to find comfort amongst the archetypal beings represented by McKenna's diminutive “tykes”? It is certainly worth considering McKenna's suggestion that the machine elves represent what was “lost to us since the fading of the magic light of childhood.” This consideration might lend support to the observation that the growing industry for nostalgia may be rooted in a desire to heal a collective cultural trauma.

While encounters with elf-like entities do not appear to occur as frequently in experiences brought on through ayahuasca, Shanon nevertheless emphasizes the abundance of reports involving meetings with spiritual guides. Shanon particularly highlights the frequency of visions of female healing figures, the exact form through which they manifest being relative to the culture of the

---

192 Ibid.
observer. For example, members of the Amerindian tradition are more likely to encounter a being known as “the Ayahuasca mama, the mother of Ayahuasca” whereas members of the church of Santo Daime are more likely to report the figure as being the “Rainha da Floresta (Queen of the Forest) and the Holy Virgin,” both of whom are considered to be “the same persona.” Elsewhere, in the same chapter in which Shanon describes visions of “mythological and phantasmagoric beings,” he again notes that “also very common is a benevolent female figure standardly taken to be the Virgin Mary. Conceivably the great frequency with which these figures appear in visions of my informants may be attributed to the Christian and semi-Christian contexts in which Ayahuasca is often taken.”

Again, we can see the influence of set and setting on the content of psychedelic visions. Nevertheless, it is worth considering even further the fascinating phenomenon of the frequency with which religious imagery appears in many psychedelic visions. Again, we seem to be confronted with the phenomenon of unconscious archetypes, visions of which are triggered through the ayahuasca experience and are manifested before the mind's eye in a form that is familiar according to the experience of the individual. This is part of the strategy of religions such as Santo Daime who use the technology of ayahuasca as a means of consolidating religious belief; even beyond psychedelic contexts, this also seems to be a mechanism at work in any religious technology.

If religion itself is a cultural technology used for the purpose of encouraging mystical experiences, then the profound mental states attained through such means as music, psychedelics, and trance must have the additional function of revealing their influence through the symbols that make up an individual's cultural background. If Jung's theory offers us any explanatory power, it is in its suggestion that there are certain thoughts only thinkable through the language of cultural symbols and metaphor. This would of course also suggest that religious thinking is an inextricable element of human psychology, as it constitutes a deep position in the archaic substrate of the human unconscious. After all, without corresponding religious symbols, what would the mind perceive under the intoxication of ayahuasca? Nevertheless, this does not mean that religious thought must necessarily manifest itself in forms familiar to us. What the ayahuasca and DMT experience suggest, rather, is that the psychological foundation of religion is much closer to a form of noesis – or, rather, that religious practice is merely the tool, or a box containing several tools, meant to allow for the more direct mystical experience. As

194Ibid., 122.
the Buddha famously instructs in an often-quoted passage from the Alagaddupama sutta: “In the same way, monks, have I shown to you the Teaching's similitude to a raft: as having the purpose of crossing over, not the purpose of being clung to.”\textsuperscript{195} Here the Buddha explicitly references religious teaching as being technological in nature. It is not the tool itself that is essential, but the way it allows us to interact with and better function in the world – and in this case, our minds.

Other than its relevance to the mechanisms of ayahuasca's role as a religious technology, the reason I wanted to include this investigation of the phenomenon of archetypal manifestations in psychedelic experiences is that, in addition to the female spiritual guides mentioned by Shanon and the diminutive “tykes” described by McKenna, the reports in both Shanon and Strassman's texts also contain occasional references to musical hallucinations. Though Strassman does state that “it was quite rare for volunteers to hear formed voices or hear music,” there were enough music-related reports mentioned in his study as well as Shanon's to justify bringing them up in this chapter.\textsuperscript{196} Significantly, in both Strassman and Shanon's texts, musical hallucinations were often of a divine or cosmic nature. For example, Shanon relates one of his own early experiences with the brew, in which he saw a vision of a “fair maiden” surrounded by a powerful energy which gradually began to morph into music.

Shanon continues: “It was music so sublime that no mortal could hear … down here on earth, I knew, there were men and women and children who, unbeknownst to themselves, were drawing their hearts, like the heads of flowers towards the sun, so that they could be nourished and lovingly nurtured by the music of the spheres.”\textsuperscript{197} One of Strassman's volunteers also reported a musical experience with cosmic associations. She reported having heard “high-pitched singing, like angel voices. But they aren't comforting. They are very impersonal and don't care about me. They are simply part of the background noise of blasting through the void of the universe.”\textsuperscript{198} Shanon also mentions a vision in which he felt he was “thrown up into a realm high above the planets” in which he needed to somehow redeem his existence through song.\textsuperscript{199} He continues: “For six to eight hours I continuously sang the praises of God … the melody was being composed as it was being sung. As I was singing, I found myself to be surrounded by an immense choir of angels – I was taking the lead role and they were accompanying


\textsuperscript{196}Shanon, \textit{The Antipodes of the Mind}, 147.

\textsuperscript{197}Ibid., 157.

\textsuperscript{198}Strassman, \textit{DMT}, 212.

\textsuperscript{199}Shanon, \textit{The Antipodes of the Mind}, 185.
Just as the archetypes associated with religious feeling manifest themselves in the form of culturally-conditioned sacred visions, it is likely that these psychological substrates also have the capacity to manifest themselves musically. Given the close relationship between music and the psychedelic experience, it is not surprising that musical hallucinations should also occur, especially in conjunction with visions steeped in religious and sacred imagery. There seems to be a close psychological connection between music and religion, one which we see manifest not only in the world's cultural practices, but also in the kinds of hallucinatory visions experienced under DMT intoxication.

An additional point worth mentioning in relation to Santo Daime specifically is that, emically, the hymns that constitute the majority of their rituals are said to be “received”, not composed. More precisely, Blocksom specifies that, “Daimistas consider their hymns to have been received from the astral plane.” The notion of musical composition being received through divine inspiration is an ancient one and has perhaps been around since human beings first began creating music. An exploration of the relationships connecting the concepts of divine inspiration, composition, and genius are beyond the scope of this chapter, but it is at least worth mentioning that the followers of Santo Daime are not the first to claim a sacred origin to their musical works. That said, the claims made for an “otherworldly” source for musical compositions is somewhat more convincing in the case of Santo Daime than in most other contexts. As Shanon writes, “Ayahuasca often makes its partakers sing. More than that, the brew makes some people sing melodies they have never heard before, in other words, compose.” Shanon also goes on to make the connection that this brew-inspired expression may have been the means through which the Santo Daime hinos were first written, stating: “All the hymns of the Santo Daime Church are of this type: they are songs that prominent persons of the community have sung under the effect of the Daime. These songs are said to be 'received'.”

Considering the sophistication of the visions for which the ayahuasca brew is famous, it should come as no surprise that entire compositions can emerge from an intoxication experience, especially in such a musically rich setting as the tradition of Santo Daime. Although it is merely an aesthetic

200 Ibid.
203 Ibid.
evaluation, Shanon has nevertheless observed that, “personally (and I am definitely not alone in this regard), I have found the Daime hymns exceptionally beautiful.”204 I would tend to agree. I am inclined to suggest that this is a kind of evidence supporting the music's profound creative source, though it is impossible to make any definite conclusions based on personal taste. Nevertheless, the history of mind-altering substances being used as an aid to musical creativity has been well established, a popular example being the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* which, according to band member Paul McCartney, was inspired mostly by “experience with drugs” – not to mention cannabis use amongst early jazz artists such as Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington.205 Moreover, Shanon reports that, though intoxicated users of ayahuasca occasionally experience problems with motor control, “in the context of performance, it is possible to encounter under the intoxication levels of execution that are actually higher than normal.”206 Shanon also claims that “under the effect of Ayahuasca, many people (myself included) sing better and in a much stronger voice than they normally could.”207 All of these details seem to suggest that the ayahuasca brew may have something to do with the artistic merit observable in the Santo Daime *hinos*, despite their simplicity. That said, it is also likely that this artistic value has as much to do with the church's musical emphasis as on its use of ayahuasca as a creative tool. This emphasis on communal music-making is also observable in the religious gospel music stemming from the musically rich African American religious tradition, despite entheogens not usually being used as an aid in the compositional process.208 The same could of course be said for much of the sacred music in the Western art music tradition as well, from such composers as Machaut to Bach. Clearly these composers did not require ayahuasca in order to write sacred compositions of high artistic merit. Nevertheless, as the idea of religion as technology suggests, there are many means through which creative and mystical states may be reached, and sacred music can take inspiration from many sources.

It is certainly possible that the Santo Daime hymns were modified after their initial 'reception',

---

204Ibid., 23.
either intentionally or as a consequence of their oral transmission throughout the years. Blocksom's observation as to the structural consistency across most Daime hinos seems to support this possibility: “Most Daime hymns are in strophic form … strophes are normally two eight-bar phrases, each phrase repeating once before the strophe repeats.” Blocksom also makes the suggestion that the purpose of this abundance of repetition was to facilitate the “memorization of hymns that were originally received from a largely illiterate population.” This is likely a significant reason for why the hinos were either intentionally structured or gradually modified to take on their present form. What Blocksom does not mention, however, is the potentially comforting effect this repetition can have during an ayahuasca experience. Shanon describes how ayahuasca often significantly modifies a person's perception of time and that “often, a moment seems to last an eternity, and if what one is seeing at that moment is frightening, the experience can be quite terrifying, in which case the music being played or sung can be most helpful.” Moreover, “when the melody is familiar – either from immediate repetition or accumulated long-term experience – this securing effect is especially pronounced.” As a result, repetition in the Santo Daime hymns can be seen as serving multiple functions, such as facilitating memorization and providing a source of guidance and comfort during intoxication. While it is possible that the original hinos, such as those written by founder Meistre Irineu, were initially “received” just as they are preserved today, it is much more likely that they were “polished” over time by the forces of prudence and necessity.

210 Ibid.
212 Ibid.
Eu Tomo Esta Bebida

Eu tomo esta bebida
Que tem poder inacreditável
Ela mostra a todos nós
Aqui dentro desta verdade

Subi, subi, subi
Subi foi com alegria
Quando eu chequei nas alturas
Encontrei com a Virgem Maria

Subi, subi, subi
Subi foi com amor
Encontrei com o Pai Eterno
E Jesus Cristo Redentor

Subi, subi, subi
Conforme os meus ensinos
Viva o Pai Eterno
E viva todo Ser Divino

I take this drink
Which has an incredible Power
It shows all of us
Here in this Truth

I went up, I went up, I went up
I went up with happiness
When I arrived in the Heights
I met with the Virgin Mary

I went up, I went up, I went up
I went up with love
I met the Eternal Father
And Jesus Christ the Redeemer

I went up, I went up, I went up
Following my teachings
Viva my Eternal Father
And viva to all the Divine Beings

“Eu Tomo Esta Bebida”, O Cruzeiro #124

---

213 I take this drink / Which has an incredible Power / It shows all of us / Here in this Truth

“Eu Tomo Esta Bebida,” Nossa Irmandade, accessed March 8, 2022,
Figur 1. Basic outline of the melody for the hymn “Eu Tomo Esta Bebida”.

In this section I will undertake a brief analysis of what I consider to be an illustrative example of a Santo Daime hino. “Eu Tomo Esta Bebida” (I Take This Drink) is the 124th hino in the hinario (hymnal) O Cruzeiro, “received” by the religion's founder Meistre Irineu himself.

This particular hino, as with many others, corresponds with Blocksom's assessment that many Santo Daime hinos “are in strophic form … strophes are normally two eight-bar phrases, each phrase repeating once before the strophe repeats.” Two atypical elements exist in this hino, however. Firstly, the two individual phrases consist of four bars rather than Blocksom's suggested eight. Secondly, the repetition of the first phrase is foregone, though the second phrase is repeated once each strophe. Thus, the structure of each strophe in this hino can be represented as ABB. Otherwise, this hino is rather representative of most of Meistre Irineu's compositions found in O Cruzeiro.

As is common in many tonal melodies, both the apex and lowest point of this theme are members of the tonic triad, which here happens to be a G minor chord. In general, the melodic motion of the hino is straightforward and simply arpeggiates the underlying harmony. This is an advantage in a context of communal music making, since uncomplicated melodies are of course easier to perform. As

---

mentioned earlier, Santo Daime began as an oral-aural tradition and hymns were not originally written down, so relatively simple melodies were preferred for the purpose of facilitating memorization.

The two main motives present in this hino constitute the building blocks of the two formal sections. In the A section, the principal motive is a five-note gesture consisting of a pickup, a leap, and a rhythmic elaboration of the destination of the leap. The original statement of this motive takes place on the pickup to the first measure and extends to its third beat. The motive is then transposed twice more, with a significant variation in the final statement (with an inversion of contour, a leap on the third beat, and a melodic extension leading to the end of the phrase on the half beat in m. 4). The motive that makes up the B section resembles the first in its arpeggiated contour but is just made up of four quarter notes beginning on the downbeat, two on an initial pitch followed by two leaps. As in the A section, the B section's motive is transposed twice more, with a cadential variation in the final statement. The entire B section then repeats before the entire form, ABB, is repeated, set to a new strophe of lyrics. This music is repeated for four strophes in total, with additional instrumental repetitions opening and closing the piece.

Given the guiding role of Santo Daime hymns during the intoxication experience, we should expect them to be pragmatically structured with this role in mind. “Eu Tomo Esta Bebida,” for example, features a form of word painting that seems practically designed for the evocation of divine visions and mystical experiences. Shanon reflects that “singing is uplifting – quite literally so – and when the voice is raised up, so too is one's soul and with it one's visions.” And since “ayahuasca amplifies the effect intrinsic to music, and in turn, music provides extra fuel for ayahuasca's psychoactive effects,” we should expect certain musical effects to encourage the onset of a musical-mystical feedback loop in the context of the Santo Daime collective trance experience.

One such effect observable in “Eu Tomo Esta Bebida” is the energetically rising gesture toward the melodic apex near the beginning of the hino. This gesture is initially tied to the lyrics “eu tomo esta bebida” (I take this drink), followed by “que tem poder inacreditavel” (which has an incredible Power). Many Santo Daime *hinos* feature similar lyrics, such as “Eu Tomo Daime”, quoted at the beginning of this chapter. The reasons appear to be multifarious, including the consolidation of the group by

---


216 Ibid., 290.
acknowledging a shared activity and the grounding of the individual by reminding them of the context of their experience. There is likely an element of intention-setting involved in this activity as well – that is to say, in order to maintain a proper mental “set” and to encourage divine visions, many Santo Daime hymns remind the worshippers why they are there, singing and dancing as they are: to drink Daime and meet “com a Virgem Maria” (with the Virgin Mary). This lyrical element has the effect of guiding the ayahuasca experience in a positive direction and is likely one of the reasons why so many of Shanon's informants reported visions of the Virgin Mary and of Jesus Christ.217

The last three strophes lyrically modify the pattern set in the first, beginning with the words “subi, subi, subi” (I went up, I went up, I went up). The second strophe follows the early climactic moment with “subi foi com alegria” (I went up with happiness) while the third strophe follows the climactic moment with “subi foi com amor” (I went up with love). Again, combined with the increased sensitivity to musical stimuli under ayahuasca intoxication, these are potent lyrical intentions, encouraging worshippers to dwell in states of happiness and love as their minds ascend to higher and higher states of altered consciousness. The word painting occurring at this moment in the hymn parallels the uplifting content of the lyrics; in the same way that a companion might encourage our ascent up a steep mountain, the physical and psychological sensations of upward moment experienced when performing this hymn encourage an ascent into states of religious ecstasy, offering support in the face of fear and the unknown.

An additional advantage of having music to listen to and perform during the ayahuasca experience is that, as we saw Krueger argue, music has the capacity to scaffold our emotions and allow us to “offload” emotional thought processes.218 In other words, Santo Daime hymns, provided that a level of attunement has been reached (which, as we saw Shanon argue, is a fundamental goal informing the structure of the rituals219), should have the capacity to do some of the emotional work for worshippers and, as a result, act as a “modifying mirror” and direct them toward the religious experiences they seek. As Krueger argues, discussing the capacity for music to outline a virtual space in the imagination, “music becomes present to consciousness in a different way. We hear it as also having distinct internal spatial complexity. It is perceived as a structurally organized soundworld that can be

219 Shanon, The Antipodes of the Mind, 23.
\textit{inhabited}, experientially, in a way many other sounds cannot.\textsuperscript{220} Shanon, referring to the temporal dimension, has also acknowledged that “even in the ordinary state of consciousness, listening to music can transport people to a different temporal matrix, defined not by the clock but rather by the intrinsic dynamics of the composition.”\textsuperscript{221} Significantly, in the context of ayahuasca rituals, “this effect is greatly magnified and one may indeed feel absorbed and swept into what is experienced as another frame of being, or another reality altogether.”\textsuperscript{222} If musical spaces can be “inhabited” in our listening experiences under ordinary states of consciousness, then it is not difficult to imagine the immense influence that such spaces can have on worshippers in Santo Daime rituals, performing \textit{hinos} such as “Eu Tomo Esta Bebida” after having consumed the ayahuasca brew. If music modifies our emotions under ordinary conditions, its effects must be considered as totally enveloping under ayahuasca intoxication. In the ayahuasca experience, the distinction between the caregiver and child breaks down – we are no longer certain whether the emotion belongs to us or to the music. And when the distinction between the self and the other is disintegrated, if only briefly, then a religion has attained its goal of evoking a mystical experience.

\textbf{Concluding Remarks}

In this chapter I investigated the history of the religion of Santo Daime, the mechanism of its rituals, the source of its music, and the way it uses both ayahuasca and music as a technology for facilitating a mystical experience. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that, as Masters and Houston remind us, “there are various odd and pathologicomimetic states of mind which seem to be especially productive of unfounded claims of religious and mystical experience.”\textsuperscript{223} That is to say, not every psychedelic experience is a mystical experience, or even a general religious experience, though its unusual nature can often convince us that it is. For this reason, it is helpful to keep in mind the characteristics of a mystical experience described by Richards and Pahnke and others before them.\textsuperscript{224} Importantly, a mystical experience should leave a lasting positive impact on an individual, and not merely serve as an interesting diversion for an evening. This is why Strassman argued against the

\textsuperscript{220} Krueger, “Music as Affective Scaffolding,” 58.
\textsuperscript{221} Shanon, \textit{The Antipodes of the Mind}, 290.
\textsuperscript{222} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{224} Pahnke and Richards, “Implications of LSD and Experimental Mysticism.”
therapeutic use of pure DMT – the experience is often so rapid that it leaves little time for anything other than confusion and awe.\textsuperscript{225} Nevertheless, ayahuasca has been used for millennia in the aboriginal traditions of the Amazon jungle, and the techniques developed around its use as a tool for healing and facilitating mystical-type experiences have been perfected over time to allow for maximal personal and social benefit.

This technology and these techniques were then adopted by the Church of Santo Daime as a tool for energizing Christian worship. The fact that numerous studies have shown that, as Blainey writes, “Santo Daime members are generally healthy individuals, many of whom credit ayahuasca with inspiring them to live a more wholesome lifestyle,”\textsuperscript{226} supports the efficacy of the techniques. It is also interesting to note that in a study conducted by Blainey on members of the Santo Daime church, informants “consistently refer to their ayahuasca rituals as a kind of 'key' technology that unlocks solutions to psychophysical and existential problems in their lives.”\textsuperscript{227} All of this seems to point to the general efficacy of the musical and entheogenic tools – religious technologies - used by the Church of Santo Daime for the purpose of evoking religious visions. Given the advantageous communal benefits and positive influences on members' health, Santo Daime can be considered to offer a strategically designed setting for the psychedelic experience which effectively makes use of music, text, and trance for the purpose of guiding worshippers toward a Christian-based worldview, health, and mystical-type experiences. In many ways, Santo Daime is exactly what so many contemporary religions strive to be: A practice which consolidates its community, heals psychological problems, and offers a direct contact with the divine. This is achieved as much through the use of ayahuasca as with music. In the following chapter we will investigate a tradition which strives to achieve transcendent states without the use of entheogenic aids, through sound technology alone.

\textsuperscript{225} Strassman, \textit{DMT}, 137.


\textsuperscript{227} Blainey, 295.
Chapter III
Fuke-shū, the Shakuhachi, and Honkyoku

The shakuhachi as it was used in the historical branch of Zen Buddhism known as Fuke-shū presents an ontological paradox: Within the religion, the shakuhachi is treated as an instrument of Zen, a spiritual tool to be used in the pursuit of awakening; the instrument can also be seen as a musical instrument, designed for the production of music for aesthetic enjoyment. The tradition sees these two states of being as antithetical. This chapter explores this seeming contradiction, examining the practical use of the shakuhachi in Fuke-shū through a number of lenses, including the phenomenology of the self explored in Varela, Thompson, and Rosch's book The Embodied Mind as well as Andreas Gutzwiller and Zachary Wallmark's own research on historical and contemporary thought on the status of the shakuhachi as a musical instrument in Japan.228 I also briefly draw on the work of Benny Shanon and Chris Letheby relating to consciousness and psychedelic drugs, suggesting that the use of the shakuhachi as a tool for modifying the mind can provide some insight into the psychological mechanisms of psychedelic drugs and even help illuminate some of the problems relating to the nature of the self discussed by Varela and colleagues.229

Shakuhachi Ontology

Mystical experience is culturally determined. While it is possible that we may be able to point to a neurological basis for the mental experience of mysticism, it is nevertheless also the case that this experience is shaped by cultural and religious expectations, and the ways that it is consequently integrated into everyday consciousness and the broader cultural context is also a product of local influences. This observation constitutes the foundation of Evan Thompson's criticism of the treatment of mindfulness meditation in modern neuroscience, in which the experience is often transplanted from


its original context into a lab for the purpose of locating a substrate based in “biological reality.”

While it is likely that mindfulness meditation and mystical experience in general do influence the brain in empirically measurable ways, it is in many ways trivial to investigate them outside of their cultural contexts since it is within these contexts that they are received, integrated, and reflected upon by individuals and the larger community. The mystical experience is fundamentally a human experience, and its subjective nature will inevitably demonstrate the influences of one's environment.

One particular tradition which highlights the cultural contingency of the mystical experience is Fuke-shū, a Zen Buddhist sect which originated in Japan. Buddhism is not traditionally known as a religion which looks favourably upon the musical experience, a situation which Mabbett notes to be a fascinating paradox in light of the rich variety of musical practices found throughout Buddhist traditions. Mabbett emphasizes how, in early Buddhist practice, the Buddha “urged upon his followers a life of poverty and simplicity … there is no room here for gorgeous displays, for magnificientia in the mediaeval Christian sense.”

This attitude can be found explicitly stated in the seventh of the Eight Precepts (Pali: atthasila). It should come then as a surprise that so many of Buddhism's cultural manifestations place music so centrally in their practice. One example is the Fuke-shū sect's practice of meditation through the playing of the shakuhachi, a kind of end-blown bamboo flute developed in sixteenth-century Japan. Without a doubt, Fuke-shū took the incorporation of music into Buddhist practice and soteriology much further than did any previous branch of Buddhism.

How the shakuhachi first came to be associated with spiritual practice is not known. The instrument was first introduced to Japan through China and, as Wallmark points out, seems to have

230 F. J. Varela, The Embodied Mind, xxix.


232 Ibid., 9-10.

233 “Nacca gita vadita visukhadassana-mala gandha vilepana dharanamandana vibhusanatthana veramani sikkhapadam samamadiyami.”

"I undertake the training rule to abstain from dancing, singing, instrumental music, unsuitable shows, and from wearing garlands, using scents, and beautifying the body with cosmetics."

originally been played in a religious context by mendicant monks as they went about begging for alms.\textsuperscript{234} It is possible that the tradition began as a way of encouraging alms giving through performance, or as a way of notifying the populace of the presence of the monks. The monks who originally took on the performance of the shakuhachi were known as the \textit{komuso}, “priests of nothingness”, and were identified not only by their choice of musical instrument, but also by large “identity concealing straw basket hats (\textit{tengai})”.\textsuperscript{235} Being granted a number of social and travel privileges by the Edo Japanese government, the group of komuso monks soon became infested by a number of unlawful and womanizing characters looking to escape persecution and pursue hedonistic goals. As a result, in Edo-era Japan the shakuhachi came to be associated “as much with violence and sex as with its former Zen connotations.”\textsuperscript{236} This association is perhaps echoed in Malm's observation that the shakuachi, with its blunt end, can also double as a convenient weapon.\textsuperscript{237} While it is clear that many followers of this Zen sect pursued it in earnest, the vast gulf between the sacred and the secular found within its actual practice is worth noting. Of course, in all religious traditions the motivations of its members will differ to some degree or another, and in many cases worldly motivation will outweigh devotion to spiritual ideals. In any case, the undignified connotations that arose around the shakuhachi and the monks who played it resulted in an effort to standardize the repertoire and associated performance techniques. As Wallmark phrases it, “playing technique and tune repertory became a sort of shibboleth used to distinguish between rival groups,” and a failure to perform according to expectation could lead to a performer being “executed on the spot.”\textsuperscript{238} Clearly by this time the instrument was not being treated merely as a vehicle for musical diversion, a fact which may have to some degree influenced the spiritual associations which came to be ascribed to the instrument.

The Meiji era Japanese government banned the practice of Fuke-shū in the late 1860s in light of its criminal associations, and since then the instrument has been used mostly in secular contexts.\textsuperscript{239} Nevertheless, the repertoire is still performed today, though within the midst of a fascinating tension: Wallmark argues that the foundational questions – about whether the classic works (\textit{honkyoku}; Japanese: 本曲) of Fuke-shū are to be considered music or not and whether the shakuhachi is to be

\textsuperscript{234}Wallmark, “Sacred Abjection in Zen Shakuhachi,” 2.
\textsuperscript{235}Ibid., 2.
\textsuperscript{236}Ibid., 2.
\textsuperscript{238}Wallmark, “Sacred Abjection in Zen Shakuhachi,” 2.
\textsuperscript{239}Ibid., 2.
regarded as an instrument or a spiritual tool - are central to the modern performance practice of the instrument. While, according to Western definitions of music, it may appear obvious that the organized sound produced by a shakuhachi must of course constitute some form of music, according to the worldview and philosophy of many Fuke-shū practitioners these sounds and the intentions behind their production point toward very different conclusions.

The notation and standardization of the Fuke-shū honkyoku are attributed to a komuso named Kurosawa Kinko (1710-1770) and, though his writings were all destroyed during the second World War, many important ideas in the Fuke-shū tradition are still attributed to him.\(^ {240} \) Perhaps the most important for understanding the spiritual practice of Fuke-shū is the phrase *ichion jōbutsu* (Japanese: 一音成仏), or “enlightenment in a single tone.” For Kinko, what was significant was not the form of a shakuhachi piece, but the independent impressions of individual musical moments, what Gutzwiller terms “tonal cells.”\(^ {241} \) That is to say, rather than valuing coherent and connected melodies, the “extremely slow tempo and flexible rhythm” of Fuke-shū honkyoku have the effect of “breaking up the melodic coherence in favour of complex, largely self-contained patterns of notes.”\(^ {242} \) For Kinko, at least according to what is known of Kinko, the use of the shakuhachi as a tool for enlightenment was not contingent on melody, rhythm, or harmony – the formal, organizational elements of music. Rather, enlightenment was to be found in a meditator's concentration on a single tone, serving as a contemplative object and a catalyst for spiritual insight. Why the komuso monks did not just throw out the traditional honkyoku in favour of free improvisation is not clear. Certainly, a desire to maintain lineage likely played a part in the dedicated practice of the honkyoku. The phenomenon of secular music being adopted for sacred purposes in religious traditions is not a rare phenomenon at all in the history of spiritual traditions. Sometimes it is the music which comes first, only being given a sacred status much later.

Wallmark investigates this ontological tension between the shakuhachi's status as a secular instrument (*gakki*) versus a sacred tool (*houki*) at length and reminds us that the dichotomy is not as absolute as it may first appear, especially considering the transcendence of duality favoured in the Zen tradition. Nevertheless, though many shakuhachi players recognize the “false dichotomy” between the


\(^ {241} \)Ibid., 59.

\(^ {242} \)Ibid., 59.
shakuhachi as a musical instrument and a spiritual tool, in practice players will consider themselves to
tend more toward one position or another.\textsuperscript{243} As Wallmark's case studies reveal, the ontological
orientation we ascribe to an instrument can have a significant influence on what musical decisions are
made using it.

One example that Wallmark cites is the shakuhachi performer Kentaro Idemitsu who, in an effort to
preserve his vision of traditional shakuhachi performance, aims to perform “raw, unlacquered (\textit{ji-nashi})
flutes that sound like 'howling wind,' not music.”\textsuperscript{244} Taking the attitude that “music” is essentially
“contrived”, Idemitsu instead performs the shakuhachi in a way that emphasizes the “bamboo's sound”
rather than his own.\textsuperscript{245} Idemitsu's approach reveals the effects that a philosophical substrate can have on
the practice of making actual music; influenced by Kinko's principle of \textit{ichion jōbutsu}, Idemitsu draws
attention to the momentary, sound-like elements of the performance rather than the melodic and
rhythmic elements of the piece.

By way of contrast, Wallmark cites a recording by American shakuhachi player Richard Stagg,
a performance which reveals a preference for a “smoother, cleaner playing style” without the timbral
distortion that a performer such as Idemitsu would value.\textsuperscript{246} Stagg's performance can be seen as
representing an inclination toward playing the shakuhachi as a musical instrument, a tool for
entertainment and the creation of an aesthetic experience. That said, the distinction between spiritual
and aesthetic experience is not entirely clear. Of course, the dichotomy is clearly made in the Fuke-shū
tradition which tended to prioritize the use of the shakuhachi in Zen meditation rather than in concert.

Much of what we know about the early spiritual and philosophical background of Fuke-shū
comes from three essays written by Hisamatsu Fūyō, who was both the pupil and grandson of
Kurasawa Kinko.\textsuperscript{247} In one of these essays, \textit{Hitori Kotoba}, Fūyō is careful to observe that “a fine tone
is not the goal of shakuhachi playing” and that it is “despicable, if someone loves to produce a splendid

\textsuperscript{244}Ibid., 4.
\textsuperscript{245}Koji Matsunobu, “Artful Encounters with Nature: Ecological and Spiritual Dimensions of Music Learning” (Ph.D. diss.,
\textsuperscript{246}Wallmark, “Sacred Abjection in Zen Shakuhachi,” 5.
In another essay, *Hitori Mondō*, Fūyō perhaps makes his attitude toward musical expression even clearer when he writes that “one piece is no piece; no piece is Spiritual Breath; Spiritual Breath is nothing other than Void and Nothingness.”

Likely echoing the attitudes of his teacher Kinko, Fūyō resolutely portrays the most important part of a shakuhachi performance as being found nested deep within the music, rather than resting evident among its surface elements. Though cohesive musical works may indeed be performed on the shakuhachi, the percipient performer is nevertheless not aware of the piece itself, but of the breath, through which the performer might come to attain an awareness of “Nothingness”, leading to what we may call a mystical or peak-experience.

Despite Fūyō's determined insistence on the disconnect between musical performance and spiritual practice, Gutzwiller has pointed out a crucial stumbling point in Fūyō's thought. In his writing, Fūyō emphatically argues for the relative unimportance of musical form in using the shakuhachi as a spiritual tool. Nevertheless, he still attempts to argue that “the Path can only be followed by strict adherence to the form and by an impeccable mastery of technique for playing the *shakuhachi*.”

Moreover, in *Hitori Kotoba*, Fūyō claims that a “mastery of technique leads to an understanding of the Spirit of the music.”

Gutzwiller argues that Fūyō's insistence on the importance of technique in gaining access to the “Spirit of the music” can help us locate the moment that “*honkyoku* changes from being a purely religious exercise without primary aesthetic claims into music.”

This is because, despite Fūyō's attempts to avoid “equating technical perfection with understanding,” his writing reveals an unmanageable tension between the structural integrity of honkyoku and the principle of ichion jōbutsu – what is the purpose of developing technique when the spiritual work is found beyond the music itself? How can a tradition of musical performance and a canon of classical works be maintained if the resulting product is not valued as music at all, and if technical skill is discouraged? From both a philosophical and practical standpoint, it was difficult for Fuke-shū to maintain a musical tradition while at once denying its musicality. That said, despite everything, the tradition continues. It is perhaps

---

248 Ibid., 61.
249 Ibid., 57.
250 Ibid., 62.
251 Ibid.
252 Ibid.
because of this strange, uncertain paradox at the heart of Fuke-shū that the shakuhachi honkyoku remain fascinating musical works to this day. It is also this tension between the sacred and the secular that makes Fuke-shū a valuable case study in understanding the nature of music, consciousness, and the imponderable mysteries of existence.

Representing the Void

In the Acintita Sutta of the Buddhist Pāli Canon, the Buddha reflects on the four imponderables (Pāli: acinteyya), four problems which should be avoided seeing that no full comprehension is possible:

The Buddha-range of the Buddhas...
The jhana-range of a person in jhana...
The [precise working out of the] results of kamma...
Conjecture about [the origin, etc., of] the world...

These four problems are said to “bring about madness and vexation” to anyone who attempts to probe them too deeply, and the Buddha warns that such bottomless inquiry can serve only as a distraction from the goal of liberation from suffering. The first three imponderables are perhaps of little interest outside of Buddhist cosmology itself (though the third could be construed as referring to the nature of causality in general, as this is approximately what the term “kamma” points to). The last of these imponderables, however, has immediate relevance to every human being, whatever their religious or philosophical background. The existential facts of Being and consciousness are difficult to deny, and the strange mystery of our predicament is perhaps one of the primary forces motivating religious and artistic thought. Nevertheless, the Buddhist tradition is clear in its assessment of this fundamental question – it is not worth pursuing. There is no answer. No matter how encompassing our body of scientific knowledge becomes, no matter how deeply we follow philosophical inquiry, the origin of existence is beyond our grasp. If all phenomena have a cause, then what was the first? And why, and from where, did such a first cause come about? These questions are impossible to unravel, and the Buddha may very well be right in predicting their trajectory to madness.

Nevertheless, we cannot escape the strangeness of our situation. As a phenomenologist might say, “we find ourselves *thrown* into the world,” forced, whether we like it or not, of experiencing reality through the senses. Art may be one of our primary means of coming to terms with this existential situation. Conscious experience has shape. We perceive reality through the veil of what is evolutionarily useful for our survival as human beings within our environment. The immense complexity of the cosmic soup of atoms, quarks, electromagnetic waves, energy, and metaphysical paradox is delimited by our senses and given structure within conscious experience. Similarly, artistic creation can be seen as further delimiting the apparent chaos of our conscious experience of nature, turning it into something more manageable according to our human perspective. When the artistic process is seen in this way, we reduce the apparent gulf between the sacred and the secular. All art graces the edges of imponderable madness, touching on the truths and paradoxes of existence without diving directly into them. Perhaps the most primary of these truths is what Aldous Huxley has referred to in the context of the psychedelic experience as the *mysterium tremendum* – the mystery that repels, the dreadful glory of God, the fearsome enigma of the cosmos. We can never peer into the truth of our origins directly, but by means of religion and art we are able to defer the mystery and perhaps even draw personal and communal strength from its imponderable source.

Despite the similarities between the musical and the mystical experience, the two are distinct in the perception of time they evoke. Part of the definition of the mystical experience, used by psychedelic researchers such as Walter Pahnke, is the feeling of “the transcendence of Space and Time.” To illustrate an extreme example of the effect of time dilation, Letheby cites the testimony of British MP Christopher Mayhew who once volunteered to experiment with mescaline on live television. Mayhew stated that, “for several days afterward I remembered the afternoon not as so many hours spent in my drawing room interrupted by these kinds of excursions, but as countless years of complete bliss interrupted by short spells in my drawing room. But to the film team, and to Dr. Osmond [the supervising psychiatrist], the excursions lasted no time at all.” For those with experiences such as Mayhew's, moments seem to take place in a state of being completely outside of both time and space,

---

where indeed the very concepts of time and space seem to not even apply. Letheby also cites journalist Michael Polan's experience with the tryptamine psychedelic 5-MeO-DMT, in which he faced an ego dissolution which obliterated his identity and caused him to locate his awareness within “all that there was. Whatever this was, it was not a hallucination. A hallucination implies a reality and a point of reference and an entity to have it. None of those things remained.”

Especially when paired with a sense of ego dissolution, the experience of being outside of time and space, without any point of reference, is often a characteristic of the mystical experience.

Music, on the other hand, exists as a phenomenon of organized temporality. The mystical transcendence of time and space cannot be said to be part of the musical experience. Of course, music can be used as a catalyst for mystical experiences which are felt to transcend time and space, and music has indeed been demonstrated in empirical studies to be a highly important factor in facilitating mystical-type experience in psychedelic therapy. In ordinary circumstances, however, music on its own does not lead to a sense of transcending time and space. When used as a temporal anchor, this is an advantage. Describing the use of music in entheogenic rituals, Marlene Dobkin de Rios and Fred Katz propose the metaphor of music as a “jungle gym” for the mind undergoing hallucinogenic visions, a “fixed structure … imposed upon the drug user by the shaman who controls to some degree his clients' visual options within this ritualized use of music.”

Shanon glosses Dobkin de Rios and Katz's characterization with his observation that music provides “the intoxicated mind with readily available channels around which to organize experience.” Shanon also draws attention to music's function as a temporal anchor, highlighting that “not only is music fully embedded in time, but music actually orders and structures people's experience of time.”

Music provides the vision-producing mind with a framework to hold onto and helps keep ceremony participants temporally grounded, even when the effects of the brew begin to distort temporal perception. As a result, despite the complementary nature of ayahuasca and the musical experience, the psychedelic experience could be said to be an antithesis

---


262 Ibid.
to the musical experience in many ways, with psychedelic drugs causing the mind to lose temporal grounding and music tending to maintain it. That said, the psychological reality is likely far more complex. In some cases, music also seems to have the capacity to alter our sense of temporality, if only slightly. In any case, the musical experience is generally grounded within our ordinary sense of time. The same cannot be said for a typical mystical experience. As a result, it would be a mistake to conflate music with mysticism. Rather, according to the idea of micro-mysticism, music provides a safe window into the mystical experience and under special circumstances, through the musical-mystical feedback loop, can help open the door to a more direct experience of the mind's antipodes.

Music's capacity to outline the contours of the *mysterium tremendum* is a vital element in the listener-music relationship, especially in religious contexts. A Christian mass may attempt to evoke the unknowable majesty of God, or a Santo Daime hymn may attempt to convey a sense of spiritual insight, using concepts and experiences within the sphere of human understanding to point toward that which lies beyond. Of course, the same task is often attempted in other forms of art, but it is perhaps music's abstract character, its capacity to, as Shanon phrases it, “generate an otherworldly mode of existence,” that allows it to reach the furthest into the inexpressible Void. It isn't that music succeeds in communicating that which is beyond understanding, but that, in certain contexts and under the right set and setting, music has an acute capacity to put us in mind of the mysteries of the mind and cosmos. It can encourage us to reflect on that which we take for granted, the divine mysteries that sink into the background of our everyday lives. This aspect of the musical experience functions similarly to Joona Taipale's conception of music as an “attuned caregiver” who “attunes to the affective state of his child and purposively pulls it in a wanted direction.” When we are receptive to the mystical inclination of sacred music, we are able to attune to it and allow the music to pull us out of our everyday consciousness and into an awareness of the sacred mysteries of existence.

Importantly, music can help us attune to the mysteries of existence in a way that is relatively grounded. This characteristic might appear to be at odds with the common conception of music as the most immaterial of the arts, a “pattern of pleasing sensations” or “an abstract decoration.” Compared

---

263 Ibid.
to the ego-dissolution of psychedelic and mystical experiences, however, it is fair to argue for music's relative groundedness in everyday experience. Although music has the capacity to evoke the sacred mysteries of existence, it does so in a way that simultaneously keeps us connected with the environment and our communities. This is also perhaps why music makes for an ideal adjunct to religious ritual. Despite the overall health and well-being of people found in many entheogen-using religious communities, such as the church of Santo Daime, psychedelic drugs are not without risk. Although literature reviews have found that “adverse psychological reactions to psychedelics were relatively rare,” negative experiences are always a possibility – in other words, the phenomenon of the bad trip – which often involves feelings of “mental confusion, agitation, extreme anxiety, fear and psychotic episodes – including bizarre and frightening images, severe paranoia, and loss of sense of reality.” Psychedelics also have the potential to be particularly harmful to those with pre-existing or genetically latent mental illness, such as schizophrenia, “for whom it could trigger a relapse or first episode of psychosis.” The potentially negative effects of psychedelics are difficult to imagine for those who have not experienced them. Bad trips have the capacity to produce “feelings of panic and loss of control” that can “overwhelm the user and in some cases lead to hospitalization.”

Unlike psychedelic drugs, music does not seem to pose such risks. While the intensity of the psychedelic-occasioned mystical experience can lead to intense feelings of panic and fear, the softer mysticism of the musical experience allows for a contemplation of divine mystery and the cosmic Void in a way that is easily integrated into our everyday life and our community. As a result, in some cases music may be a preferable alternative to psychedelic drugs in religious and medical settings. Borrowing


267Letheby, Philosophy of Psychedelics, 13.


Taipale's conception of the attuned caregiver, we can imagine that it would be far more likely for misattunement to occur in the serotonergic rollercoaster of the psychedelic experience, potentially causing the experience to feel “artificial, and potentially traumatic in the sense of abandoning.”

A point which might illustrate this perspective is the fact that psychedelic drugs have been connected with triggering anxiety-based depersonalization/derealization disorders, characterized by feelings of being “unreal or detached from one's environment and the self” that can last for prolonged periods of time.

Music, on the other hand, especially in communal settings, tends to reliably produce feelings of connection with the environment and with other people. Granted, the extremes of the psychedelic experience are also the source of their profound potential to heal. Just as psychedelic experiences can lead to feelings of disconnection, given the right circumstances they can just as easily lead to profound feelings of “connectedness, emotional catharsis, and psychological insight.”

If psychedelic medicine is to be introduced once again into clinical practice, it will of course be necessary to weigh the potential risks and rewards according to each given case. While psychedelic medicines can be incredibly effective at healing mental ailments, sometimes it is best to contemplate the Void at a distance. Various cultures have achieved this not only through music, but also through such practices as meditation.

Just as music can be seen as a relatively safe way of contemplating the Void, so too can the practice of meditation. Just as entheogens are used in many cultures to evoke a mystical experience, religious traditions such as Zen Buddhism make use of meditation as a means for evoking similarly transcendent states. Nonetheless, the Buddhist tradition suggests against the use of both intoxicants and music as a means toward attaining mystical experiences and insight. Found within the most basic of the Buddhist precepts (Pāli: Pañcasila) is a rule imposed (rather, recommended for the purpose of developing the mind) against taking “fermented and distilled intoxicants which are the basis for heedlessness.”

Whether the Buddha would have included abstinence from such psychedelic compounds as LSD, psilocybin, or DMT in his rules for mental training is a contentious issue amongst some Buddhist practitioners, with some arguing that psychedelic drugs can help cultivate qualities such as “stability, loving-kindness, clarity, and humbleness” and others arguing that these modulated states

---

273 Letheby, Philosophy of Psychedelics, 3.
serve as a hindrance to the training of the mind. Certainly, factors such as a dosage, intention, set, and setting all complicate the debate. From a neuroscientific perspective, Raphaël Millière and colleagues have even compared the neural correlates of meditation and the psychedelic experience, drawing attention to important similarities and differences between the two. Notably, Millière acknowledges that, though there may be similarities in brain activity between experiences of ego dissolution in the two states, “‘self-loss,’ far from being an unequivocal phenomenon, can take several forms.” While the mystical states induced by music, meditation, and psychedelics may share many similarities, it is important not to forget that they are also in many ways distinct. Just as the mystical experience, or our interpretation of it, is culturally determined, it is also determined by its method of induction. As such, it should come as no surprise that different cultures will argue for the superiority of one method of mystical induction over the others. Naturally, given certain cultural and personal conditions, it is likely that some methods of evoking the mystical experience may indeed be preferable.

Regardless of what restrictions may have been imposed by the Pāli Canon, Buddhism has always been an evolving tradition that has adapted to contemporary contexts. Both the Tibetan and Japanese Buddhist traditions, for example, are known for their colourful use of music and sound in ritual and practice, and Buddhism as manifest in the modern West also has few qualms about the use of music (at least amongst the laity). The case of Fuke-shū Zen, however, is perhaps the most extreme example of music finding a function within Buddhist practice. In Fuke-shū, the shakuhachi and the tones it produces become a means for achieving a state of awakening, the satori (Japanese: 悟り) state of Zen enlightenment. As we have seen, however, it is not uncommon for music to be used as a means for guiding individuals toward mystical states. As such, the shakuhachi as used in Fuke-shū Zen can be seen as a spiritual tool capitalizing on two methods of mystical induction: the evocative power of music and the contemplative stillness of Zen meditation. This is the method through which Fuke-shū practitioners approach a contemplation of the Void.

What makes Fuke-shū’s use of sound unique relates to the paradoxes built into its ontological status – and when dealing with the communication of the ineffable, there are few tools more useful than

277 Ibid.
the literary device of the paradox. We have already explored the uncertainty behind the shakuhachi's status as a musical instrument or spiritual tool. Paradox also exists in the sound produced by the shakuhachi. Mabbet describes, for example, the attempt of the shakuhachi performer to represent the fundamental Mahāyāna teaching of the “emptiness or voidness of all the contents of our material world” by means of producing a sound which “artfully imitates the sounds of artlessness, of nature, like the gentle soughing of wind in the pines that gently breathes and fades into the encompassing silence from which it came.”278 The shakuhachi imitates the tones of nature, which are themselves representative of the emptiness of all things. Form is used to express formlessness. What a Buddhist might call “voidness” (Sanskrit: Śūnyatā) a Christian might refer to as the “mysterium tremendum.” The concepts are of course culturally situated and do not map onto one another precisely, but they nevertheless both refer to a sense of the unfathomable mystery at the heart of existence. Since the emptiness in all things cannot be directly communicated (after all, as the Taoists say, “the way that can be spoken of is not the constant way”279), a tool such as the shakuhachi must be used in order to trace the contours of the existential mystery. The paradox is perhaps central to all musical expression but is particularly important in meditative practice using the shakuhachi.

**Sound, Technics, and Peering Behind the Veil**

The intimate question of what music fundamentally is does not crop up in most musical contexts. In most scenarios, when listening to a Mozart symphony or a Schubert Lied for example, we may acknowledge the scientific understanding that our impressions of harmonies and timbres are all merely neurological translations of air pressure oscillations; nevertheless, we recognize that our conscious experience of the music appears to us as something more sophisticated than the merely material facts which underlie it. Nothing within a Mozart symphony explicitly calls our attention to its status as sound and the mental mechanisms behind our impressions of it, and we are free to enjoy our emergent conscious experience of it as is.

Fuke-shū, however, is an example of a tradition which, at its foundation, does call into question the mechanisms of the musical experience. This is to be expected, given that an important aspect of Buddhist practice has always been reflection and introspection into the nature of reality and existence.


Dependent origination (Sanskrit: Pratītyasamutpāda), for example, is a Buddhist doctrine found in the original Pāli Canon which outlines the process by which phenomena and experience arise. In their book on phenomenology and embodied cognition, Varela and colleagues use the principle of dependent origination (they translate it as “codependent arising”) to make a connection between Marvin Minsky and Seymour Papert's concept of societies of mind and the conception of the self as outlined in Buddhist philosophy. In Varela's words, dependent origination attempts to illustrate “the circular structure of habitual patterns, the binding chain, each link of which conditions and is conditioned by each of the others – that constitutes the pattern of human life as a never-ending circular quest to anchor experience in a fixed and permanent self.”²⁸⁰ In other words, like Minsky and Papert's idea of societies of mind, dependent origination paints a portrait of the self as being a sequence of miniscule cognitive functions, each of which interact with one another in a chain, resulting in the appearance of a cohesive sense of self. Nevertheless, when the chain of dependent origination is reflected upon, Buddhist doctrine claims that a person will be able to perceive that their sense of self is fragmentary and dependent upon a myriad of minor mechanisms, such as the six senses, sensory contact, and feelings of pleasure or pain, which ultimately lead back to a root cause – our ignorance of the nature of reality.

The result of the process outlined in the concept dependent origination can be likened to our experience of the seeming richness of a musical object, despite knowing all the merely material causes which align to give rise the impression of a musical experience. Our conscious experience of a Mozart symphony has a clear qualia – to borrow Thomas Nagel's phrasing, there is something it is like to hear a Mozart Symphony.²⁸¹ Nevertheless, when we tug at the string we are able to unravel the experience of the symphony in the same way that we might unravel our awareness of self through a meditation on dependent origination, leading to a realization that this conscious qualia leads from enjoyment to perception to consciousness and, according to Buddhist thought, back to a base of ignorance as to the nature of reality.

Such a reductionist exercise would no doubt terrify many lovers of Mozart. But in the same way that knowledge of the physics of sound does not need to subtract from our immediate experience of music, following the thread of dependent origination does not necessarily prevent a person from having and appreciating conscious experience. Indeed, given that the entire project of Buddhism is to help the

²⁸⁰Varela, The Embodied Mind, 110.
mind understand and overcome suffering, Buddhist philosophy suggests that such insight into the nature of the self can only be beneficial and enrich our ordinary experience of consciousness. The Buddhist experience of the true nature of self through meditation upon the chain of dependent origination can be compared to the psychedelic experience of ego dissolution, which has been shown to provide “psychological insight in which pathological self-models can be revised by means of ‘unbinding’ the self-model.”\textsuperscript{282} The experience of psychedelic ego dissolution does not last forever, though for some it may feel as though it does. Nevertheless, the drug user inevitably returns back to baseline consciousness, accompanied by their familiar sense of self. Even after achieving awakening, the Buddha is said to have spent around forty-five years traveling, teaching, and building a monastic community. Peering into a mechanism does not cause it to cease; rather, by understanding the processes by which a mechanism operates, we can perhaps learn to operate it more efficiently, with greater knowledge and wisdom. The same must also be true of the mind and consciousness.

Some may be understandably skeptical of discussions involving terms such as “awakening,” “mysticism,” and “ego dissolution.” The terms can conjure up images of either ancient religious rites or the wild spiritual speculation of modern New Age movements. Nevertheless, in recent decades many naturalist philosophers and scientific thinkers have begun to take a sober interest in mystical and religious states, adopting the position that they may actually have a place in a materialist worldview. Philosopher Chris Letheby makes the argument, for example, that, in the context of psychedelic therapy, “not all 'mystical experiences', in the relevant, operational sense, are experiences as of non-naturalistic metaphysical realities. There are states of consciousness that (a) satisfy standard psychometric criteria for a 'complete' mystical-type experience, but (b) are not experiences as of 'another [metaphysical] Reality that puts this one in the shade'.\textsuperscript{283} To illustrate, Letheby draws attention to how, in a study of psilocybin for treatment-resistant depression, “connection to a spiritual principle was the least common response,” with most patients instead citing psychological revelations involving “connection to self, others, and world” as the most salient parts of their experience.\textsuperscript{284} Letheby’s basic argument is that mystical experience, as determined by psychometric criteria, is not necessarily something that lies outside a naturalist worldview. The phenomenon of ego dissolution does not need to be described in supernatural terms. On the contrary, this altered state of consciousness may

\textsuperscript{282}Letheby, \textit{Philosophy of Psychedelics}, 5.

\textsuperscript{283}Ibid., 72.

\textsuperscript{284}Ibid., 57.
provide a closer glimpse into the scientific reality of the phenomenon of consciousness than we can find in our ordinary, everyday mental states.

The tension between the modern cognitivist view of consciousness and our everyday personal experience forms the heart of Varela and colleague's *The Embodied Mind*, a book which assembles thought from such diverse sources as French phenomenology, cognitive enactivism, and Buddhist philosophy in order to closely investigate the nature of consciousness and its apparent incongruity with the modern cognitive sciences. Fresh insight is required since, as the authors write, “according to cognitivism, cognition can proceed without consciousness, for there is no essential or necessary connection between them.” In the cognitivist model, cognition is seen as being a mechanical process based on the logical manipulation of symbols. Importantly, “the system interacts only with the form of the symbols (their physical attributes), not their meaning.” In a mechanistic system, symbolic manipulation can take place without recourse to questions of semantics. Comprehension of meaning does not need to factor into cognition. This position naturally leads to the question, Varela and colleagues argue, of why conscious experience appears to exist at all? If theoretical models can accurately describe the mechanisms of cognition without reference to human consciousness, then why do we still feel the presence of a conscious, perceiving self?

While the cognitivist paradigm seems to deny the existence of a self, this has nevertheless understandably been a difficult conclusion for many cognitive scientists to accept. Cognitive researcher Marvin Minsky, for example, is described by Varela to have pursued the destabilization of self in his *Society of Mind*. Nevertheless, instead of arriving at the seemingly impossible conclusion that there is no consistent self, Minsky instead argues that, despite ourselves, “we cannot give up our conviction in such a self.” At the end of Minsky's book, “science and human experience simply come apart” and we are forced to “believe in something we know not to be true (our personal selves).” It is this strange tension at the heart of cognitive science that Varela and colleagues attempt to address by introducing into the discussion the traditions of phenomenology and Buddhist meditation.

---

286 Ibid., 43
287 Ibid., 107.
288 Ibid.
Though never directly described this way, Varela and colleague's book seems to take the form of a mystic text. In any case, *The Embodied Mind* is no ordinary book on cognitive science. Eleanor Rosch makes this clear in her introduction to the revised edition, writing that “this book is about something real. For that reason, it does not fit easily into any of the usual academic disciplines. It is not science, it is not philosophy, it is not phenomenology, and it is certainly not Buddhism, although it touches on all of these.” Rosch also mentions how one of the main motivations behind writing the book came from the observation that a rift had developed between “the human mind as studied by science and the mind as personally experienced … the disconnect between first person and third person knowledge.” The authors explicitly state that the intention of the book is pragmatic and that they aim, not to offer a “grand, unified theory,” but to “open a space of possibilities in which the circulation between cognitive science and human experience can be fully appreciated and to foster the transformative possibilities of human experience in scientific culture.” The aim of the book is framed as an exercise in transforming perception, not just on the level of theory and data, but on an existential level as well. The goal of *The Embodied Mind* seems to be not unlike the goal of meditation itself. What is gained through the book's project is not new factual information, but increased insight into the nature of the self and reality – insight which also has the potential to open the doors to new scientific and personal perspectives. For that reason, I think it would be reasonable to argue that this book represents a fascinating convergence of science and mysticism. In enacting such a convergence, the book's authors attempt to provide a path toward closing the gap between scientific knowledge and personal experience.

If the act of meditation can help us gain some pragmatic insight into the nature of the self, then we can also see the shakuhachi of Fuke-shū Zen as a technology for achieving this end. This characterization of the shakuhachi and honkyoku as technologies used for the investigation of the nature of the self also points toward a homology between meditation and entheogens – both have historically been used as *technics* for the realization of self. The term “technics” is often used in philosophical discourse to encompass the meanings of both *technology* and *technique* – it “refers to technical matters in the broadest sense.” As such, both meditation (as a technique) and psychedelic

---

289 Ibid., xxxv.
290 Ibid., xxxv.
291 Ibid., ixiv-ixv.
drugs (as entheogenic technologies) can be understood under the general term “technics.” This term is also particularly apt when discussing the shakuhachi which, as we have seen, exists in a state of ontological tension between the categories of “musical instrument” and “spiritual tool.” The shakuhachi can be viewed as a technology for producing music, but the meditative practice involved in its use can also be viewed as a technique for achieving an altered state of consciousness. As such, the term “technics” has a valuable multivalency when referring to the shakuhachi.

The two categories under which the shakuhachi has been defined in Fuke-shū have historically been considered mutually exclusive. Gutzwiller characterizes the history of the performance of honkyoku as having begun as a “purely religious exercise without primary aesthetic claims”; despite this, the shakuhachi inevitably went on to “sink to the level of a musical instrument.”

That said, in some form the shakuhachi had always maintained its identity as a musical instrument. Honkyoku, despite being performed with an emphasis on individual sounds rather than the general composition, still involved the performance of full pieces of music, complete with rhythm and melody. Though aesthetic unity was never the objective, the basic elements of music were always present in the tradition of playing honkyoku. Earlier I suggested that this most likely stemmed from a reliance on tradition, but the use of complete musical pieces by komuso monks in meditative practice nevertheless can be seen as also having an important functional purpose. In Fuke-shū, shakuhachi performers were, through the doctrine of ichion jōbutsu, engaging in a practice similar to the traditional Buddhist meditation on dependent origination. While dependent origination aims to allow meditators to perceive the conditional nature of the self, honkyoku allow shakuhachi performers to perceive the conditional nature of music. Seeing that both exercises deal with an introspection into conscious experience, they are likely to lead to similar insights.

In his investigation of the contemporary practice of shakuhachi performance, Jay Keister discusses an American branch of spiritual shakuhachi practice initiated by performer and shakuhachi grand master Michael Gould. Gould's contemporary approach to shakuhachi performance reflects the introspective philosophy of Fuke-shū, encouraging students to develop awareness “not only of the instrument, but of how one feels and thinks.” That said, Keister makes the suggestion that Gould's

---

method of instruction differs from Japanese schools of shakuhachi instruction in a Zen context in the way he “integrates detailed explanations of Zen concepts into technical practices concerning the flute.”

Although there existed a tension between philosophy and technique in the original Fuke-shū tradition, in Gould's approach to the instrument he attempts to merge the two. For example, when explaining how to use the shakuhachi technique known as atari (a technique that involves accenting a note by forcefully hitting a finger-hole), Gould apparently informed a student that “you decide where atari goes. You end up making the rules yourself.”

For Gould, the notated honkyoku is a product of “Zen culture,” and a serious student of the shakuhachi must learn to reflect their own immediate experience in their shakuhachi playing rather than the content of tradition. Despite his emphasis on unifying philosophy and technique, Gould still approaches the shakuhachi as a spiritual tool meant to unravel our personal experience rather than simply express a cultural product.

Gould also encourages students to reflect on the silence out of which the sound of shakuhachi emerges, and the silence into which it again dissipates. As Keister explains, “drawing analogies to the opposite states of existence and non-existence, he encourages students to make more extreme head movements and explore the points at which sound vanishes into silence and reappears as sound with the tilting of the head.” This embodiment of the realization that “we come from nothing, we live, we die, but somewhere in between we have something,” has a noticeable effect not only on a student's performance on the shakuhachi as an instrument at a technical level, but also on the student's meditative experience of the shakuhachi as a spiritual tool. In this way, shakuhachi performance can be seen as a conscious reflection on Jankélévitch's observation that “life is an animated, limited construction that stands out against lethal infinity; and music, as something similar to life … is isolated, between beginning and end, in the immensity of nonbeing.” Crucially, however, the shakuhachi performer does not just use this observation as a philosophical framework; rather, the performer embodies this sense of nonbeing and, through deep states of meditative concentration, comes to experience it in a profound way through the unravelling of sense experience.

---

295 Ibid., 119.
296 Ibid.
297 Ibid.
298 Ibid.
299 Ibid.
While selecting individual examples of honkyoku to illustrate the mechanism and impetus of the spiritual music of Fuke-shū is difficult, seeing that the emphasis in the practice is on personal expression and private experience rather than the musical content itself, it may still be valuable to examine one popular piece in the tradition. “Hon Shirabe” (Japanese: 本調), a honkyoku whose title translates as “basic melody,” is said to represent the “basic building blocks of shakuhachi honkyoku.” A website dedicated to shakuhachi performance known as Komuso suggests that “Hon Shirabe” is a honkyoku that is meant to express extremes and that a performer must “play the song with as wide a dynamic range as possible as well as quietly as possible. Experience both extremes.” That said, reflecting the paradoxical nature of shakuhachi practice, the website also mentions how it is important that a performer of “Hon Shirabe” “take an active mental approach and create [their] own song and distinctive voice.” “Hon Shirabe” is also particularly apt to represent Jankélévitch's thoughts on music and silence. It is the the extreme dynamic ranges of this honkyoku, especially in the first three initial long breaths fading into nothingness that initiate the piece, that provide an opportunity for reflection on the origins of experience and our potential for unravelling the nature of conscious awareness, leading to insight and the evocation of altered states.

Philosopher Jacques Derrida was himself something of an unraveller of grounded reality. Varela and colleagues draw attention to the situation of modern science and philosophy, where our confidence in solid foundations has been put into question, but where we also have no way “to develop direct and personal insight into the groundlessness of our own experience.” In many ways, Derrida's career has been characterized by a series of rug-pulls from under philosophical assumptions and foundations. Destabilizing the distinctions between “human and animal … instinct and intelligence, absence and presence of culture,” Derrida argues in his Of Grammatology that “inscription is not simply a property of linguistic writing; it should instead be understood as a constitutive basis for all life.” By pointing to how systems of inscription form the basis of biology and life through the replication of DNA, Derrida makes the argument that “all life is fundamentally constituted through the structures of

---

302 Ibid.
303 Ibid.
304 Varela, The Embodied Mind, 218.
prostheses, inscriptions, or programmable codes.”\(^{306}\) In other words, the boundary between the self and technology is unstable, since the very basis of our biological and cognitive reality is founded upon a system of inscription which precedes us both historically and ontologically.

Michael Gallope uses Derrida's understanding of technology and his way of thinking about time and space through the concept of *différance* to make the argument that a “musical object may be, in a strict ontological sense, impossible.”\(^{307}\) Derrida's formulation suggests the idea of what Gallope refers to as *constitutive technicity*, the notion that “technology is not something that is exterior to humans, but is something that is intrinsic to life itself.”\(^{308}\) Doing so, Gallope aims to question the possibility of developing a transcendental description of a musical object. In other words, any description of a musical object “could not be broken down into any smaller units of recognizable instruments, notes, gestures, motifs, styles, or recording techniques.”\(^{309}\) Phenomenologically, the overall qualia of our musical experience is always dependent on preceding causes. The “musical object” is itself a collection of traces made in space, “the becoming-space of time,”\(^{310}\) which we cognitively register as an experience in time. Our experience of a musical work has no ground.

Gallope's approach is of course entirely philosophical. Acknowledging the abstract nature of the inquiry, Gallope relates that, “while empirical inquiries into the correlation between consciousness and musical objects invariably confront the issues dealt with here, thinkers like Derrida and Bernard Stiegler can only offer a general sense of the complications such inquiries confront.”\(^{311}\) This form of philosophical investigation can perhaps be useful in reorienting our position toward metaphysical and ontological assumptions, perhaps opening new perspectives which would otherwise have been closed off by our conventional circuits of thought. Nevertheless, despite acknowledging the philosophical groundlessness of the musical object, Gallope's paper leaves our actual experience of the music unchanged. The Fuke-shū monk, with the help of the shakuhachi and honkyoku, engages in a similar practice to Gallope, only with a radically different intention – the shakuhachi performer aims to peer into the groundlessness of the music, to focus so intently on individual moments of sound that a

\(^{306}\)Ibid.

\(^{307}\)Ibid., 47.

\(^{308}\)Ibid.

\(^{309}\)Ibid., 60.

\(^{310}\)Ibid., 50.

\(^{311}\)Ibid., 48.
moment of awakening can be gleaned from a single tone. While Gallope provides a philosophical basis for musical groundlessness, meditative practice with the shakuhachi provides a direct experience of it. The ultimate aim of the exercise is, of course, to gain better insight into the nature of reality and experience. By doing so, a meditator can peer behind the veil of our sense of self and perceive how, as Varela and colleagues phrase it, “organism and environment enfold into each other and unfold from one another in the fundamental circularity that is life itself.” The shakuhachi of Fuke-shū serves as a unique and fascinating technology for unravelling our sense of self and evoking a mystical experience.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter has examined the use of the shakuhachi within the tradition of Fuke-shū Zen as a technology for inducing a state of awakening, what may be termed a mystical experience within the Buddhist tradition. We examined the paradoxical ontology of the shakuhachi within its cultural context in Japan and the tension which exists between its use as an instrument of musical entertainment versus its use as a tool for spiritual awakening. This chapter also touched on the Buddhist notion of voidness, connecting it with the Christian concept of the mysterium tremendum, suggesting that art and religion are some of the strategies which we use for keeping ourselves in mind of the cosmic mysteries of existence and Being. This conversation segues into a reflection on psychedelic and meditation-induced mystical experiences in which I suggest that the mystical experience may actually be understandable according to a materialist model and may also help provide deeper insight into the nature of the self as suggested by the modern cognitivist model. In order to help examine this possibility, I drew upon Varela and colleagues’ *The Embodied Mind* to suggest that the detailed examination of the nature of sound reflected in shakuhachi performance is analogous to a close examination of the nature of the self. Following this observation, I also attempt to show how something like shakuhachi meditation in Fuke-shū can provide an experiential counterpart to the kinds of philosophical insights made by Western thinkers such as Derrida and Gallope.

Fuke-shū’s denial of its honkyoku as being music poses an interesting question for our understanding of the listener-music relationship. In entheogenic traditions such as Santo Daime, music is treated as a technology which has the capacity to guide a person’s consciousness and emotions in a desired direction. Within such contexts, the listener-music feedback loop allows the listener to attune to

---

the musical object, experience it based on their current state of mind, and then allow the experience to loop back and modify their original mental state. In this type of situation, the phenomenological experience of music is essential for its pragmatic benefits. The case of the komuso monk is different, however. Within the doctrine of Fuke-shū, the shakuhachi performer is not being guided into an altered state of consciousness by the music itself, but by their concentration on individual moments of sound. Though it is a musical piece that is being performed, it is not a musical piece that is experienced. The performer, instead, must hear through the “music” to gain insight into its dependent nature, leading to an experience of ichion jōbutsu, enlightenment through a single sound.

As such, music functions very differently in Fuke-shū than in most contexts of sacred music. Just as the psychedelic experience aims for ego dissolution, Fuke-shū shakuhachi meditation aims for music dissolution which, ultimately, aims toward the mystical experience of awakening. That said, at least in the initial stages of shakuhachi meditation, it is possible that honkyoku play a similar guiding role as the hinos in Santo Daime. The languid tempi of honkyoku perhaps help bring about attunement, triggering a listener-music feedback loop which enables the performer to enter a state of calm that is conducive to the meditative concentration required for allowing the music to dissolve altogether into momentary fragments of sound. Characterized in this way, the uses of music in Fuke-shū and Santo Daime are perhaps not as distinct as they may initially appear, seeing that the time-dissolving effects of the ayahuasca brew are also sure to fracture all sense of musical coherence at ego-dissolving doses. The difference may simply lie in the gradual, voluntary nature of shakuhachi meditation, versus the forceful clutch of the ayahuasca experience. In any case, Fuke-shū remains an example of one of the many branches to grow out of the monolithic tradition of Buddhist doctrine and an excellent case study in how music, despite doctrinal discouragement, often finds ways of justifying its own use in religious practices. In the next chapter we will turn our ears toward another cultural tradition which aimed to use music as a technology for transformation and insight not only on a personal scale, but on a societal scale as well.
Chapter IV
Psychedelic Rock and 1960s Counterculture

The 1960s psychedelic counterculture was driven by a desire for transformation. Following the discovery and distribution of the psychedelic drug LSD, luminary figures such as Timothy Leary began to rally together those eager to explore the transformative effects of the substance. Musicians became part of the cultural momentum as well, writing singles and albums inspired by the psychedelic experience which experimented with the stylistic conventions and clichés of contemporary popular music, leading to musical works that opened new perspectives, much like the newly popularized drug. This chapter explores the range of this momentum toward transformation in the 60s, outlining the ideals which underlined it, the mechanisms by which it was realized in musical works, and the resulting cultural products and movements which grew out of it. Drawing on Joona Taipale's writing on affective attunement, this chapter also presents the extended argument that the relatively familiar flavour of early psychedelic rock was a necessity since, in order to bring about any kind of cultural or social change, a society must first meet with a “modifying mirror” by which it can attune and subsequently be guided. According to this understanding of emotional attunement, it is only by being guided by the familiar into the unknown that true transformation through the other can occur. In this way, albums such as the Beatles’ Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band can be seen as steppingstones to greater musical innovation, as gateways to new perspectives, expanded creativity, and the transformation of self and society through music.

A Tale of Two Commodities: Drugs and Music in the 1960s

The 1960s cultural revolution was founded on a drive for transformation – both social and psychological. What would result from this transformation, however, was not entirely clear. Despite its association with the American Civil Rights movement and protests against the Vietnam War, the hippie movement was from the start “amorphous, muddled, with great variations in participation and commitment.” Unlike most revolutions, the hippie movement was not entirely certain what its

---


ultimate aim was. Figures such as Timothy Leary and Ken Kesey advocated for a kind of “neurological politics” based on the assumption that altering consciousness through psychedelic drugs would be by itself sufficient for bringing about advantageous social change. Nevertheless, many followers of 1960s counterculture played the roles of ‘‘weekend’ or ‘plastic hippies, tourists wearing native garb whose idea of the scene was derived from psychedelic travel posters’’ and often had more interest in “drugs, sex, excitement, freedom from rules and restrictions” than in bringing about powerful personal and social change. Nevertheless, the reverberations of the hippie movement were incredibly far-reaching, influencing Western and global culture in ways that we still are not able to fully ascertain. What is clear, however, is that the counterculture placed an emphasis on transformation, whatever form it might take. What is also clear is the two principal tools through which this goal was pursued: through psychedelic drugs and psychedelic rock.

The hippie movement did not appear did not appear from nowhere. It was not even coaxed into existence by the discovery of its “sacrament” LSD by Swiss chemist Albert Hoffman. Lester Grinspoon and James B. Bakalar draw attention to the substantial volumes of literature on consciousness-altering drugs that existed in the scientific field long before the discovery of LSD, ranging from the nitrous oxide self-experiments conducted by Humphry Davy in 1798 (a dissociative which went on to become a popular “esoteric entertainment for gentlemen of the cultural elite”) to Ludwig Lewin's first paper on the effects of peyote in 1888, to European encounters with iboga and ayahuasca in the mid-1800s. Moreover, much of the language and philosophy found in the 60s countercultural movement derived directly from established sources associated with “depth psychology, oriental religion, anarchism, American Indian lore, and the Romantic and Beat literary current of inspired spontaneity.” The 60s counterculture movement was, like religious movements such as Santo Daime and Fuke-shū, syncretic in constitution. What set it apart from our typical image of religious movements, however, was in how its aspirations extended beyond a simple celebration of the divine mystery into hedonism, consumerism, and the dissolving of social structure. Both music and psychedelic drugs acted as the perfect mediators between the movement's conflicting energies, between the secular and the sacred. They both offered experiences of transcendence, but in a way that was marketable to the masses.

315 Ibid., 83.
316 Ibid., 80.
317 Ibid., 58-59.
318 Ibid., 71.
Both music and psychedelic drugs share a capacity to bring about a transformation in consciousness. In many spiritual traditions, a combination of the two has been found to be ideal for the purposes of healing and encountering the divine. Benny Shanon, as we have seen, discussing the use of music as a guide in traditional ayahuasca ceremonies, directing altered states of consciousness in desirable directions.\(^{319}\) In the context of Western medicine, Helen Bonny and Walter Pahnke have outlined how music can be used in conjunction with LSD psychotherapy, claiming that “music appears to be involved significantly in the crucial extra-drug variables of both set and setting.”\(^{320}\) Bonny and Pahnke also suggest that among the many contributions music can make to the therapeutic process is the possibility of evoking a “peak experience.” This form of altered state of consciousness was named by psychologist Abraham Maslow, but it functions effectively as a scientifically neutral descriptor of what is referred to elsewhere as “mystical experience,” such as in W. T. Stace's classic exploration of the subject.\(^{321}\) According to Bonny and Pahnke, music is particularly effective at helping guide patients into a state of “oceanic feelings” and encouraging them to experience the temporary dissolution of their sense of self.\(^{322}\) The dissolution of the ego often associated with high dose psychedelic sessions has been found in clinical trials, such as those conducted by Roland Griffiths et al., to result in “sustained positive changes in attitudes, mood, and behaviour.”\(^{323}\) Maslow encompasses these kinds of states under his more general term “peak experience.”

The field of music therapy is founded upon the idea that guided musical experience can evoke positive change. Music therapist Helen Bonny describes much of music's healing potential as stemming from it abstract qualities, “crossing through verbal barriers and providing meaning on several levels simultaneously” while also stimulating the imagination and triggering “the flow of imagery and fantasy or renewal of memories.”\(^{324}\) While not as emotionally potent as the psychedelic experience, music


\(^{324}\)Helen Lindquist Bonny, “Music and Healing,” in *Music & Consciousness: The Evolution of Guided Imagery and Music,*
nevertheless also has the potential to transform the self under the right conditions, providing what one of Bonny's clients once referred to as a “legal high,” offering a “relaxing, pleasant experience” without the mental risks associated with psychedelic therapy.\textsuperscript{325}

Putting aside the potentially healing and transformative properties of music and psychedelic drugs, in the counterculture of the 60s both forces were also treated as profitable commodities. This likely was not the aim of the movement's representatives. For example, psychedelic “high priest” Timothy Leary, a researcher at Harvard University, advocated a philosophical position that mixed “social criticism, straightforward hedonism, and traditional Eastern religion,” a position which eventually became the basis of the free-spirited approach to life advocated by the hippie movement.\textsuperscript{326} The hippies saw themselves, according to Grinspoon and Bakalar, as “mutants, hopeful monsters who represented the next stage in cultural evolution.”\textsuperscript{327} Their aim was to subvert the commercial norms of the “stuffy complacency of the 1950s” and, by means of mind-altering drugs, bring about a “permanent transformation of consciousness.”\textsuperscript{328} Nevertheless, the society which the hippies tried to transform soon turned the tables and subsumed the very movement which attacked it. Music and drugs, despite being used by the hippies as vehicles for personal and societal transformation, were soon integrated into the profit-driven machinery of the market, sold to millions of young people eager to buy their way into the wild excitement of the times. As Grinspoon and Bakalar sketch the situation, “if drugs were its most important commodity and commercial enterprise, music was not far behind. The musicians and entrepreneurs of rock, along with drug dealers, were its financial aristocrats, and much of the rock music of the late sixties was inspired by psychedelic experiences or designed to be heard under the influence of the drugs.”\textsuperscript{329} The countercultural attack on societal structure twisted into its own hierarchical house of psychedelic lords and royals. One of the great paradoxes of 60s counterculture is that, along with the shakuhachi of Fuke-shū Zen, it was marked by a tension between the sacred and the profane, freedom and hierarchy, chaos and order. In the 60s, anticonsumerism and nonconformity were preached by means of mass-produced goods and fashion trends.

\textsuperscript{325}Ibid., 203.
\textsuperscript{326}Lester Grinspoon and James B. Bakalar, \textit{Psychedelic Drugs Reconsidered} (New York: The Lindesmith Center, 1998), 65.
\textsuperscript{327}Grinspoon and Bakalar, \textit{Psychedelic Drugs Reconsidered}, 72.
\textsuperscript{328}Ibid., 63.
\textsuperscript{329}Ibid., 73.
The immense cultural impact, complete with its controversies and paradoxes, that the chemical lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD-25) would come to have on the Western world would have been difficult to imagine when Albert Hoffman first synthesized it in 1938. Five years later, in 1943, the company that Hoffman worked for, Sandoz Laboratories, began to market LSD for psychiatric use under the name “De-lysid”. One person who may have predicted the future impact of psychedelic compounds was author Aldous Huxley, who was “prescient enough to imagine before 1960 that LSD and mescaline would rise to higher social visibility or become a larger cultural phenomenon than nitrous oxide or cannabis had been in the nineteenth century.”330 Despite its clinical origins, LSD curiosity eventually leaked from the labs onto the streets, setting off its history of recreational use. The LSD experience was too startling to be ignored and “those who did not retreat in horror often become proselytes.”331 Thus a wave of LSD champions began to emerge, including “poets like Ken Kesey and Allen Ginsberg as well as rock musicians” and visual artists, spreading news of the newly discovered chemical throughout the culture.332 The growth of the psychedelic revolution paralleled the growth of a religious movement in many ways, with figures such as Leary and Kesey developing cult-like followings as they promised transcendence and social transformation through the use of the psychedelic sacrament of LSD.

In her book on rock music and the 60s counterculture, Sheila Whiteley carefully illustrates some of the ways that the popular musicians of the era expressed and transmitted the psychedelic experience and culture in their albums. Importantly, Whiteley argues that experimentation was essential for communicating the ideals of the psychedelic culture and that “stylistic complexity, the elements of surprise, contradiction and uncertainty suggested alternative meanings which supported the hippies' emphasis on timeless mysticism. It appeared that the counter-culture and musical innovation were inseparable.”333 Why stylistic complexity was demanded by advocates of timeless mysticism is not entirely clear, but it is likely that much of the drive for innovation came from a dissatisfaction with a culture that did not recognize such experiences and the ideals they lead to in its creative products. In this way, bands associated with the psychedelic and progressive rock movement such as Cream, The Jimi Hendrix Experience, Pink Floyd, The Rolling Stones, and the Beatles, all experimented with

330Ibid., 61.
331Ibid.
332Ibid., 63.
333Sheila Whiteley, The Space Between the Notes: Rock and the Counter-Culture (Oxfordshire: Taylor & Francis Group, 1992), 2-3.
radical transformations of form, style, and timbre that “mirrored concern for an alternative society.” Influenced by the consciousness-transforming properties of psychedelics, many creative figures in the counterculture aimed to express the drive for self and societal transformation through the use of music. A reconfiguration of musical conventions implied the possibility of reconfiguring societal conventions as well. As a result, the cultural drive of the hippie movement also came to be encoded in how it expressed its values through music.

In the spirit of paradox, the wild experiments of 60s progressive rock nevertheless remained fixed in the realm of popular culture. The Beatles may have taken inspiration from avant-garde composers such as Karlheinz Stockhausen, but they were still producing music firmly in the popular style. Moreover, attempting to escape from the perceived artifice of the popular music industry, the Beatles took on alter egos for their album *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* in an attempt to express themselves outside of their popular personas. There was always a certain instability of identity in psychedelic culture. Wealthy and elite figures such as Leary could afford to “drop out” of the game of life, breaking free of the “absurd and futile rituals bound by restrictive rules of which [we] remain unconscious unless [we] are liberated by the drugs,” but many followers of the movement were unfortunate examples of “dropouts, some of them runaways, who drifted into the life with no clear conception of what they wanted or were rejecting and drifting out again in a few years after succeeding or failing in the transition to adulthood.” The nebulous values of counterculture were not sustainable – “psychedelic drugs could sustain cults but not a culture.” Nevertheless, the instability that characterized the psychedelic revolution of the 60s, much like a true psychedelic experience, eventually coagulated back into the ordinary world of laws, order, and hierarchy. And yet the world had changed. Though the counterculture had failed to bring about its utopian ideals, it nevertheless succeeded in instigating the transformation it sought. More than the psychedelics themselves, it is likely that the communal creative products that came out of the counterculture ended up having an immense influence on the wider world. Though not as emotionally potent as the psychedelic experience, music nevertheless has a social persistence that tends to stick around in a culture. It was of course also much easier for the commodity

334Ibid., 2.  
336Grinspoon and Bakalar, *Psychedelic Drugs Reconsidered*, 64.  
337Ibid., 80.  
338Ibid.
of psychedelic music to go mainstream than the psychedelics themselves. After their prohibition in the late 60s, psychedelics rapidly fell out of the public eye and were banished to the realms of underground culture and the mythos of the war on drugs. Psychedelic music, on the other hand, was readily embraced by commercial culture and has been woven tightly into the narrative history of popular music. Though the light of the psychedelic musical commodity shone the furthest, it still owes its existence to the psychedelic compounds which sparked it.

**Transformation and Transcendence through the Reconfiguration of Self**

Instead of constructing a future from the ground up, 60s counterculture aimed at transformation through a reconfiguration of the past. In many ways this period of cultural transformation represented an extrapolation of the LSD experience at a social level. Jörg Fachner argues that any state of mind achieved through psychoactive drugs is also possible without them, seeing that drugs merely “emphasize, amplify, or weaken certain brain functions.”

This is also the opinion of Chris Letheby, who argues that “mystical experiences” are not necessarily hallucinations, but at the same time also do not necessarily suggest the existence of non-naturalistic metaphysical realities. In other words, psychedelic drugs achieve their transformative effects by reconfiguring mental patterns that already exist within the brain, offering new perspectives on the self, others, and reality. Moreover, current research seems to suggest that positive clinical outcomes in psychedelic trials are directly correlated with self-reported mystical experiences and ego dissolution. It seems to be the case that it is out of the phenomenological chaos of the mystical experience that psychedelic drugs derive their transformative potential. Arguably, it was only through the chaos and the melting of social boundaries in the 60s that radical transformation could occur. Just as the hallucinating mind makes new mental connections during the intoxicated state, so too did the old societal conventions of Western society shift and morph in perspective during the tumult of the 60s countercultural movement.

Perhaps the album that best represents the transformative aspirations of 60s counterculture is the

---


341 Ibid., 67.
Beatles’ eighth studio album *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. By the mid-60s, both the Beatles and the general youth culture in the Western world had become frustrated with the circumstances of their society and the identities they were expected to adopt. As with many young people in America and Britain at the time, the Beatles had begun to experiment with cannabis as a way of breaking out of the status quo; one of the result of this experimentation with consciousness was a shift in perspective that motivated the band to escape the artifice of their personae as pop artists. All four members shared the sentiment and, despite having mixed thoughts on what to do about it, were collectively “eager to abandon their earlier personae.” The band members, “frustrated with the screaming fans” and disillusioned with fame and fortune, sought authenticity and meaning by alternative means. This led the Beatles, along with many others in their generation, to seek authenticity in Eastern philosophy, psychedelic drugs, and artistic experimentation.

The strategy taken by the Beatles to combat artifice in *Sgt. Pepper* was to dive directly into it. In his essay on the use of artifice and theatrical “masks” in *Sgt. Pepper*, Mark Osteen argues that the fake band that the Beatles created for the album, and which is featured prominently on the album's cover art and in its opening song, allowed them to paradoxically pursue self-expression in a more genuine way. Osteen describes the philosophy behind the album as follows: “Through finding new masks to wear, they declare, we can discover a more authentic selfhood and community. By using your imagination – with the help of friends, but also through introspection and fearless action – you can become someone new, as the Beatles have done by becoming *Sgt. Pepper's band.*” The theme of self-transformation, which was of great concern to the successful English pop band at the time, is encapsulated in the central themes explored in *Sgt. Pepper*. These same themes that were of immediate concern within the microcosm of the Beatles also ended up strongly resonating within the macrocosm of the overall countercultural climate. As such, the Beatles became the perfect guides for leading Western youth from the garden of the familiar into the forest of the unknown.

While some of the songs on the album do seem to reference the use of psychedelic drugs, the overall theme of transformation found on the album does not seem to treat them as a panacea, as figures like

---

343 Ibid.
344 Ibid., 45-46.
345 Ibid., 44.
Timothy Leary often did; though Ringo Starr does “get high with a little help” from his friends and the narrator of “Lucy in the Sky With Diamonds” appears to be guiding a novice through a psychedelic experience, the main impetus behind the album's theme of transformation seems to come from its faith in the healing and unifying powers of creativity. Whiteley emphasizes the reconfiguration of old values at work in the opening track, for example, especially in the “Edwardian figure of Sgt. Pepper himself” who, along with the “context of the military bandstand with its attendant mood of light-hearted festivity” represents a playful parody of military cliché and a toying with the symbols of traditional English culture. As Mark Osteen suggests, “the Beatles aren't merely musicians; they are wizards conjuring up miraculous transformations. Using masks, they model not how to escape the prison of fame but how to use it to create false selves that are, paradoxically, true.” While this attitude does seem to coincide with Leary's conception of LSD as a tool for removing oneself from society's social games, the Beatles’ emphasis on building human connections and exploring innovation within social strictures seems to have more in common with the approach taken by Kesey, who later on in the hippie movement came to “see the dangers of emphasizing LSD itself too much,” rather than the insight that can be derived from it. Sgt. Pepper recognizes the transformative powers of cannabis and the LSD molecule, but it treats them as tools, along with many others, to help guide us toward the ultimate goal of embodying authenticity.

Although many of the songs on Sgt. Pepper feature the experimental play and disorienting effects which Whiteley identifies with psychedelic coding, the one song that is most often linked to the psychedelic experience both musically and lyrically is “Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds,” which “partially resolves the uncertainty and needs of the lonely person by evoking the colour, freedom and beauty of love experienced on a trip.” Whiteley interestingly characterizes the song as depicting an “experienced user” who “leads the novice … into a changed reality” and helps this novice avoid a negative experience, a so-called bad trip. Liridona Gashi and colleagues have written an intriguing paper that makes use of narrative theory to help us better understand how members of the psychedelic

346 Ibid., 48-49.
347 Whiteley, The Space Between the Notes, 39.
349 Grinspoon and Bakalar, Psychedelic Drugs Reconsidered, 64.
350 Ibid., 85.
351 Whiteley, The Space Between the Notes, 41.
352 Ibid., 42.
subculture use stories as a way of integrating difficult psychedelic experiences and reframing potentially traumatic encounters with the mind as “important experiences, resulting in deep insights.”353 Another important aspect of the paper is its exploration of how stories help to pass on “a set of rules that should be followed to avoid bad trips. When they reflected on why something went bad during a trip, it was often explained by noting that these rules were not followed.”354 Although the song “Lucy” does not actually describe a bad trip, it does nevertheless serve a similar narrative function to the kinds of “trip narratives” investigated in Gashi and colleague's paper. “Lucy” provides a lyrical mythology of the psychedelic experience, a cultural package meant to provide the novice with expectations and advice on avoiding a negative outcome. Only in the case of “Lucy,” the song uses both word and sound to paint a picture of the narrative of the trip, creating a much more vivid roadmap into the world of altered states.

Although the vivid cartoon-like imagery found in “Lucy” is unlikely to appear in most LSD experiences, the lyrical emphasis on sensorially intense images such as the “tangerine trees” and the “girl with kaleidoscope eyes” as well as the overall dream-like atmosphere and uncannily positive mood have the effect of setting up expectations which, though exaggerated, are nevertheless attuned to the phenomenology of the LSD experience. According to Taipale's characterization of music as an “attuned caregiver,” we can see “Lucy” as providing some degree of “affective attunement” to the experience of the psychedelic novice, matching their emotions and experience at a base level and providing “the child with a reflective surface that furthers the child's emotional self-understanding, while also informing the child that he or she is not alone with this feeling.”355 Just like an attuned caregiver, “Lucy” has the potential to play the role of a “modifying mirror” which can help guide the listener toward the positive atmosphere of the song's depiction of the psychedelic experience, provided that the initial requirements for attunement are first met. Otherwise, as Bonny warns us in a therapeutic context, the music might appear as a “constant irritant and hinderance.”356 Fortunately, the Beatles' first-hand experience with LSD-induced altered states allowed them to act as competently attuned guides in the pathway they laid out with “Lucy.”


354Ibid., 4.


Musically, one of the most striking structural features of “Lucy” might be its changing metre, leaping with a 3/4 waltz in its verses and landing on a 4/4 rock beat in its exuberant chorus. The effect is disorienting enough on its own, suggesting, as Whiteley has observed, a kind of back-and-forth between two worlds, the dreamy world of the hallucination and the “unblurred” timbres of “normal' experience, real life.” Moreover, Whiteley connects the electronic distancing and blurring of sound in the recording with the sensory effects of the psychedelic experience. Harmonically, Whiteley suggests that the tonal shift from A major to Bb major between the verse and pre-chorus sections also create an “insubstantial” atmosphere characteristic of psychedelic hallucinations. The chorus then shifts to a G major tonal centre, pushing us even further from the original key of A major. The descending bassline in the waltz-like verse can be seen as another technique for creating a dreamlike atmosphere, a compositional move that Whiteley also observes in the earlier Beatles single “Strawberry Fields” – a song which features a similarly descending bassline that is described by Whiteley as providing “a route downwards into the subconscious.”

A notable detail mentioned by Osteen but absent in Whiteley's book is the unusual timbre of Lennon's voice in “Lucy”, which was “recorded at a slower speed to sound higher on playback,” daubing yet another layer of otherworldliness and artifice onto the music's uncanny atmosphere.

Crucially, for all its experimentation, “Lucy” is still a rock song recognizably composed within the strictures of popular form. Interestingly, there are songs on Sgt. Pepper which do not deal directly with the psychedelic experience but are arguably more musically experimental than “Lucy.” This may have been a deliberate decision. Although the Beatles were allegedly eager to break out of their familiar pop band personae, they remained popular musicians, and as long as they continued their act as the Beatles the group would, at least initially, be required to work within certain formal parameters. While songs like “A Day in the Life” may take inspiration from the contemporary avant-garde, and songs like “Within You Without You” borrow from non-Western musical traditions, the entire album is contained within the popular forms that first launched the Beatles to international renown. Sgt. Pepper plays with

---

357 Whiteley, The Space Between the Notes, 42.
358 Ibid.
359 Ibid.
360 Ibid., 66.
362 Ibid., 57.
pop conventions, but it still very much remains a pop album. As Richard Goldstein anticipated when the album was first released, “Sergeant Pepper will be the Beatles baroque – an elaboration without improvement.”

Though there certainly was considerable innovation and experimentation in *Sgt. Pepper*, perhaps more than Goldstein gives it credit for, it was also necessary for the Beatles to exercise some creative restraint in crafting the album. If the goal of the album was to help lead to personal and societal transformation, then it was also important that the music first met its audience where they were already at, enabling them to emotionally attune and then be guided into the new territory it promised – in this case, that territory being the ideals of the 60s counterculture.

The overall presence of musical familiarity underlying experimentation in *Sgt. Pepper* was an important mechanism behind its success. As Taipale has suggested, if music is to act as a modifying mirror, it must first have an opportunity to attune to the emotions of the listener. According to Taipale, “the alternative version” – the expression seen in the modifying mirror, in this case the music of the Beatles – “must fit into the 'parameters' of the child's experiential situation.”

If the caregiver expresses an emotion that is felt to be at odds with the child's emotions, the relationship will end up feeling “misattuned, artificial, and potentially traumatic in the sense of abandoning.” Similarly, in order to resonate with an audience and evoke an meaningful emotional response, music must fit to some degree within the parameters of a listener's expectations. *Sgt. Pepper* was a success in this regard while simultaneously touching on the radical themes of counterculture. Despite the psychedelic overtones and themes of radical transformation ingrained in the album, “there is a sense of shared identity: the audience recognise the style and are confident that they are 'in the hands of the Beatles'.

*Sgt. Pepper* could not have been too radical a departure from the musical world already understood by fans of the Beatles. In order to serve the purpose of proselytizing the new age, the Beatles needed to take relatively modest steps toward radical transformation. They needed to retain the trust of their audience if they were to take them on a transformative journey into Strawberry Fields, into the unfamiliar space of tangerine trees and marmalade skies. In order to act as a modifying mirror for their society, the Beatles were first required to create an opportunity for attunement.

---


365 Ibid., 12.

The commercial success of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* speaks to the role it played as a modifying mirror for the 60s counterculture. Perhaps even more than its original commercial success, the album's cultural persistence has demonstrated the extent to which it served as a roadmap for young people in the 60s eager to break free from cultural norms. *Sgt. Pepper* was the number-one selling album in the United Kingdom upon its release and remained in that position for twenty-two weeks. It was the “cultural event of the year – the decade, even.” In America, the album was played by DJs “nonstop, without interruption, often from the LP's start to finish.” The album also opened up the world of psychedelic experience to many of its listeners. As Peter McCabe and Robert D. Schonfeld write, “the cult heroes were popularising acid and psychedelia, and inevitably, the initiates were going to follow.” For better or worse, the youth of the UK and America heard the Beatles' promise of radical transformation and were ready to grab hold of the tools that would help achieve it. While figures like Leary and Kesey led the intellectual front of the psychedelic revolution, musicians such as the Beatles provided the hippie movement with its hymns, laying down its emotional bedrock. While the intoxication of a psychedelic drug eventually wears off, music tends to persist in a culture. The perspectives offered by the counterculture's psychedelic intellectual elite were encoded into abstract sound by its musicians. It is thanks to the creative products of the 60s that the memory of the countercultural revolution has persisted for as long as it has; it is unlikely that LSD would have been as culturally influential on its own. Psychedelic drugs have the capacity to radically alter the human psyche, but it is difficult for them to sustain a cultural movement. In order for a culture to unfold, it requires more than the personal experiences promised by psychedelics – it also requires their cultural expression in art and music.

---

368 Ibid.
369 Ibid.
After the Revolution: Hard Drugs, the Acid Casualty, and Eastern Religion

Given that “psychedelic drugs could sustain cults but not a culture,” it is unsurprising that the grand trip of the 1960s one day came to an end.\textsuperscript{371} Until America passed its 1970 federal drug law banning a number of hallucinogenic drugs, including LSD, the hippie movement's psychedelic sacraments were legal to possess. Prohibition does not necessarily reduce a population's usage of a substance, but in many ways the momentum of counterculture itself was already beginning to decelerate before the outlawing of LSD. Indeed, Grinspoon and Bakalar claim that the number of people taking LSD today is similar to the levels of the 1960s, though with the difference that “fewer are taking them habitually, trying to build a vision of the universe and a way of life on them, or suffering unexpected disastrous reactions.”\textsuperscript{372} More than anything, the culture has changed and “LSD is not now a major signal of rebellion or cause for alarm any more than long hair on men.”\textsuperscript{373} LSD has lost its mythic status as Leary's psychedelic sacrament and the hippies have moved onto other aspirations, ideals, and substances.

Grinspoon and Bakalar reflect on the branches that stemmed from 60s counterculture, suggesting that they can be symbolically represented through the following four Ms: “Methedrine, Marxism (or Maoism), Marihuana, and Meditation.”\textsuperscript{374} Although Grinspoon and Bakalar draw attention to the political outgrowths to come out of psychedelic movement, I will take a slightly different approach, emphasizing instead the culture's splintering into groups characterized by crime, injury, and alternative spiritual practices; I will also analyze some musical works that have sprouted from the branches of the 1960s psychedelic revolution.

The all-embracing attitude of the hippie movement concealed many social problems. As Grinspoon and Bakalar observe, “the high language about love and community emanating from the few articulate leaders admired by sympathetic observers obscured a great deal of sordid reality.”\textsuperscript{375} The naive

\textsuperscript{371}Grinspoon and Bakalar, \textit{Psychedelic Drugs Reconsidered}, 80.
\textsuperscript{372}Ibid., 78.
\textsuperscript{373}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{374}Ibid., 81.
\textsuperscript{375}Ibid.
tolerance of the psychedelic community left it vulnerable in many cases to those with selfish, or perhaps even malicious, intent, such as Charles Manson and the Hell's Angels. As a result, the drug culture was “easily corrupted by drug dealers' profiteering and co-opted by commercial exploitation of its superficial symbols.” Just as the music industry capitalized on the anti-consumerist hippie movement, so too did drug dealers and drug manufacturers commodify the very drug that was meant to make one lose faith in the value of commodities. With figures like Leary encouraging frequent LSD use, himself taking psychedelic drugs weekly, LSD was in high demand and many profit-motivated illegal producers stepped in to provide the supply. From its beginning, the psychedelic revolution was built on unstable philosophical ground.

At least in terms of abuse potential and lethal dose, psychedelics are relatively safe to use, with even seemingly innocuous drugs such as caffeine and alcohol posing more of a physical danger. That said, as an escape from conventional reality, any kind of mind-altering substance can be abused. Grinspoon and Bakalar argue that many in the psychedelic revolution eventually moved on from relatively harmless drugs like LSD and cannabis to more physically addicting drugs such as alcohol, barbiturates, heroin, and Methedrine (methamphetamine). By the time the momentum of the psychedelic revolution began to slacken, the “flower children had abandoned the scene and it was dominated by speed freaks, addicts, alcoholics, motorcycle hoodlums, and the teenage runaways and schizoid or inadequate personalities they preyed on.” When the rhetoric of free love fell apart, the hidden realities of crime, corruption, and addiction buried beneath the surface of the psychedelic revolution were exposed. Though this seedy face of the movement was by no means representative of its totality, it nevertheless reveals an important flaw in the 60s countercultural ethos, which, for better or for worse, indiscriminately embraced the destruction of boundaries and social norms.

Drug use in the 1960s was not limited to psychedelics. Though LSD served as a catalyst for the social movement, physically addictive substances such as heroin and methamphetamines were also used in

376Ibid.
377Ibid.
378Ibid., 66.
380Grinspoon and Bakalar, *Psychedelic Drugs Reconsidered*, 81.
381Ibid., 82.
certain circles of the subculture. One of the most popular bands to depict the more unsavoury face of the counterculture was the Rolling Stones. Although the promotion of psychedelic drugs by bands like the Beatles was seen as threatening to societal order, the Stones promoted a disruption of a different order. Controversy surrounding the Stones peaked in 1967 when band members Keith Richards and Mick Jagger were arrested in Richards's residence in Redlands for the possession of cannabis, amphetamines, and heroin.\textsuperscript{382} According to Marcus Collins, the so-called “Redlands Affair” made such an impression that it became central to a debate in the United Kingdom on the theme of societal “permissiveness”.\textsuperscript{383} According to many social commentators of the 1960s and beyond, this period marked an increase in permissiveness toward unlawful behavior, leading to “the weakening of traditional moral codes, the emergence of alternative and countercultural lifestyles, and the prominence of new and vital cultural forms” - the situation sparked a debate about “how permissive Britain had, could, and should become.”\textsuperscript{384} While the Beatles represented the utopian ideal of psychedelic transformation, the Stones represented the rough reality of many who lived by the countercultural code.

The Stones were controversial not only for conservative figures, but for liberal members of the hippie culture as well. According to Collins, the Stones were “too unrespectable, unrepresentative, and uninterested to forge a viable alliance with liberals” and even made an effort in their work to mock the flower power movement.\textsuperscript{385} This mocking attitude toward the hippie movement is reflected in the Stones' relationship with the Beatles. Whiteley comments on how the career of the Stones “had been an often deliberate contrast to the Beatles, following each move with a reciprocal response.”\textsuperscript{386} A clear example of this shadowing of their popular rivals can be found in the Stones's 1967 album Their Satanic Majesties Request, “ostensibly the record which linked them most strongly with the psychedelic.”\textsuperscript{387} While the Beatles celebrated the themes of community, love, and Eastern mysticism, the Stones turned to symbols of black magic and the occult to reflect the “satanic edge of the counterculture itself,” resulting in what appears to be a “conscious and complementary response to the Sgt.

\textsuperscript{382}Marcus Collins, “Permissiveness on Trial: Sex, Drugs, Rock, the Rolling Stones, and the Sixties Counterculture,” \textit{Popular Music and Society} 42, no. 2 (n.d.): 188.
\textsuperscript{383}Ibid., 189.
\textsuperscript{384}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{385}Ibid., 200.
\textsuperscript{386}Whiteley, \textit{The Space Between the Notes}, 90.
\textsuperscript{387}Ibid.
Pepper image of the Beatles.” With this in mind, though *Satanic Majesties* appears to be an attempt by the Stones at producing an album in the psychedelic rock style, it can also be read as a parody of the Beatles and the flower power movement in general. While the Beatles sold an optimistic promise of a better world, potentially providing “escapism” from the “demands of reality,” the Stones painted a portrait of the often sordid reality buried deep within the counterculture.

Drugs were depicted by the Beatles as a tool for transformation and transcendence. In “Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds,” for example, the figure of Lucy – a common personification of LSD – “is merely a guide, just as the narrator is our cicerone for the journey into a transformed reality that lies not without us but within us. Self-reinvention can happen, the song implies, only if you banish your fears and follow a luminary who models freedom and helps you turn on.” The Beatles treated drugs in their entheogenic sense, as a means for communing with the divine, for bringing about healing and radical transformation. On the other hand, the Stones depict drugs as a means for achieving hedonistic pleasure. “She's a Rainbow” from *Satanic Majesties*, a song which “reads like an attempt to reconstruct *Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds,*” portrays its titular character not as a guide toward radical self-transformation, but as a colourful marvel offering sensual pleasure. Whiteley even suggests that *She's a Rainbow* implies the experience of using heroin, writing that “she shoots colours all around' provides an alternative image in its evocation of fixing. Opium-based drugs may transport the user upwards.”

Nevertheless, reminding us of the black magic themes of the album, Whiteley describes how “the withdrawal symptoms are painful. At this point, the focus of the opening track becomes clear. She can provide ecstasy, peace of mind, but the price might be a soul.” In many ways, the Stones represent Grinspoon and Bakalar's observation that the rhetoric of the counterculture obscured an often “sordid reality.” It is important to recognize that the Stones, though they often mocked the counterculture, were also representative of its more sordid aspects. Stephen Davis, for example, highlights the Dionysian face of the Stones, writing that, when the Stones perform, “sex and death go hand in hand.

---

388Ibid.
389Ibid., 39.
391Whiteley, *The Space Between the Notes*, 96.
392Ibid., 97.
393Ibid.
Sirens scream and the earth moves. Dionysus is in the house.  395 Though 60s counterculture was amorphous on its own, it was still characterized for the hope of a constructive future. The Stones, on the other hand, embraced the hedonism of the moment. While the counterculture did end up bringing about positive transformations in many areas of society, it had no strategy for dealing with the problems of crime, poverty, and addiction the Stones reflected in their music. 396 The problem of drug addiction in society still sees no resolution and has only further tightened its grip on users not only on the streets but in the music industry.

Another discouraging reality hidden at the heart of the psychedelic revolution, though one that was certainly exaggerated and sensationalized, was the phenomenon of the “acid casualty.” As LSD use grew in popularity in the 1960s and advocates such as Leary began to appear on television proselytizing its potential, the news media started to latch onto incoming reports of “bad LSD freak-outs,” exaggerating the dangers of the substance and encouraging an atmosphere of fear toward its increasing cultural significance. 397 As Siff describes it, “the most popular stories contained aspects of poetic justice. It seemed particularly suiting that college students who took drugs to see mystical wonders would come to ruin by staring at the sun, or that the terrible effects claimed of LSD would come at a terrible cost.” 398 At the time, LSD was implicated in countless disturbing cases, from a medical student who killed his mother-in-law to a man being hit by motor vehicles due to LSD-induced negligence. 399 Taking psychedelic drugs does without a doubt pose very real psychological risks, though “the danger is not great enough to make everyone decline the opportunity for such an awe-inspiring adventure of the mind.” 400 In any case, many of the risks associated with psychedelic use can be mitigated with attention paid to the factors of dose, set, and setting. Rick Strassman, having published a review investigating adverse reactions to psychedelic drugs, insists that “in the research environment, volunteers who were carefully screened, supervised, and followed up suffered very few

396 Grinspoon and Bakalar, Psychedelic Drugs Reconsidered, 83.
398 Ibid., 152.
399 Ibid., 155-153.
400 Grinspoon and Bakalar, Psychedelic Drugs Reconsidered, 191.
serious adverse reactions.”401 That said, in the context of unregulated recreational use, extremely negative experiences and psychotic episodes are far more frequent. Negative effects can be strategically mitigated, but psychedelic use still poses immense risk, especially outside of a medical context.

The reemergence of scientific interest in the study of psychedelic drugs starting in the early 1990s has helped to neutralize the often polemical debate surrounding the dangers of their use. This is a promising sign, since both psychedelic advocates and detractors have a history of taking a parochial perspective. As Grinspoon and Bakalar write, “a voyage like this one might be expected to produce some casualties. The controversy about how many and what kind, how serious they are, how they are caused, and how they can be prevented has been one of the noisiest of all those surrounding psychedelic drugs.”402 Psychedelic advocates are hesitant to acknowledge the potential risks of the drugs, while their opponents are hesitant to acknowledge their potential benefits. Just as those seeking to prohibit the distribution of psychedelics might not want to “admit that there was such a thing as a good trip,” it is also common for psychedelic advocates to deny the existence of a true bad trip.403 Semantic issues of course complicate attempts at defining exactly what constitutes a negative drug experience. Though psychedelic drugs can expose the mind to a variety of negative experiences “almost as great as the variety of human suffering,” amongst psychedelic users “bad trips are often regarded as more valuable than good ones, on the ground that they teach the drug user more about himself; the suffering has the great virtue of not seeming meaningless.”404 Nevertheless, these experiences can still be psychologically damaging in the rare instances that they occur.

One variety of negative experience that can result from psychedelic use is what Grinspoon and Bakalar refer to as “the metaphysical bad trip,” an experience in which “everything is implicated in the drug taker's misery, his wretched feelings are seen as revelations of the ultimate nature of the universe, and he experiences some version of what mystics have called the dark night of the soul.”405 While the psychological effects of such harrowing experiences usually do not last long after the effects of the

---


402 Ibid., 157.

403 Ibid.

404 Ibid., 158-159.

405 Ibid., 158.
drug have subsided, some research has suggested that “psychedelic drug use may have helped to precipitate schizophrenia earlier in life and in persons who would otherwise not have been so vulnerable to it.” Such pronouncements are controversial, however, considering that in studies related to the subject, “schizophrenics had used larger amounts and more kinds of drugs than the normal control subjects leading to the question of whether psychedelic drugs can precipitate schizophrenia, or if individuals already experiencing schizophrenic symptoms might be more likely to seek out drugs to help regulate their symptoms. Nevertheless, prolonged psychosis following the use of psychedelics has been observed in some individuals who have used the too frequently. This variety of psychosis seems to develop out of “a gradual shift toward projection, denial, and delusions in a person who repeatedly takes the drug at crises in his life.” Dosing too frequently and without proper care paid to set and setting can result in negative psychological consequences and a potentially extended psychosis. While the rhetoric surrounding the dangers of psychedelic drugs is often exaggerated, it is important to also recognize the harm that can follow indiscriminate use. It is also possible that the controlled status of these substances only heightens the risks of irresponsible usage. It is with these concerns in mind that psychedelic drug trials, such as those headed by Roland Griffiths at John Hopkins University, always involve a thorough screening process to minimize the risk of psychological harm to volunteers.

Given the importance of music in the psychedelic revolution, it is hardly a surprise that the rock star “acid casualty” became such an important figure in the culture's mythology. While conservative media sources aimed to portray the acid casualty phenomenon as a kind of “poetic justice” for those seeking “mystical wonders” through drugs, some members of the flower power movement ended up idealizing drug-induced psychosis and schizophrenia, seeing it as a kind of heroism or martyrdom. Reflecting on the idealization of psychosis found in R. D. Laing's popular psychology books, David Gales suggests that the Scottish psychiatrist “appeared to make it cool, and interesting, and special to

\[^{406}\text{Ibid.}\]
\[^{407}\text{Ibid., 181.}\]
\[^{408}\text{Ibid.}\]
\[^{409}\text{Ibid., 180.}\]
\[^{410}\text{Ibid.}\]
\[^{412}\text{Siff, Acid Hype, 152.}\]
be bonkers. If you weren't bonkers and weren't ever going to be, you could certainly accelerate the
process, or rather you could bring on the process if you did enough acid. This idealization of the
psychotic state resulted in a “Rimbaud-esque self-destructive thing in some quarters where people just
wanted to be that interesting.” Most of those who actively sought out drug-induced psychosis
inevitably made a return to consensual reality. The acid casualty, however, is regarded as one of the
unfortunate few who, for whatever reason, did not.

The most notorious of the so-called “acid casualties” is Syd Barrett, the co-founder of the English rock
band Pink Floyd. It is important to emphasize, however, that Barrett's status as an acid casualty is
almost certainly based more on cultural myth than on medical fact. While there are many who argue
that Barrett's psychological decline following the release the band's second album in 1968 was
connected with his frequent use of LSD, as Nicholas Schaffner writes, “the point is, you don't know
whether the acid accelerated this process that was happening in his brain, or was the cause of it. No one
knows.” Duggie Fields, the British artist who shared a flat with Syd Barrett in 1968, denies that
Barrett was a drug casualty, though he admits that the drugs were most likely “a catalyst in his
downfall.” Artist Pete Brown argues, conversely, that “being swept in to another world because of
the popularity of his music” was probably the main cause of Barrett's mental illness. Others, such as
David Gale and Lesmoir-Gordon, have suggested that Barrett was always “a bit strange” and that he
was likely already “destined for mental illness anyway … it was merely accelerated by the stardom
thing and all these unsettling chemicals.” No one can say for certain what happened since, after
leaving Pink Floyd, Barrett chose to retreat from the public eye. By the 1980s, Barrett insisted on going
by his birth name, Roger Barrett, and decided to move in with his mother in Cambridge permanently.

It is impossible to say for certain whether Syd Barrett can actually be considered an acid casualty, or
whether his retreat from society was brought on by other factors. Whatever the case may have been,

---

413 David Gale, quoted in Rob Chapman, _Syd Barrett: A Very Irregular Head_ (London: Faber and Faber, 2010), 391.
414 Ibid.
416 Duggie Fields, quoted in Chapman, _Syd Barrett_, 182.
417 Pete Brown, quoted in ibid.
418 David Gale, quoted in ibid, 274.
419 Lesmoir-Gordon, quoted in ibid.
Barrett's disappearance from public life only served to inflate his mythological status and intensify the speculation as to its origin. It is not known whether LSD caused Barrett's retreat from the world, but in the cultural sphere he came to be seen as the prototypical acid casualty, an image that was further reinforced by the remaining members of Pink Floyd.

Pink Floyd's 1975 album *Wish You Were Here* is bookended by a song suite of nine parts dedicated to the memory of Syd Barrett. This song suite, “Shine On You Crazy Diamond,” in many ways seems to treat Barrett more as myth than anything else. Nevertheless, in eulogies myth and reality are often mixed, the plain facts of a person's life being married to the symbolic role they played within their culture. As such, the grandiose treatment of Barrett's story in “Shine On” is perhaps justified. The beginning of the third section of the suite features a four-note disjunct electric guitar motif featuring a tritone between the first and last pitches, an effect which Rose suggests “connotes the mental condition of Barrett because of its disjointedness.”\(^{421}\) The descending chromaticism of Part V's vocal line is also considered by Rose to suggest something of Barrett's “downfall.”\(^{422}\) Lyrically, “Shine On” displays a comparison between who Barrett used to be (“remember when you were young, you shone like the sun”) and the devastation of what he has become (“now there's a look in your eyes, like black holes in the sky”). These lyrics express the observation made by songwriter Roger Waters that mental decline had transformed Barrett from someone full of “brilliance and splendour” into a sad soul bereft of life, “now in a metaphorical state of death.”\(^{423}\) Lyrics such as “come on you stranger, you legend, you martyr, and shine” further reinforcing the mythological colouring of Barrett's tragic transformation, emphasizing a picture of him as a hero, a psychedelic saint wounded in the pursuit of the forbidden mysteries of the mind.

Whether the mythologizing of the song is appropriate to the reality of Barrett's quiet retreat or not, Pink Floyd's “Shine On” nevertheless captures an image of the man a representative figure of the acid casualty, the hapless would-be mystic who “reached for the secret too soon” and “cried to the moon.” It is interesting to observe how closely Pink Floyd's depiction of Barrett's story matches the hunger for poetic justice found in the conservative journalism of the 1960s – Barrett “reached for the secret too

---


\(^{422}\) Ibid., 45.

\(^{423}\) Ibid.
soon” and came to confirm the media's hysteria that “the terrific effects claimed of LSD would come at a terrible cost.”\textsuperscript{424} The attitude taken by Pink Floyd of course differs from that found in the LSD panic of popular media. For Pink Floyd, Barrett's transformation was less a cautionary tale and more an expression of the transiency and sadness of life. As Waters relates, “‘Shine On's’ not really about [him] – he's just a symbol for all the extremes of absence some people have to indulge in because it's the only way they can cope with how fucking sad it is.”\textsuperscript{425} In “Shine On,” the mythological dimensions of the acid casualty are expanded to embrace all forms of existential retreat, all the tragic inward transformations that people undergo to escape from the sadness of their lives. Part of this sense of sadness could be said to stem from the failure of the psychedelic revolution, from the realization that there was no longer any utopian goal toward which the counterculture could strive toward. Perhaps this too is a fundamental face of the acid casualty myth – a tragic figure of failure who strove for personal transformation but in the end found only self-destruction. Though a lot of good came out of the 1960s counterculture experiment, the myth of the acid casualty perhaps represents another reminder that pursuing utopian ideals can sometimes lead to tragic ends. Shooting for the stars can sometimes lead one into an abyss.

The final branch out of the psychedelic movement that I wish to address is the part that became infatuated with Eastern religions. Eastern spirituality was of course always central to the constitution of the 1960s counterculture, with luminaries like Leary and Alan Watts drawing from the concepts and vocabulary of Eastern religions in order to articulate the philosophy of the psychedelic movement, though admittedly “mostly in diffuse and vulgarized versions.”\textsuperscript{426} Nevertheless, psychedelic drugs stimulated a serious interest in Eastern spiritualities, such as Buddhism and Hinduism, in many of the era's flower children. Grinspoon and Bakalar even argue that the most common reason people stopped using LSD in the 1960s was “the belief that LSD itself had enabled them to go 'beyond' it, by transcending the need for it.”\textsuperscript{427} Many former LSD users began to seek transcendent states of mind through other means, such as meditation. For many, “the drugs whetted metaphysical appetites that Eastern religion promised to satisfy.”\textsuperscript{428} Moreover, deeper studies into Eastern mysticism led some

\textsuperscript{424} Siff, \textit{Acid Hype}, 152.
\textsuperscript{425} Waters, quoted in Rose, \textit{Which One's Pink}, 42.
\textsuperscript{426} Grinspoon and Bakalar, \textit{Psychedelic Drugs Reconsidered}, 64-65.
\textsuperscript{427} Ibid., 86.
\textsuperscript{428} Ibid.
individuals to believe that, to “realize the ideals of simplicity and naturalness suggested but not achieved by the drug culture, it was necessary to get rid of technical aids that were seen as impure and ultimately in some sense poisonous.” In this way, the answer to the paradox of psychedelic commodification came in the form of abandoning the psychedelic “sacrament” of LSD itself, with individuals striving to cultivate states of peace through their own discipline and concentration. For those who embraced the lifestyles of Eastern religions, the psychedelic revolution seemed to undermine its own sense of values. As Grinspoon and Bakalar relate, “doubts about Western science and industry already present in the drug culture, as well as the concern for purity and wholeness represented by the ecology movement, led to a rejection of psychedelic drugs.” The idea of self-transformation first promised by psychedelic drugs came to be seen as attainable only in their absence.

One musician who fully embraced the migration from psychedelia to Eastern spirituality was the Scottish songwriter Donovan, whose 1966 hit single “Sunshine Superman” is thought by some to have “initiated the psychedelic revolution.” In an interview with Goldmine Magazine, Donovan describes the early years of psychedelic rock, explaining how “when psychedelic is attached to music, what you're actually talking about, is a mood that could come from smoking pot. The tempo and the feel in that kind of music is very laid-back, what we used to call 'chill'.“ Donovan emphasizes that psychoactive substances were not necessary for understanding the music, “but it helps. I was aware of what I was doing. I was making poems and songs to place the audience in a state of relaxation.” Again, Donovan's description of his compositional goals echoes Taipale's conception of music as a modifying mirror which must first fit into the parameters of a listener's experience before they can attune to it and experience the benefits of emotional regulation. Early in his career, Donovan wrote music that aimed to attune to the relaxed, introspective mental state that can be experienced through the use of cannabis and psychedelic drugs, and it is likely that much of the success of his psychedelic style derived from the way the mood of his music resonated with the drug experiences of the new generation. Donovan's music met its audience where their minds emotionally stood, and as a result it successfully

429 Ibid., 87.
430 Ibid.
432 Ibid.
433 Ibid.
attuned to their experience, leading to the music's immense cultural impact and the growth of psychedelic rock.

Although Donovan is often credited with the initial impulse behind the style of psychedelic rock, his music nevertheless evolved over time. Along with many other musicians associated with the counterculture, Donovan eventually turned to Eastern spirituality as an alternative to psychedelic sacraments. Nevertheless, psychedelics still have a use in healing. Donovan laments the prohibition of psychedelic plants, pointing out how “these substances were then made illegal despite the fact that doctors and scientists were experimenting with strong plants in their laboratories to help the mentally ill.”435 In Donovan's opinion, psychedelic drugs have a transformative potential that should be integrated into the Western medical model for the purpose of healing mental disorders. Moreover, early experiments with these substances “opened the psychedelic third eye, very akin to meditation” and led to many young people of the post-war era to question the ecological and social destruction that appeared to follow the wake of the previous generation.436 Donovan continues, describing how “the idea of the psychedelic journey is within you, not without. Because the parents went out and destroyed everything they could possibly find. The inner world had to be explored.” 437 It is this same drive for inner exploration, for personal transformation, that motivated the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, and eventually led many countercultural icons, including Donovan, to Eastern spirituality. As Donovan phrases it, what the counterculture was seeking “was all in the East. That's part of why psychedelia eventually moved on into meditation.”438 Following the transformative ideals of 1960s counterculture, many members of the psychedelic rock movement came to realize that the transcendent states promised by psychedelic drugs could be better achieved through meditative practice. Moreover, according to the model of music as a modifying mirror, the reflective mental state of meditation allowed the bridge between the introspection of the psychedelic experience and music inspired by Eastern spirituality to be an easy one to make. Because of their comparable phenomenology, the transition from psychedelia to meditation was easily made, both on musical and spiritual fronts.

The inevitable dissolution of 1960s counterculture led to several paths of cultural integration, some

435 Greenblatt, “Donovan.”
436 Ibid.
437 Ibid.
438 Ibid.
generally more socially beneficially than others. While there were those for whom the freedom and chaos of the hippie culture led down a road of self-destruction, there were others who, using psychedelic drugs, gained a fresh perspective which eventually led to a more sober reflection on their place in society and the world. These branching paths were also reflected in musical works, with new musical subcultures developing out of the movement's criminal underbelly as well as its spiritual ideals. Those who could not relinquish the ideals of the psychedelic revolution also formed the foundations for a new musical culture – the rave scene. Sessa describes how the spiritual guru Bhagwan 'Osho' Shree Rajneesh helped disseminate the psychoactive empathogen MDMA throughout America and Europe, particularly in the island of Ibiza where “Osho-ites spread their message of love and sex through the use of meditation and MDMA.” This congregation of hippies and MDMA in Ibiza led vacationing DJs to discover the drug, helping them create a “link between ecstasy [MDMA] and house music.” As a result, electronic dance music gradually emerged as the new representative for the psychedelic style in music. The psychedelic revolution, like scientific research on psychedelic drugs, “never stopped entirely, but it certainly drastically reduced in volume and ceased being mainstream around 1966 when LSD was made illegal.” Regardless, once the psychedelic counterculture left the public eye, it fractured into multiple pieces, many of which flourished into new cultural movements of their own. Whether good or bad, personally harmful or beneficial, the psychedelic revolution introduced a plethora of new perspectives and possibilities into Western culture, and the exact magnitude of its influence is something which we still do not fully grasp. The far-reaching effects of 60s counterculture still have the capacity to surprise us.

**Concluding Remarks**

This chapter discussed the interacting influences that psychedelic drugs and music had on the construction of 1960s counterculture. A primary theme of the counterculture, echoed in representative works such as The Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* was that of transformation. The transformation sought for in the psychedelic revolution through the “sacrament” of LSD was echoed in the experimentation and subversion of expectations found in psychedelic rock. That said, despite their eagerness to explore new creative territory, many early psychedelic rock artists were careful to toe the

---


440 Ibid.

441 Ibid., 159.
line between stylistic intelligibility and radical experimentation. The Beatles, for instance, took inspiration from the European avant-garde and foreign musical traditions, but still conformed to popular music structures that would be familiar to fans. As a result, musicians like the Beatles managed to explore the theme of radical transformation, but in a way reminiscent of the modifying mirror, meeting listeners familiar with their early work in a familiar space and then gradually guiding them toward new perspectives and ideals.

The destabilization of social structure which characterized the hippie movement was unable to sustain itself for long. Nevertheless, from the movement's fragments came an abundance of new cultural traditions. Some of the progeny of the psychedelic movement grew out of the unsavoury aspects of the culture, including its vulnerability to crime and substance abuse, problems which persist in the music industry and in society at large. Mythical perspectives also emerged out of the hippie era, with figures such as the acid casualty representing the ideals, fears, and disappointments of the psychedelic revolution. Despite, or perhaps because of, the mystery surrounding the mental decline of Syd Barret, the musician was seen as a representative acid casualty and was mythologized as such by both the public and the remaining members of Pink Floyd. Other musicians, such as Donovan, abandoned psychedelic drugs after having “got the message” and began to pursue Eastern religion and meditation as an alternative, and potentially superior, means of access to transcendent states of consciousness. Those who held onto the ideals of the hippie movement and its belief in the sacramental powers of psychedelic drugs went on to construct the new culture built around electronic dance music, which turned to MDMA as its drug of choice. One of the main goals of the psychedelic revolution was societal transformation. While ultimately the movement may not have achieved the utopian vision it aspired to, its still managed to extraordinarily influence the cultural trajectory of the Western world.

Transformation, both personal and societal, can only happen gradually. In order to be guided from one state to another, we must first enter into a relationship with the other through a state of mental attunement. This is the case whether the attunement occurs between caregiver and child, therapist and patient, or music and listener.442 In psychedelic therapy, psychoactive drugs like LSD and psilocybin can be used to increase the suggestibility of the mind, and when paired with music this heightened sensitivity can lead to an intense mirroring effect in which the patient is guided through a feedback loop through a guided healing experience. In some ways the 1960s can be seen as an extended

442 Taipale, “The Modifying Mirror.”
psychedelic therapy session, with psychedelic rock groups like Cream, The Jimi Hendrix Experience, and the Beatles acting as music therapists aiming to mirror the mental state of their society and help guide it toward beneficial modes of transformation. The mechanism behind this approach had much to do with experimentation and variation within the confines of familiar forms, reconfiguring cultural symbols and familiar musical cliché in ways that provided novelty while also staying true to the atmosphere of the psychedelic experience. That said, for bands such as the Beatles, psychedelics were only part of the process, a means for providing a mystical vision, a peak-experience, that could then be developed as a basis for building a more authentic identity and strengthening ties to a larger community. While the counterculture ultimately failed to bring about the utopia it sought after, the psychedelic revolution nevertheless shook the foundation of the Western world and provided it with several fresh perspectives that led to numerous cultural transformations, both for the better and for the worse. Nevertheless, despite some of the challenges faced by Western society during the height of the psychedelic revolution, the overall effect was, necessarily, one of maturation and growth. As is often said within psychedelic circles, possibly echoing the Rolling Stones: You don't get the trip you want, you get the one you need. In some poetic sense the world needed the 60s counterculture, if only to provide a new perspective on what is possible.
Conclusion

This thesis has investigated the use of music in the induction of mystical experience in three contrasting musical traditions. In the first case study, I investigated how music is used as a guiding force in Santo Daime rituals, helping to bring about a musical-mystical feedback loop with the capacity to direct consciousness toward increasingly positive states. In the second case study, I showed how honkyoku are used in Fuke-shū to provide an object of concentration which, as a meditation object, can provide access to an altered state in which, according to Buddhist philosophy, the true nature of the self can be perceived. In the third case study, I investigated how mystical experiences brought on by the LSD compound gave rise to something akin to a religious movement in 1960s counterculture in which the goal of transformation, of both the self and society, was sought after through the pursuit of altered states of consciousness and experimental musical expression. These three case studies demonstrate the deep connection that exists between the human sense of the sacred and musical expression. If we are to develop a nuanced understanding of what music is and what it can do to the human mind, it is important that we recognize the connection between mystical experience and musical experience. Whatever the nature of that connection might be, it seems clear that there is some kind of relationship between the kinds of mystical states observable in a brain undergoing meditation or a psychedelic experience and the ineffable experience of listening to music.

How exactly music relates to mysticism is not entirely clear, and further research is very much needed. It is possible that music relates to the mystical experience merely as a catalyst, as a cultural tool for triggering the musical-mystical feedback loop and directing the mind in a given experiential direction. It is also possible that the neural correlates that Raphaël Millière and colleagues have associated with meditation and the psychedelic experience can also be associated with musical experience, at least given the appropriate context. 443 What Taipale's notion of music as a modifying mirror makes clear is that, unless music meets us where we stand, or we rise to meet it, we fail to reach a state of attunement and the music will fail to have any meaningful influence. 444 Nevertheless, if we somehow manage to open our musical eye and perceive through our senses, rather than with them, we

can perhaps reach states of musical experience that can be considered just as mystical in character as those states induced by meditation or psychedelic drugs. Whether the “micro-mysticism” found in many religious contexts can be found to influence the brain in analogous, though mitigated ways is also an interesting question that can perhaps be explored further in empirical studies. This kind of research would certainly be of interest not only to those who write and perform music but for those who use music to heal as well. Such a study would lend credence to music therapist Helen Bonny's claim that deep listening can lead to states of mind similar to those experienced by “disciples of some Far Eastern school of Zen or Tao.”\textsuperscript{445} Given the right conditions, music can potentially serve as another tool for achieving the sought-after therapeutic peak experience.

In the field of cultural studies, it would be worth investigating further how musical attunement has influenced the evolution of musical style. Is there perhaps an attunement “sweet spot” reached by successful albums like 	extit{Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band} that strikes a balance between creative experimentation and attunement to the emotional needs of the audience? This line of research also poses the question of social responsibility amongst musicians. If musicians can be said to act as modifying mirrors for musical audiences, what kind of ethical responsibility do they have in directing their audiences toward positive changes in mood, identity, and belief? This notion also has interesting implications in the phenomenon of religious pop genres such as Christian rock and Christian metal, in which affective attunement is achieved with fans of a style of popular music for the purpose of guiding them toward a particular religious view.\textsuperscript{446} Certainly, the practice of using music to gain converts is nothing new. For example, Mabbet notes the use of music as an evangelical technique in Mahāyāna Buddhism.\textsuperscript{447} Nevertheless, there seems to be much potential in investigating the capacity of music to attune to an audience's emotions as a way of modifying their system of beliefs. The belief-shifting effects are presumably even more extreme when psychedelic compounds are involved.

One other example of a thread of investigation that could extend from this thesis could relate to the study of the mystical dimensions of commercial music. If it is true that there are potential musical


\textsuperscript{446}Marcus Moberg, 	extit{Christian Metal: History, Ideology, Scene} (Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), http://dx.doi.org.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/10.5040/9781474220071.

experiences that lie beyond our everyday conscious perception, it is reasonable to suggest that they exist not only in musical works designed for the evocation of religious ideas, but also in the commercial works heard on television, in videogames, and at the shopping mall. Robin Sylvan has written a valuable book demonstrating how the spiritual sensibilities of West African religious music have carried on into modern popular genres based on the musical legacy of Black Americans.\(^{448}\)

According to Sylvan’s argument, music that we think of today as popular, commercial, and secular has its roots in a spiritual lineage, and we can still perceive that spiritual trace if we are perceptive enough. In any case, it seems clear that musical works that we declare to be profound and of artistic value do not hold a monopoly on the capacity to evoke a sense of meaning and significance. Just as William Blake sought to see “a World in a Grain of Sand / And a Heaven in a Wild Flower”\(^{449}\) it is likely that the experience of the mystical can be found in any musical source, so long as the circumstances are right and we can properly attune to it. While it is probably true that certain musical works, for certain people and in certain cultures, are better at producing a sense of the sacred, it is still the case that attunement is a subjective phenomenon based on the psychological makeup of the listener. It is even possible that there could be a correlation between our sense of musical taste and the sense of “micro-mysticism” we experience when listening to music. In any case, this topic raises many questions that are worth pursuing in further detail.

While it may be impossible to show another person exactly how to sense through the musical eye, we can nevertheless point out details that seem to indicate the value of doing so. That is what this thesis aimed to accomplish – to demonstrate that there are more ways of listening than we are usually aware of and that through certain techniques we can access these modes of musical experience for their communal, mental, and transformative benefits. This thesis demonstrated that its three case studies all made use of music as a way of expressing the sacred and as a way of encouraging the mind to enter altered states of musical perception. This thesis also offers something of a challenge to musical listeners. If musical attunement requires the subject to stand on the same ground as the musical object, this means that certain musical experiences require effort on our part to achieve. Conversely, the amount of effort and time we perceive stamped into the craftsmanship of a musical work can give us some indication of whether making such an effort is justified in the first place. If a composer invested a


substantial amount of time into a musical work, this perhaps suggests that we too could benefit from investing our own time into understanding it. This plea for patient understanding is certainly not unfamiliar to many contemporary composers who, like Arnold Schoenberg and his Society for Private Musical Performances, feel their work might be better appreciated if audiences took the time to reach for a mental state (based in education, curiosity) in which they could attune to it. We can of course remain content with our current range of musical interests, content to sit and wait for familiar musical experiences to drop from the sky and agree with our palate. If we wish to expand our range of hearing, however, and maybe even the range of our spirit, we must take it upon ourselves to grow as musical listeners, to educate ourselves in new styles, pursue promising musical experiences, and develop new modes sound-awareness.

We can wait for music to meet us where we are, but we can also step outside of our current mode of being and meet musical objects where they are. We can work to open our own musical eyes and perceive the joy and fascination that others see in music that is unfamiliar to us. Doing so constitutes a kind of personal growth and transformation that most religious traditions, including Santo Daime, Fuke-shū, and the spiritual side of 60s psychedelic rock, would agree is of value. By cleansing the doors of our perception onto the musical, we expand our view of the ineffable. Our understanding of the world increases as we open ourselves and allow a greater variety of sound into the musical eye.
Bibliography


Nossa Irmandade. “Eu Tomo Esta Bebida,” N.D.


https://www.nossairmandade.com/hymn/94/FlorDas%C3%81guas.


http://dx.doi.org.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/10.5040/9781474220071.


Curriculum Vitae

Name: Forest Muran

Post-secondary Education and Degrees: The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada

Related Work Experience: Teaching Assistant
The University of Western Ontario
2021-2022