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Tripping Out from San Francisco

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Tripping Out from San Francisco Peter Tamony A he first night of the San Francisco Trips Festival at Longshore men 's Hall in San Francisco coincided with the \$3.50 dinner of the Northern California Cartoonists at Caesar's across the street, an event often decorated by such artists as the creators of Charlie Brown, Steve Canyon, and Dennis the Menace. Thought: perhaps the hearty Italian dinner would ballast me against the onslaughts of the several rock-and-roll groups from around San Francisco, now gathered under one roof to present an "audience-experienced psychedelic reaction without the use of drugs" but with strobe lights, girls nude and bodycolored , an Indian teepee, and other surrogates. I could meet a big or two, duck the after-dinner talks, and walk across the street. Regrettably, the walk was too late. The Festival was a sell-out—a thousand turned away that night, with an attendance of ten thousand on three nights, 21-23 January 1966, reported and commented on in the newspapers for a week.' So I missed that seminal gathering of the so-called tribes, that happening.² It was the event that signaled the incursion of the hippies into San Francisco, and projected a term with multiple connotations into the national vocabulary. Albert Hofmann, a Swiss

chemist, synthesized LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide) while seeking something else, an occasional happening in science, though hardly serendipitous.³ Having accidentally inhaled or absorbed the chemical through the skin, Hofmann experienced hallucinations. A few days later he ingested what he thought was a minute amount of the substance. While bicycling home he found Basel distorted and on this first trip suffered the delusion that he had left his body and was hovering nearby. Hofmann's report on this effect set off research and experimentation around the globe. [From *American Speech*, 56 (Summer 1981), 98-102. Reprinted with the kind permission of the University of Alabama Press.]¹⁰⁸ Peter Tamony LSD became the principal psychotomimetic drug, the name given compounds that mimic serious mental ailments (Solomon 1964, p. 43; Campbell 1971, pp. 66-67). For centuries in varied cultures drugs have been used to induce colorful hallucinations like those of LSD. Peyote, sometimes termed mescal, is ingested by Indian tribes of the Southwest and Mexico. The nepenthe of Homer was based on the opium poppy, while the poisonous *Amanita muscaria*, first cousin to *A. phalloides*, the more deadly destroying angel, set Vikings berserk to pillage and murder.⁴ To denominate the whole range of such "mind-expanding" substances, the word psychedelic was coined from Greek elements by Humphrey Osmond of Princeton (Leary 1968b, p.57/2). Until the late 1950s, experiments with LSD seem to have remained largely in the hands of scientists and medical men. In 1958 the British-born Zen scholar Alan Watts was invited with others to test the "mystical" qualities of the drug at the medical school of the University of California at Los Angeles, and at the Langley Porter Clinic in San Francisco. On 3 February 1958 and subsequently, Watts described his first experience with LSD on his Sunday night radio program over KPFA, Berkeley (Watts 1964).⁵ In southern California Aldous Huxley was the guru, and in far Boston the Chronology of Trips of Timothy Leary commenced in 1959, Godsdog being his first guide, Huxley his fourth, Allen Ginsberg his sixth, and Krishna his sixteenth and last (Leary 1968a, pp. x-xi). The first use of trip in connection with mind drugs (as traditional narcotics and formulated substances were termed by intellectuals in the 1950s) was in *The Connection* (1957) by Jack Gelber, staged in New York in 1959. This play, set in the dope scene of San Francisco's Broadway, contained such lines as, "Steady, boys, we have a long trip. Our other actors are off in the real world procuring heroin," and "All right, junkies. During our trip we will incorporate an allied art—the motion picture" (Gelber 1962, 231-32).⁶ The background of such use appears to be prison language with the sense "fantasy, day dream, fable, factual or fictional," a definition recorded in a glossary issued by the Bureau of Corrections of the State of California in 1962 (Barkdull...

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Albert Hofmann, a Swiss chemist, synthesized LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide) while seeking something else, an occasional happening in science, though hardly serendipitous.³ Having accidentally inhaled or absorbed the chemical through the skin, Hofmann experienced hallucinations. A few days later he ingested what he thought was a minute amount of the substance. While bicycling home he found Basel distorted and on this first *trip* suffered the delusion that he had left his body and was hovering nearby. Hofmann's report on this effect set off research and experimentation around the globe.

(From *American Speech*, 56 (Summer 1981), 98-102. Reprinted with the kind permission of the University of Alabama Press.)



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