

# **Psychedelic Modernism**

## Literature and Film

**Raj Chandarlapaty**

**Series in Literary Studies**



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*"You must understand the whole of life, not just one little part of it."*

*Jiddu Krishnamurti*



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# Preface

When I first revised my work on psychedelic literature to include documentaries, I owned up to a host of misconceptions. These changes broadly-offered the focal point of view: scientists such as Albert Hofmann and Timothy Leary treated mental health patients with drugs such as LSD, mescaline, and psilocybin, offsetting their symptoms and sickness. This finding, however, was overrun after testimonies from rock icons that included Ken Kesey, continuing to the point by 1968, at which LSD was used casually throughout the United States. From the guiding perspective of knowledge and social theories, psychedelic realism focused on alternatives to formalism and socialism, limiting neurological and psycholinguistic idea transmissions. Aldous Huxley's debut as a psychedelic thinker was with his 1953 publication of *The Doors of Perception*, crowning his role as a social-institutional thinker who advocated conscious revolution. This brought forth many possibilities, but as an introduction, I note that both Huxley and Leary were reluctant to advocate drugs as instrumental in changing society. It was with some difficulty, intellectual as well as political, that thinkers would envision a world where taking LSD, mescaline, and psilocybin constituted part of a legal and meaningful experience. Somewhere within the fault lines between communism and capitalism lay different perspectives that altered subjective lines of self-invigoration, perhaps to advance greater humanity but also to change the impact of democratic thinking. Huxley's belated ambition would not be for lack of evidence: he had, in his early writings, documented stories of the corruption and abuse in pre-Enlightenment England. Surprisingly, the chance of divergence was avoided, with the films offering many reasoned introduction points.

Antagonisms between experience and its translation present a more meaningful solstice of our learning: let us say, for instance, feeling and experiencing obfuscate many channels of writing and memory and complicate consumption's idea as a social metaphor of being. From this point of view, finding a blueprint for tripping would seem logical: it would, at least, tell us what the mind's processes told us about who we were, cosmically and physically. We ask the societal question: how open are we to the idea of drugs as begetting social transactions, underscoring a self-governance or super-governance that manages itself in our modern lives? This question rewrote many details, but themes and key evidence show that psychedelic learning was conceptual, and its text and discussion conform to authority, science, and even literature. The test was certain: previous drug-influenced writers, including the Beat Generation, had limited success telling why their uses were socially

relevant. Scripture's relative absence suggested the obvious: why were we studying this? Is it not likely that drugs are consumed for pleasure and that humans depend upon their ignorance of drug interactions? But, then, responses were overwhelming: Aldous Huxley, Timothy Leary, Albert Hofmann, Ken Kesey, Jerry Garcia, Carlos Castaneda, and Phillip K. Dick undertook the trust with meaning, to say that people's lives may be managed better than they were, with solutions to capitalist pathologies surrounding drug addiction. I found that vision, inscribed in religious histories and memories, may rebuild our senses and our resolute social belonging.

At the outset, it should be said that prospects for teaching authors who used psychedelic drugs are pleasantly broad, perhaps if only because classes and studies have ignored their potential draw at re-building and contextualizing a truly pluralist modernism that has considered the psychic and intertextual ramifications of guiding mental and social worlds away from repression, and away from highly limited Victorian doctrines that racialized and criminalized practices to uphold White dominance. Such efforts distorted humanism's limitless potential to re-configure the bane of empiricist-rationalist relationships that had, in their passive, un-rhetorical suppression of contexts and mental experiences, darkened and baned addict lives and helped to revive Victorian moral stamps during the twentieth century. FIU Professor Richard Schwartz had been plain about the human condition in 1992 when speaking about George Orwell's *1984* in a Cold War Literature class, musing: "Maybe love is the answer." Many in our generation did not take graduate courses on liberal authors. They so recalled no class discussion about drugs' apparent role in helping to build modernist theory as it skewers our attempts to remain Eurocentric. This reality obfuscates psychedelia's true discussions, wherein a logical, composed, and resonant interconnection with the modern psyche could liberate and manage the modern man in a model closer to his true inspirations.

With censorship's deep gaze counting the details, I only taught the subject of drugs in literature to undergraduates three times, almost all of it focused on the subject of marijuana. Student essays at Florida International University and the University of Texas, Rio Grande Valley, maintained the bland, sterile gauze of prohibitionist admissions and identifications of the drug user's "bad" social identity. Still, author discussions that include interviewed colleagues, plus engaging, endlessly broad archaeology of counterculture's new beginnings and Huxley's curt pedagogical appraisals when thinking about forms, signals that modernism held within itself a much greater breath and that it is time we turned to specific inferences and logical, meditative points reversing socialist-Victorian indoctrinations that debilitate the human subject, rendering them unresponsive to their existence's true dimensions. The project also posits the necessary debacle: the Beat Generation, who professed themselves as

romanticists who praised errant forms and incomplete syntax. In these studies, I would like to underscore that psychedelic modernism, or its disciplinary study, promised us a supreme logic and a utopic necessity that might mitigate controls, self-control, interactions, and even social conformity's minutes as our guidance. Greater modernism lay open, with warmly positive themes replacing the dark, crude, and rueful decanting of romantic loss and inertia that wrote the Beat Generation's pages. Documentary films promise the width of the author's semiotic reinvention as cultural forces: Stephen Prince observes, "The spectator's understanding of the cinema is therefore explained as a matter of cultural conditioning."<sup>1</sup> Of course, re-interpreting the author or scientist would likely favor "pure" researchers who might then be explored and assumed to proponent a greater meaning to inquiries. Still, Denver-born adventurer, writer, and mystic Neal Cassady was within the lost literature. So, we will recount his legitimate studies and his engagement of countercultural icons to paint a new freedom that the film's sweep of talks and comments would underscore was unimagined in Jack Kerouac's halcyon days during the 1940s and 50s.

The book's purpose is to build psychological and societal relevance to the initial studies and experiences to derive commentaries, research, and authorial questions as the beginning points for greater studies of psychedelic drugs during the key period. More aptly put, this work will demonstrate psychedelic media's prevalence and interactive influence in our parallel discussions about consciousness, ideations, and spiritual freedoms through various mind-body techniques found in literary modernism. Key to examining both literature and films, which democratize archival learning and re-introduce decentered intellectual models, was our capacity to "earn tradition," as T.S. Eliot put it, through models and experiences, carving open the roots of inquiry to produce a modern idealism that could redress concerns of science, psychiatry, faith, and post-Empiricist intellections about humankind's experiences, memories, and collective actions. Huxley and the writers who followed him keenly eyed the apparatus by which knowledge and traditions grew to anoint pathways and mysticism that could redraw modern societies by rehabilitating human beings prone to Victorian moral and medical shackles. Several key components exist beyond simply memories, self-reporting, and documented surveys. Thinkers tried to understand drugs' rational principles, to say that they beckoned a new, romantic model of social and national control while giving us symbolic outlets for one's pre-rational inquiry and cognition. The purpose of this study, then, traces our initiation of psychedelic studies to introduce documentary films that include interviews and commentaries, together with studies and narrator summaries, to build modernist quests for knowledge and our psychiatric

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<sup>1</sup> Prince, Stephen, "The Discourse of Pictures," 90.

certainty. Traditionally, studies of drugs were more confined to science, psychology, and crime to suppress a great deal of interactive content that could speak for both societal change and for mental, physical, and imaginative re-examination as cursors screening a new dynamic and also a repressed modern involvement in life. In our history, the case for the humanities engendered this repression, and books and published sources limit substantive content that could speak to learning, experience, and idea-proliferations in the decades after World War I that introduced psychoanalysis. Literary studies were limited to published works, ignoring more engaging and thoughtful data that could bravely spell out the author or thinker's accomplishment at breaching Victorian and socialist controls in psychology's critical re-examinations as a true science. This idea is accomplished when we use humanities reasoning and hard data to project a broader, more truly cogent psychology that includes drugs as part of a partial reconnection with recurrent Western philosophical anxieties. I believe that, however, twentieth-century literary authors related perspectives and rough findings to constitute equality with the domains of science and psychology. It was evident from this time that literature intended to conduct serious mind-soul investigations by examining characters, histories, and political-leaning commentaries. Though Danielle Giffort was vague on this point, "storytelling often crystallizes around particular figures of expertise who become performative images that can be inhabited. Motifs related to science, credibility, and ethics get attached to these figures,"<sup>2</sup> it should become clear that scientism and analysis pervaded the trippers' stories. Rock n' roll excursions carried scientific curiosity's basic pretense, or the curiosity to build their experiences and festivities around the psychological principle of enhanced humanity. It was also clear during Jacques Lacan's mid-twentieth century that literature as part of the humanities was shaded. It grew science's objectivity, filling us with empty conceptual frameworks that had beguiled nineteenth-century psychologists. Some attempt is needed to adapt music artists' writings and comments as they strove for common linguistic and cultural origins when uncovering psychedelic ideas and talent. This book, my third in the area of film and literature, devises communitarian and academic beginnings that could be popularly demonstrated, as they did not confine themselves to the abstract literary isolation: it will instead project social impact through authors, friends, and thinkers commenting on the crucial periods in the historical past and then in the twentieth century after World War I. Documentary films, as they gauged unpublished and posthumous findings of time and context, broaden our scope and develop historical themes and threads to help us understand interactive points in psychology's ascent,

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<sup>2</sup> Giffort, Danielle, *Acid Revival*, 13.

extending its rays beyond Victorian models of control, suppression, and criminalization of Being. We can then say that a greater social context could be imagined and formed from the annals of time and archaeology of the mind and spirit, as these entries had been confined to obscurity and irrelevance. After all, psychedelic films as fictional narratives would be just that—likely to confirm our stereotypes through humor. Patricia Aufderheide states the obvious challenge with brevity and clarity: “A documentary film tells a story about real life, with claims to truthfulness.”<sup>3</sup> Still, initial studies and the treading of philosophical rather than criminal ideas sharpen our angle, calling upon our objective focus to demonstrate the idea’s development over time in this medium to grant drugs legitimacy. Suppose we are to ever gauge the seriousness of drugs as a social or psychological idea. In that case, we should follow instruction and reason, explaining it as a science consistent with humanities writing and forming inferences that speak to a greater, psychoactive leaning in knowledge directed towards dreaming and visions. We should also categorize and grade alterations of perspective to suit our abandonment of rationalism’s confines that, in its root motions, criminalize experiences that traverse and modify the mind’s actions. While I will situate these in terms of history, this project emphasizes the relative newness of discoveries and pretenses towards knowledge, building the rungs of Michel Foucault’s “repressive hypothesis” as the basis for re-examining thoughts, inundations of meanings, and our psychiatric concepts. No historical period will be underscored, nor will anyone be managing philosophy or ideation system. Still, it is without a doubt that history, when lost, invites strategies to recover its contents. Our display of knowledge when courting psychedelics and their specific reference to hallucinogenic cults, religious texts, and aesthetic summarizations is uneven rather than broad, and the necessary keys to our understanding of shamanism’s impact are broad, though thinly referenced. Still, this was not true for Huxley himself, and this fact re-opened popular literary discussions on Buddhism, pre-Columbian rituals, Hindu philosophy, and counterculture’s sweeping modern re-invention of these in culture-freed contexts. Demonstrating the simplicity of American forms complements the initial meditations from Europe.

A final note has to do with positions concerning the legality of drugs and their media. Because some of these writers rejected the idea of implementing the legal use of psychedelic drugs, a host of critics identify the elitist trend, suppressing democratic experiences that may inculcate greater learning and a wider appreciation of cultural contexts. Timothy Leary stated this authoritatively in an interview, saying that his political views about LSD, psilocybin, and

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<sup>3</sup> Aufderheide, Patricia, *Documentary Film: A Very Short Introduction*, 3.

mescaline were “the same as the Johnson Administration.”<sup>4</sup> Part of the book intends to demonstrate learning versus mainstream opinions and ideas about social change, speaking to our public ambivalence. Of course, published works identified social instruction and indoctrination. So, we will focus on the counterculture’s surrogate idea-makers and their populist forms in imaginative mental pathways, bringing together modern experiences geared to de-philosophize psychedelic insight. Strong attention has been given to Huxley’s inundation with Indian realism during the times, and thus, we could examine our pre-scholastic anxieties in documentary films. Positive cautions from Huxley and Leary’s exhibit, where authors had refused to advocate legalization, durable findings contraindicating the tradition to suppose social and pluralistic realization. Penning history and historical truth, too, alters our social projections, opening the doors for critical re-examinations.

Moreover, the antagonism was basic, calling upon authors to detail the sensory and linguistic evidence, allowing psychedelic studies to, at last, comprise science. There ought to be sufficient knowledge and social information to build free societies with greater humanistic inclusion of one’s conscious and cognitive responses to institutional controls. In short, responses did not depend on criminal hypocrisies but on the guiding sense that ideas and experiences grew towards greater inclusion. This expansiveness was not said in isolation: clearly, psychedelic documentaries made a strong, three decades-long association of chemists and scientists with the Sandoz Corporation, fully legal and based in Switzerland during the 1940s, 50s, and 60s. A partial outcome of this work will be connecting the authors to their larger modernist compendium as they, having taken mescaline as early as 1951, weren’t given recognition for their findings and so assessed the modernist minute as one where mental and perceptual expositions initiated modern penultimate re-examination while facing social change as the precursor of the Earth’s deromanticization. The prohibition of hallucinogens was a Victorian stricture, and some attention ought to be given, too, to the examples comprising science from that period. Legality’s facade was not at all a façade—clearly, thinkers and pundits built a syntactic awareness of drug properties, counting them to be part of legitimate psychiatry.

### ***Socialist Beginnings: Transcriptions of Drug Use and Their Criticism***

Criticisms and their partial fallout were blank and acrid: in Gus Van Sant’s 1991 film *Drugstore Cowboy*, a young hippie scribbles lines on a paper and calls his acid trip “groovy.” Socialist principles quickly developed, from this example, motions that criminalized drugs of all kinds, with German philosopher Karl

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<sup>4</sup> *Dying To Know*.

Marx operating the obvious reduction in his synopsis of sense-perceptions destruction of the Self as it weakens one's soul:

[...] the more the worker appropriates the exterior world of sensuous nature by his labor, the more he doubly deprives himself of the means of subsistence, firstly since the exterior sensuous world increasingly ceases to be an object belonging to his work, a means of subsistence for his labor; secondly, since it increasingly ceases to be a means of subsistence in the direct sense, a means for the physical subsistence of the worker.<sup>5</sup>

Evaporations of context, meaning, and abstraction, then, constitute socialist dictations that as “work” or as “being,” drugs are delusion and take away our human subsistence: our organizations of thought, feeling, and sensation, then, are guided through drugs to be a kind of deterioration. Socialists aptly and cleverly annex the key inference. If we couldn't figure out what we were experiencing or what parts of our cognition we were developing, we were wasting our mental and psychic resources and thus were harming, not praising, our Being. I believe it is finally time to accept the truth of the fact that Drug War politics concerning LSD and other psychedelic drugs suppressed fairly immense rounds of potential data and mismanaged its content, bowdlerizing dreams and visions that, in a descriptive form, may have been intact had we joined them to our scientific approach. It is time to narrow our lens to appreciate that when we examine data without social codes designed to constrain them, we get finer examples that constitute the text's meaning and find that these journeys could have been meaningful if they had been studied and given greater relevance. While drug reforms may be critical, we might not attach the idea of happier, translocative lives that offset sickness. Instead, we demand social change when facilitating non-Victorian happenings to increase our awareness of cultures and experiences that society banned. We might also own up to the necessity of a “system” and gain a greater sense of human growth in complex times. When Hofmann warmly attests to his translation's meaning, we learn that ideas and principles are not tied to any one form of governance. By extension, spiritual and supernatural associations provoked Being's unvisited portions that grew democracy's institutions away from accepted norms. Psychology and psychiatry, at last, grew their pre-scholastic roots, projecting another repressed social livelihood. Visions and hallucinations aside, documentary films beget the building of social norms, and those tied to

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<sup>5</sup> Marx, Karl, “Alienated Labor,” from McNeill, William, & Feldman, Karen S., *Continental Philosophy*, 216.

memory and experience hold historical and pre-cultist meanings. So, was the exercise legitimate? Did drug tripping tell us something about the Soul, the moral, and the intellectual? I will examine as many critics as I do advocates: what is clear is that a knowledge base might have been greater had ideas and immersions not been tied to our cultural fantasy. This book's objective morphology then relates the impact of literature and literary ideations to our phenomenology. It, too, is as likely that metaphors and encoded symbols of Being told us of not just humankind's imaginative lapse but much more about individual and social urges to be and how they must be made compatible with society's pluralistic goals determining the Self's realization when tagged into everyday social contexts. Conversations, texts, and short synopses establish this literary trend. It was clear from the outset that psychedelia transformed literature's modernist outlook and relevance, broadened psychic angles meant to restructure man as s/he faced the tide of postmodern stereotypes that would forever moor humans to their corporate, capitalist, and fetishist estimations of purpose and involvement.

In writing my third book in the film and literature series about documentaries, I will say that several factors affect the validity of the documentary film that correspond to their perceivable weight in re-examining literary studies. There is, of course, the narration's caliber and specific textual and biographical examples that correspond to the film's contents. Using videography, interviews, and commentators will generally establish a tone friendly with textual, biographical re-examinations of fact and principle. Then, there is the authorial portrait, with inferences situating the writer, artist, or scientist against others in their field. When compressed into film, we might judge these as to whether modernist theory had successfully relegated and responded to powerful Victorian and socialist forces that stymied research's progress and that guided people away from the makings of science and ideation. Modernist fiction and music append the doctrine of form: we surmise that postmodern novels, including those of Thomas Pynchon, dealt directly with World War II soldiers' sex and drug activity, attaching Victorian models of moral and personal circumspection and posing descriptions that exaggerate prohibition's control in our self-expression:

So when he disentangles himself, it is extravagantly. He creates a bureaucracy of departure, inoculations against forgetting, exit visas stamped with love bites (...) But coming back is something he's already forgotten about. Straightening his bowtie, brushing off the satin lapels of his jacket, buttoning up his pants, back in uniform of the day, he turns



his back on her, and up the ladder, he goes. In the last instant, their eyes were in touch is already behind him (...) <sup>6</sup>

Passages like these, from 1973's *Gravity's Rainbow*, underscore the writer's covert imaginations and, in its picaresque form as with Burroughs, who published *Naked Lunch* in 1959, re-attach conservative, Victorian moral prescriptions and interruptions of syntax, to connote authority's control of individuals. When applied to drugs and sex, postmodernism may aptly suppress the content of pleasure and introspection, hoisting the eternal, syntactic scaffolding of control beneath Pynchon's funny commodity fetishism. By contrast, psychedelic thinkers preserved and airbrushed themes, latently and rigorously, and constructed a new, functioning organism amidst the maze of modern life's many pathways. This work did not depend upon commentators and documents during that period; a key tenet of this exercise is that the authors' deepened psychedelic inquiries about culture and practice came from published or printed forms that stretched across their lives. The book itself promises greater objective content than found in the circulated forms of the larger Beat Generation, mired as it was in its humorous, fantastic dialects that, when examined, go up against the larger, objective conundrum. I justify inclusions about Cassady and other Beat Generation writers: studies on drugs come from many directions, and Cassady's poverty and abuse necessitate his synopses of drugs to rebuild the depressive person to illustrate possibilities and synthesize learning. As it turns out, critics have praised the format of Cassady's letters. We will underscore those relationships with the larger context. Author studies include, by and large, an examination of their letters and unpublished works: this gives us a positive sense of what ambitions the authors could not completely organize. At the same time, they built their repertoire of interactive works.

There are several people that I would like to thank in this ambitious new effort. Naturally, I thank the films' producers for organizing such clear content over nearly fifty years, and I would say that the time has come to examine content and intention for a didactic rereading of the basic facts as well as suppositions and analysis that could detail our understanding as to what science means. The book's authors are thanked for bringing so much useful material for us to read and growing these discussions about psychiatry and culture. Rosario Batana, Blanca Duran, Argiris Legatos, and Javier Rodriguez at Vernon Press are thanked for re-opening an engaging discussion about the positive change in philosophy and its registered influence on contemporary society. I thank Phillip Sipiora, Kurt Hemmer, and Richard Schwartz for

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<sup>6</sup> Pynchon, Thomas, *Gravity's Rainbow*, 471.

encouraging my work. I also thank Kirsten Wilson for providing materials from The Aldous Huxley Collection and The Timothy Leary Collection at The Harry Ransom Center, with many unique and sustained examples of immersive ideas and experiences. Thanks also to the Pennsylvania State University Library for Ken Kesey archival materials, to Pauline Cochran at Borchardt, Inc. for Aldous Huxley materials, to Jami and Cathy Cassady Silva for materials on Neal Cassady, and the University College London for excellent source material on Ken Kesey and George Orwell.

I salute the changes in current laws that allow drugs to be part of the human health scene. Thanks also to my Mom, who mailed me the DVDs.

Raj Chandarlapaty

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