Oh, psychedelia

The way it sounded (MONO or STEREO)
What generated its effects (OIL and WATER)
How it extended into digital (ZEROES and ONES)
The way it was documented (LO-FI)
The way it travelled (UNDERGROUND)
The flicker and the strobe (YES. YES. YES)
were all single-channel. Binary. Off. On.

Now the screens are full of rainbows. Affect and libido no longer authenticate. Grids of discipline are replaced by the plasma of control. Immersion is a predatory technology of full-sense predominance. Beyond all of that lies no India. no illumination. no colourful fabrics only the desert. the one place where we can really make love . . .

This is not a history of psychedelia. but a post-rationalisation. Reduced. restricted. it is an abstract machine animated by the fundamental difference of BLACK and WHITE. Estranged from its historical appearance and affirmed as a nucleus of repulsion and attraction. the psychedelic is permitted to abandon itself. As always. the way out is the way in.

It is bound to feel pathetic.

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This bulletin annotates a projected wall text (shown on the cover) that introduced the Research Program *Dexter Bang Sinister* at Kunsthal Charlottenborg, Copenhagen, 21 January – 28 October, 2012. Devised by Stuart Bailey, Lars Bang Larsen, Angie Keefer, and David Reinfurt, the program, like this bulletin, was based on Larsen's just-completed PhD dissertation at the University of Copenhagen, *A History of Irritated Material: Psychedelic Concepts in Neo-Avantgarde Art*. The idea was to contrive a popular version of his academic thesis by editing it *psychedelically.*

This might sound simple, or at least simple-minded, as a textual exercise in psychedelia's familiar imperatives: Jimi Hendrix's "Are you experienced?," Ken Kesey's "Did you pass the Acid Test?," or Timothy Leary's "Turn on, tune in, drop out." But the irony of psychedelic essences and injunctions should be lost on no one. It's the self-contradictory voice of the psychedelic police, and on this beat you'll always find a policeMAN who enforces a multi-colored patriarchal law: "LSD ID, please—we need to check how free you REALLY are …" This is hardly a new nor a very profound observation, just transgression's age-old contradiction: the necessity of invoking the law in order to sin against it.

The real irony, though, is how the law returns to psychedelia in the form of categorical imperatives, platitudes, and pigeonholes. If we strip away the usual clichés of psychedelic representation—excess, overload, rainbows, tie-dye—what's left? What's worth keeping? What does a hollowed-out, desaturated, low-grade, root-level, emphatically *black & white* psychedelia look and feel like? The closer we looked, the more it became apparent that such austere gears had been the psychedelic movement's means all along—and so b/w seemed an even more pertinent point of return from which to usefully depart once more.

From this vantage, how might that look and feel be put to proper use —that's to say, *transformed*—artistically and socially today? This brings us back to the immediate question: what could it mean to edit a thesis on psychedelia *psychedelically;* without recourse to drugs? How does the TRIP translate to METHOD?

At some point (we forget when) during our four-way correspondence someone (we forget who) suggested that "ideally we'll arrive at a form that seems entirely its own thing, yet none of us will be able to recall how we got there." Which is not a bad place to be, because not-remembering-how-you-got-there is always going to be a new point of defamiliarization, a moment in which you're ready to get carried away again—and so precisely a means of apprehending whatever the psychedelic itself might seem to turn out to mean in the meantime.

The particular problem is that … this will already have been, will already have begun. "The future is but the obsolete in reverse."

But what if there's no linear narrative in the first place, preventing the possibility of such a neat mirroring? The infinite regress of psychedelia doesn't follow in its wake like the tail of the comet. It builds up BEFORE it, freely disseminating its corrupt promises. Psychedelia's power inheres in its false starts, in the restlessness with which it excitedly anticipates its utopian epiphanies. Approaching the history of psychedelia, you'll have to contend with a long overture of premature footnotes and proliferating subtexts that arrive too early, exploding and dissolving the main track of its narration in advance of its even being realized: "*Adios*, main track, go away! go away!"

This dissipated becoming is in many respects just plain tired, like yesterday's promises of love and revolution. Listen to Samuel Delaney in 1974: "Left over flower-power, in all this pollution, was never my thing either." Psychedelia is always ALMOST a wonderful thing, but oh, it will let you down, from yesterday's Summer of Love to today's Winter of Capital. It appears in a polluted culture like the iridescent gloaming over a decaying and sophisticated civilization—and so in order to *truly* understand psychedelia, we must turn to the pale fires of pollution and corruption, of restlessness and disenchantment.

I was the shadow of the waxwing slain
By the false azure in the windowpane

These are the opening lines of Nabokov's 1962 novel *Pale Fire*, which takes its name from the eponymous 999-line poem penned by one of its two central characters, the unassuming academic John Shade. Famously, however, the bulk of the novel consists of annotations to the poem—a glut of running commentary and literary criticism written by Shade's colleague and next door neighbor Charles Kinbote. Flipping back and forth between poem and notes, the reader finds herself lingering in Kinbote's fine print. His notes become progressively longer and increasingly personal, until they eventually parasitize and usurp the poem they are supposed to be elucidating. According to Kinbote, the poem "Pale Fire" is actually about Kinbote himself! From the deranged critic's warped perspective,

Shade has disseminated pointed references throughout the poem's four long cantos to Kinbote, his insightful, primal reader. In this way, Kinbote writes, Shade acknowledges "all the many subliminal debts to me …"

This tendency is native to psychedelia, a kind of non-substance that feeds off the supplementary and the seemingly gratuitous. Fueled and accelerated by wandering anecdotes and free associations, the psychedelic *calls up* and *makes present.* If you begin your psychedelic discourse on the regular hippie tourist trail in Northern California, you'll soon find yourself re-connected with old friends: the French symbolists, medieval trippers like Hieronymus Bosch, and ancient shamanic cultures … to space travel, the mapping of DNA, and ether theories … and back and forth across history again, joining all the dots between the complacent (Andy Warhol), the alienated (Sun Ra), and the genuinely insane (Helena Blavatsky).

The body of psychedelia is constituted by many small histories and characterized by this indiscriminate assembly of disparate matter. And yet the psychedelic tends to come full-circle and grow to a superform, bringing it all back home, domesticating and repossessing difference under its own im-proper name, the One, the Total, the Absolute, the True Substance: the Psychedelic, the Psychedelic, the Psychedelic. It wants to make you believe that it is "the Diamond suspended from the Christmas Tree of the Cosmos"—Nabokov again, this time from *Bend Sinister*.

In this way, psychedelia mirrors Charles Kinbote's literary narcissism, only on a much larger scale. "World history," psychedelia would say, "as it is, as it has been, and as it will be, as it were, in fact consists in so many subliminal debts to me." There's an inertia at work here that fouls the play and lets imagination go to the dogs. Just as the genealogist of sexuality, Michel Foucault, threw his hands in the air and declared that "sex is boring," psychedelia affirms Belgian *trippiste* Henri Michaux's equivalent claim that *les drogues nous ennuient*—"drugs are boring." Cosmic honey, stickying up everything.

Psychiatrist Humphry Osmond coined the term *psychedelic* in his correspondence with Aldous Huxley in 1956. The neologism derives from the Greek words *psyche* (soul, mind) and *deloun* (to manifest, to open), and replaced terms such as *schizogens*, *psychotica*, and *phantastica*

for drugs such as psilocybin, mescaline, cannabis, and LSD. In a paper published a year later, Osmond contended that there are few substances which, in large enough doses, will not produce changes in body and mind resembling some kind of mental illness. To avoid being overwhelmed, then, "psychedelic agents" were classified specifically as those substances

that produce changes in thought, perception, mood and, sometimes, in posture, occurring alone or in concert, without causing either major disturbances of the autonomic nervous system or addictive craving, and although, with overdosage, disorientation, memory disturbance, stupor, and even narcosis may occur, these reactions are not characteristic …

For Osmond, the most important quality of those drugs lay not in their potential to mimic psychoses, but rather the "perhaps only slender" chance that psychedelics represent for truly becoming *homo sapiens*: "the wise, the understanding, the compassionate being, in whose four-fold vision art, politics, science, and religion are one." He concludes: "Surely we must seize that chance."

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Psychedelic culture is inseparable from the 1960s. From a psychedelic perspective, the 1960s counterculture became identifiable as a movement sometime around the middle of the decade, when psychologists Richard Alpert and Timothy Leary were dismissed from Harvard for conducting experiments with psilocybin, and Ken Kesey got his Merry Pranksters together. Augured by *The First Human Be-In* in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park on January 14, 1967, the psychedelic revolution took place during the same year's infamous Summer of Love, and ended in the Fall with a mock funeral performed in the Haight-Ashbury district by activists The San Francisco Diggers—a street parade that solemnized *Death of Hippie, Son of Mass Media* in view of hippie culture's spectacular commodification. At least, this is the potted, canonized account. But like other events of the era, psychedelia mushrooms across decades.

It is possible, if not inevitable, to conceive multiple psychedelic sequences. For contemporary French philosopher Alain Badiou, the Sixties (actually shorthand for 1966–76) was the "red decade," marked by the national

liberation struggles in Vietnam and Palestine, the worldwide student and youth movement, factory revolts in France and Italy, and the Cultural Revolution in China. One timeline extends the 1960s into the rave culture of the 1980s, and possibly on to the artistic rediscovery of psychedelic culture in the 1990s. In another, psychiatric and anti-psychiatric experimentation with LSD in the 1950s and 1960s runs parallel with those countercultural drug practices that, although recreational, were also distinctly purposeful. There was a USE for pleasure—the drug was taken for where it took you and what it did to you, and this line of anti-psychiatry and self-medication can be followed through to today's widespread pharmacological culture, in which lifestyle drugs and antidepressants help people work and compete. (It is equally possible to trace a shamanistic tangent in psychedelic discourse, one that refers to ecstatic traditions, only this is a timeline that isn't one, since it is typically founded on symbolically circular and cosmological time … ◯)

This historiography is as ubiquitous as it is multifarious. A hip international style whether in San Francisco or London, psychedelic culture is all over the place, and all over time, too—not only here and there, but also then and now. One effect of this is flower power's cyclical reappearance in fashion; another is how the youth revolt in general remains a seemingly universal and transhistorical parameter for the efficacy of protest. In February 2011, for example, protests in Bahrain were dubbed "days of rage" in reference to the original Days of Rage in October 1969 in Chicago, in which militants and students "brought the Vietnam war home" through a series of direct actions. This is how psychedelic culture bleeds into the present.

To the innocent bystander, the look of 1960s psychedelia was (and is) a kind of marketing that decanted from the Arts and Crafts movement. It comprised visual over-excitement, trivial anthropomorphic styles, and anthropocentric *vitalism.* Aesthetic complexity was reduced to farce and lingo: "psyched," "far out," "intense." This is psychedelia as realized in rock posters and on record covers, on the hippie van and in the communal mural. Seen from this perspective, psychedelia can be compared to Kant's description of "affect"—as a brief and radiant appearance followed by exhaustion, a flash in the pan. And yet psychedelic culture made its promises in ways that make us want to, if not comprehend it and

take it seriously, exactly, then at least play along with its movements and seek out a language through which it can be analyzed and narrated. The psychedelic revolution made it possible or common to take drugs and go to concerts (to name one of its cultural successes). No doubt such behavior has since been sold and exploited, but it also remains subversive; in either case, we have psychedelic culture to thank for it.

There are other pervasive echoes, too; not least the fact that drug culture in the 1960s came with a look, a sound, an aesthetic. In terms of the forms with which we imagine radicality and freedom, then, psychedelia seems to have a long afterlife, and it is hard to let go of the intuition that something remains unaccounted for, that psychedelia's fundamental strangeness can be rendered productive once more. Psychedelic art was made by and for those who don't level, who don't stand still: the high, the tripping, or, in Danish slang, *de skæve*—the awry, the uneven; basically, those who abandoned what we take to be normal vision.

. . .

The residue of psychedelic works tends to manifest whatever anyone feels like projecting onto it, and the obvious risk here is insipid nostalgic investment. When we perceive psychedelic images now as merely groovy or stylish, we tend to overlook their original provocation and sheer intensity, not only in terms of their iconographic scandals (nudity, drugs, decadence generally) but also in material terms, such as those saturated colors that exceeded the predominantly black and white imagery of printed and electronic media at the time. These practices need to be considered for the original *irritability* they have lost, the ways in which they were *obscene* in the original sense of that word—lacking a framework able to contain them and give them a stable cultural location.

To talk about irritation and obscenity is not just a reversal of the terms through which psychedelic culture is usually understood, such as healing and integration, or life and love, it is also an outline of a vitalism essentially connected to new technologies. Now largely discredited, vitalism is a philosophical concept that influenced both popular and political culture significantly. It is most commonly associated with the naming of "life forces" such as Henri Bergson's *élan vital*, Hans Driesch's entelechy, or Wilhelm

Reich's Orgone. These are the *prime movers* of all forms of life —the "tremendous internal push of life" superadded to otherwise passive matter. Vitalism is the spark that makes your heart beat, that which exists over and beyond your finite body. It has also taken vulgar and violent forms, most notoriously the fascist claim that life forces are particularly strong in certain races or peoples and intolerably weak in others.

Some recent thinkers have tried to re-connect with a tradition of critical vitalism. In her 2010 book *Vibrant Matter*, political theorist Jane Bennett, for example, talks about a "vital materialism" conceived as a "liveliness" intrinsic not only to humans, but also to materials and objects. Such a materialistic take on vitality proposes a kind of agency that not only describes how people act in the world, but also how things and systems perform their own inherent intelligence—their potential for creating, for connecting, for appearing in confederacies with other things. From this perspective, one can conceptualize a "thing-power"—that is, the way in which objects exceed their inert, secondary status and manifest traces of life and independence. As every bricklayer or carpenter will tell you, materials have lives of their own, pulsating according to the intensities that surround them. This liveliness of matter relates to the psychedelic vision that *sees beyond the object* and is capable of picking up otherwise imperceptible, non- or sub-human phenomena—the dancing of atoms, streams of air molecules, drifting of continents, and so on.

LSD, accidentally invented by a Swiss chemist in 1943, was itself a new technology in the 1960s, and hence one that could be considered in parallel with the development of satellite communication, computer technology, space travel, and quotidian self-technologies—most prominently the legalization of the pill. This distinguished narco-technologies in the post-war era from, say, smoking opium or hashish in the 19th century, or shamanistic cultures' use of hallucinogens. Thus psychedelic culture didn't only spring from the brains of lovers or madmen, but was theorized by scientists and technicians, and produced by artists; drugs and machines in various collectives and assemblages.

To Norbert Wiener, the father of cybernetics, irritability is a fundamental life phenomenon—a lower limit of stimulation, friction and excitement, or other ways in which tolerance is pushed and general equilibrium disturbed.

Crucially, Wiener's conception of irritability does not denote a homeostatic or harmonic vitalism, but a vexed and dynamic one; nor does it privilege a human subject, because irritation may equally occur in the animal nervous system or in the electronic circuit. Irritability denotes an unresolved, or continually negotiated, coexistence with an Other that is a constituent part of our being.

. . .

If one associates the psychedelic with an exuberant imagination in which every moment is incommensurable with the present one, why is it that psychedelic culture is subject to compulsive repetitions? Why is it so difficult to leave Abbey Road and Fillmore West and meet acid rockers like The Psychedelic Aliens in Accra or Flower Travellin' Band in Tokyo? Why do accounts of psychedelic art always begin and end with Leary, Ginsberg, and Huxley? Why are Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal* seemingly indispensable to this history, instead of, say, the physicist Abu Ali Hasan Ibn al-Haitham, who discovered the laws of refraction and invented the camera obscura circa 1000 AD, thus pre-empting the psychedelic light show? Why this monotonous insistence on ORIGIN and the SAME, when the psychedelic is … can be addressed as … has the speculative potential to become … an aesthetic of radical openness and events-effects, of unexpected reconstruction and ultra-rapid lines of flight?

Equally irritable is psychedelia's chaotic conceptuality—for at precisely the same time as it is ridden by this totalizing, indefinite equivalence, it is also split and differentiated. Like the theorem of quantum physics, in which light is both particles AND waves, psychedelia simultaneously comprises two or more states that are at once continuous and discontinuous: loops or *schizzes* between the SAME and its OTHER, between control and letting go, atavism and futurism, mythos and logos, fullness and nothingness, exposure and disguise, harmony and dissonance, dialectic and holistic, authenticity and falsity, modern-utopian and postmodern-ironic; alternating between day and life and death and night. Psychedelia is anti-psychiatric, divided against itself, ceaselessly forking out into supplements in a manner that resists easy diagnosis.

It's only when you appreciate that psychedelia circumscribes not only the frivolity of the freak-out, the far-out, and letting-it-all-hang-out, but equally (say) Kant, Lenin, and Heisenberg (with all the rigid interiority of their respective philosophical, political, and scientific stipulations) that we can truly begin to consider and conceptualize this strange creature. If we strip away the usual clichés of psychedelic representation—excess, overload, rainbows, tie-dye—what's left? What's worth keeping on keeping on? What does a hollowed-out, desaturated, low-grade, root-level, emphatically *black & white* psychedelia look like and feel like?

The way it sounded (MONO or STEREO)[1]
What generated its effects (OIL and WATER)[2]
How it extended into digital (ZEROES and ONES)[3]
The way it was documented (LO-FI)[4]
The way it travelled (UNDERGROUND)[5]
The flicker and the strobe (YES. YES. YES)[6]
were all single-channel. Binary. Off. On.

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1. The way it sounded (MONO or STEREO)

The phrase "good vibes" is, of course, another enduring cliché of the counterculture. But where does *the vibe* come from and what does it signify?

It describes a social atmosphere laden with positive energies—one that connects sound, life, community and subjectivity through imperceptible diagrams. Addressing the vibe is a way to articulate *psyche* beyond its usual application of "mind," and instead reconnect its other etymological root, "soul," as a vital principle: "the breath that animates the body." In psychedelic culture of the 1960s, there is much to suggest that this principle is sonic, or that matter comes to life in sound. To psychedelic thinker Alan Watts, this is what connects senses to the entire chain of being:

"The physical world is vibration, quanta, but vibrations of what? To the eye, form and color; to the ear, sound; to the nose, scent; to the fingers, touch. But these are all different languages for the same thing, different qualities of sensitivity, different dimensions of consciousness. The question, "Of what are they (sic) differing forms?" seems to have no meaning. What is light to the eye is sound to the ear. I have the image of the senses being terms, forms, or dimensions not of one thing common to all, but of each other, locked in a circle of mutuality."

The psychedelic has mainly been constituted in visual terms of style and color. Yet even if a vibration can also be seen or sensed, the vibe was most successfully represented through and as sound—most obviously in The Beach Boys' timely "Good Vibrations," a 1966 number-one hit whose chorus was underpinned by the eerie glissandi of the theremin. Originally known as the "etherphone," the theremin was a kind of keyless keyboard that played by moving the electrified air around the apparatus, and was typically used in horror or sci-fi movies. As "Good Vibrations" demonstrated, music quite literally MOVED the counterculture: its lifestyles were disseminated internationally through the music industry, and people were mobilized in masses to travel to gigs and rock festivals. Yet the vibe cannot merely be explained away by pop songs and the organization of sound into melody; nor can it simply be comprehended through the stable perceptual register of human hearing.

In psychedelic culture, the vibe does not cut across the historical stratum with the optimism and entrepreneurship of industry, but vibrates without direction in jitters, and in the temporality of hippie wasters that describes a downwards spiral into prehistory, a horizontal mushrooming of literally spaced-out time, or a vertical rise into cosmos. A psychedelic critique of civilization tended to upset linear history with breaks and durations that flipped normative time, whether at the level of the linear history that dominates Western thought, or the mundane nine-to-five of the average office job. In representations of hallucinogenic temporality, the warping and looping of time is otherwise rendered in a categorical instability between time and space, as space spills into duration, or time is frozen in a continuum. According to Watts, again: "To begin with, this world has a different kind of time. It is the time of biological rhythm, not of the clock and all that goes with the clock." In other words, "biological rhythm" is naturally incommensurable with modern time, but there is still a linearity in Watts' notion that "the seed is as much the goal as the flower," even if it is a linearity that backtracks. The freaks were, after all, flower children—living emblems of futurity, or meant to stay child and never grow up. Such untimeliness is not only a mix of modern and pre-modern time, but also a kind of FERMENTING time that pushes at what is not-yet-realized as it loops and sounds.

The notion that sound is the privileged sensorial register of the trip is corroborated by that of *tuning in.* Writing in 1975 for the folks on the consciousness circuit, historian Theodore Roszak borrows a technological image for the "process of ever-expanding receptivity" on the narrowband of human audio perception:

"It is as if the mind were a radio-receiving apparatus being assembled in an environment already filled with broadcast signals. Millions of messages fill the air available for tuning in. But, to begin with, the primitive apparatus can receive only a few, crudely empirical signals—signals based on shape or odor, chemical compatibility, light and dark sensitivity. Gradually, as the receiver becomes more complex and powerful, it draws in more refined broadcast bands and elusive wavelengths, until at last it has drawn in a vast, subtle realm of linguistic and numerical symbols: 'pure ideas' fetched like magic out of the thin air of the mind's own cogitation. At each stage along the way, the receiver, pressing forward into

the perceptual margins of its powers, finds its way to meanings, whether crude or refined, that were 'there' in a dimension of existence that could not come through until the mind was ready to tune them in."

Tuning in, then, describes a peculiar process of becoming ready to receive through a loss of self. The vibe is *potential*—the anticipation of something that will arrive through matter in energetic states. "I got a vibe" … and hence I can make probable that what I cannot see, do, or know yet, or what I am not yet. "We listen," says Roszak, "and all at once the world becomes more than it is within our ordinary experience." The vibe is not ecstatic illumination itself, nor is it desire (indeed, Leary warns against following sexual impulses during the trip), but something more abstract and frail. It is an infrastructure that allows access to the world through sensorial experience.

The Belgian poet, writer, and painter Henri Michaux is widely considered a "psychedelic pioneer," yet his aesthetic project remains recalcitrant to that of the counterculture, particularly in his approach to drugs. In Michaux's work, the vibe is a *spasm*—an overwhelming innervation, a shaking of the soul that is in no sense an affirmation. "Mescaline provokes a vibratory state," he wrote, "multiple vibrations, almost overwhelming at first, of abnormal amplitude and with a great many points." Just as the vibratory state in Michaux no longer claims for sympathy and identity, it is detached from representation. Being nothing, it resists becoming an object of knowledge.

Michaux's take on the vibration was closer to a modern loss of self, like the traumatizing shell shock of the First World War. His trip was emphatically not the good, epiphanic one, but a nerve fever, "an infernal rodeo" in which he journeyed into the "tawdry" spectacle of the mescaline high. Michaux's mescaline-taking, performed from the 1950s in "the laboratory of his home," was both method and subject matter. During and after sessions with the drug, he would write trip logs and render seismographic drawings and pulsating, *brut* landscapes of his trips.

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Nor are his poems, graphics and watercolors windows onto a hallucinatory world in any mimetically meaningful way. Prodded and moved by the "robotic" mescaline, Michaux instead becomes a semi-automation, a plotter recording events-effects in his nervous system.

In the text "La mescaline et la musique," Michaux describes listening to *Trois petites liturgies de la présence divine* by Olivier Messiaen:

"Desolidified, having become flow, the world in front of me had been subtracted. The music was annulled, but its enchantment hadn't been removed. The music—as I presently understood—is an operation to subtract oneself from the laws of the world, from its hardness, from its inflexibility, from its asperities, from its solid inhuman materiality. The operation was a success! Ah! Yes, beyond everything successful, beyond the success of any composer. There no longer was a world, there was only a liquid, the liquid of enchantment. This was an answer that turned the world itself into the musician, I understood nothing more than this answer, answered by the fluid, the aerial, the sensitive. I was inside it, engulfed."

In reference to the Pythagorean tradition of cosmic music, Michaux contends that the particularity of sound heard in the trip can lead one to understand *la musique des sphères*; but what results is something quite different to interplanetary harmony.

The vibe represents a wish to complete estrangement, but an estrangement understood as infinite *othering*—as a productive force through which one can become some-thing or some-body else. The most radical sense of Leary's slogan "Turn on, tune in, drop out" is not the banal taking of a drug to turn on, nor the dialectical secession of dropping out, but rather the way in which the subject who tunes in is untethered from her prior context and her prior being, as she disappears into *unsound* and *untime.* Leary, then, had the right idea but the wrong order. His imperative ought to have been:

Turn on, drop out, tune in.

2. What generated its effects (OIL and WATER)

Perhaps inevitably, such psychedelic intuitions of life were most faithfully realized in time-based media. New modes of seeing, such as light shows and experimental cinema, involved a reorganization of response: on the one hand, a new arsenal of perceptual and conceptual tools; on the other, vast possibilities for attention management in which the subject is dispossessed of her own thought. William Burroughs' notions of reorganizing physically-embedded patterns of social and linguistic control come to mind—techno-neurological counter-measures and media-massages that produce *anti-disciplinary* subjectivity.

Psychedelic light was literally *ob*-scene, deliberately overflowing the boundaries of its regular representational frameworks: there was no scene to stage it, no screen to hold it. It was projected onto large canvases on

an architectural scale, around entire rooms, or on band members who became living screens by dressing in white and playing white instruments. Instead of controlling and fixing the audience's gaze, psychedelic light encouraged a dispersal of attention. Projections blurred the distinctions between floor and stage, band and audience, people and architecture, light and music—deterritorializing effects that induced the audience to relinquish bodily discipline and lie down, renouncing their visual claim on the space in appropriately flaccid response to the images. In this way, the psychedelic light show rendered bodies metaphysical by projecting them, dematerializing them in light. This was quite literally the case with The Boyle Family's 1967 *Son et Lumière for Bodily Fluids and Functions*, in which snot, saliva, earwax, tears, urine, sweat, blood, gastric juices, vomit, and sperm were projected, while a couple had sex after being wired up to oscilloscopes, their heartbeats and brain-waves measured, visualized, and projected onto a large screen behind them.

Photos of light groups in action document in a disarming way their undoing of the functional integrity of industrial apparatuses of cinema and television. In 1969, a distinctly impressed Amalie R. Rothschild titled one particular photograph *The Joshua Light Show with their Tons of Equipment at Fillmore East*. It shows six members of the group poised amid dangling cables and a chaotic array of spots, reflectors, fanless projectors for maximum heat effect, and light wheels propped up on makeshift platforms and school tables. A large stock of toilet paper is at hand. Their arsenal looks precarious, as if at any moment a fuse will blow or somebody will burn their hair.

Despite their tons of equipment, it's not obvious how the Joshua Light Show could make anybody flip, though it's easy enough to imagine the sounds of whirring Super 8 beamers and the clicking of slides falling into the projection chamber—process sounds that sometimes made both audiences and musicians complain about the noise during quiet moments in the concert. Rothschild's picture eloquently lays bare the discrepancy between the spectacular effect and its cause, portraying the psychedelic light show as an amateur science lab. The materiality of psychedelic

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light was anything but seamless, rather noisy, messy and homespun, difficult to document and mediate. Even if it produced immersive environments, it was a cottage industry whose production shared the time and space of its audience.

The light shows relied on the live improvisation of the projectionists, and on the automatic, contingent creativity of chemical and thermodynamic processes, all structured by a collective intelligence. The images are familiar enough: microscopic vistas of the sub-human realm of proteins and cells were given an evolutionary kick with hallucinogenic drugs … or perhaps they depict telescopic views of interstellar dust, nebulae, halos, luminous rays and dark matter that would appeal to the turned-on as a subject of the space age.

Plasmatic images were created live by operating liquids and "wet-slides" on overhead and slide projectors. As Danish light show stalwarts Helge Krarup and Carl Nørrested recount, these were made "by pouring ink, spirit or other types of color as well as activating or inhibiting substances such as dishwashing liquid and glue between the glass panes of a slide—or by overhead projection: between watch glasses." They continue: "The chemistry of the added substances in connection with the heat of the projector made the liquids move and mix. Speed and form could not be controlled. This produced an image of amorphous forms that changed and developed—in itself a form of living images."

Another recurring motif was the obscene vitality of the open, pulsating wound, as a marker of the violence involved in breaking open the surface and coherence of the body to access its deep, unorganized states. This is the counterpoint to the amoebic concretism of the screen saver or the lava lamp. Freed from the obligation to represent, the plasmatic image becomes a *pure event* teetering between, on one hand, a self-referential technique that produces a highly suggestive realtime "painting" (what-you-see-is-what-you-get: color + oil + heat + light), and on the other, an approximation of that which cannot be apprehended by human perception (what-you-see-is-what-you-FEEL: total abstraction). In other words, you can't tell whether the plasmatic image generates a vista into the starry dome of the night sky, or into your own spiralling DNA.

The largest psychedelic light group in Copenhagen, counting some 17 members during its brief existence from 1969–72, was King Kong. They intended their shows as "the production of a totally artificial environment involving all senses and functioning as an expansion of consciousness, effectively an artificial consciousness." This artificial intelligence was distributed in the dialogic ambition of making what they thought of as "a 'phone call' to the audience, effectively establishing a two-way communication … made possible through cybernetic principles." Copenhagen light artists didn't generally locate their activities in aesthetic discourse, nor in art institutions. The members of King Kong, though, were different; they took a distinctly analytical approach to the light show, more akin to what we'd think of today as a "mixed media performance." Paul Klee was a formative influence on a number of kinetic artists whose work had influenced the group, like Laszlo Moholy-Nagy's light sculptures, or György Kepes' abstract scientific images.

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Other points of reference included Op Art, Brion Gysin's *Dreamachine*, and Marshall McLuhan's media theory.

King Kong was responsible for some of the era's most advanced light shows, assisted by an arsenal of up to 50 apparatuses. Their lighting sequences, programmed in scores they called Trips, were frequently prepared in collaboration with the performing band. The group developed 50 such trips, composed from hundreds of Super 8 films, film loops, slides, light effects, stage lights and wetslides, with titles like *Myth*, *Pseudo-Strobe*, *Psychedelic Countryside*, *Raining Bubbles*, *Acid*, *Cartoon*, *TV*, *Neon*, *Confrontation*, and *Violence*. Such performances were systematized through Steen Krarup's 1969 concept of *The Mixedmedia-Multiprojection Idea Defined*. This parameter theory was a "meditational structure" in which factors of hardware, software and variables were ordered hierarchically in sets, subsets, subsets of subsets etc., like the menu in a computer ("2.1.1.2.01.3.3 Cardboard discs which block the projection of light"). According to Krarup, the King Kong operators would be free to depart from the rigidity of the score "like a ballet dancer phrases the choreography."

Within this matrix, one of King Kong's signature techniques was the Metamorf, a simple wetslide invented by Krarup with two distinguishing features: first, contrary to psychedelic orthodoxy, it was black and white; second, as the slide got warmer in the heat of the projector, the liquids moved faster, creating depth and space. The Metamorf could be projected as a single independent image, or as a "tapestry" that formed the backdrop for additive or subtractive color projections. By the end of the 1960s, there were reportedly 140 separate light groups in Copenhagen, as well as a labor union, and so fierce competition among them to produce new images and effects. Even today the Metamorf recipe remains a closely guarded secret.

3. How it extended into digital (ZEROES and ONES)

A couple of decades before King Kong were operating in full effect, Norbert Wiener defined feedback as "the ability to adjust future conduct by past performance." Many of the examples in his 1947 book *Cybernetics* are drawn from the military industry in the Second World War, where feedback was essential for the development of radar systems; but as the concept's subsequent career in fields as diverse as psychology, biology, and the social sciences attests, cybernetics was a promiscuous idea. Observing substantial commonalities between the properties of living organisms and machines, Wiener proposed that "the physical functioning of the living individual and the operation of some of the newer communication machines are precisely parallel in their analogous attempts to control entropy through feedback."

Because it is self-generative, feedback is like an organism, i.e., it carries or EMBODIES a message. And when it comes to overcoming the dichotomy of organisms and machines, Leary and Wiener speak as if with one, fatal voice. According to Leary, the human is merely a "transient energy structure," while to Wiener, "we are but whirlpools in a river of

ever-flowing water … not stuff that abides, but patterns that perpetuate themselves"—a necessary conclusion, perhaps, for those who refuse to conceive of the organism as a unity, and who deny any closure of the nervous system.

As a sound effect, feedback is a signature of Acid Rock, a genre defined simply by Jerry Garcia of The Grateful Dead as "what you listen to when you are high on acid." Thus, feedback noise was a marker of the counterculture, but, much like Michaux's infernal rodeo, also represented a departure from the harmonic, spectacular, and style-oriented forms of psychedelic rock and its visual counterparts.

Following French philosopher of desire Gilles Deleuze, we can conceive of feedback as *the sound of the event in its own time,* or *Aion*—an "essentially unlimited past and future," a time of "events-effects" that "retreats and advances in two directions at once, the perpetual object of a double question: what is going to happen? and what has just happened?" According to Deleuze, positive feedback's event-effect is not a sound loop but a "straight line and an empty form"—a process of unfolding. And in line with the French word *sens*, which can mean either "direction" or "meaning," Acid Rock feedback is not WITHOUT direction or signification, but rather produces a double-direction and a double-sense that exerts a contradictory, agonizing pull on the listener.

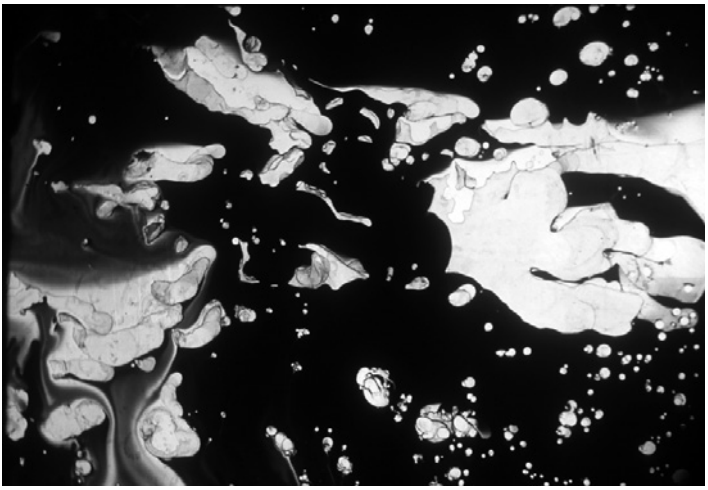
What *makes sense* is neither a structure waiting to be discovered and re-employed, nor an origin or a principle to which events can revert. On the contrary, sense is always IN the making—"something to produce by a new machinery," and so quite literally always an effect:

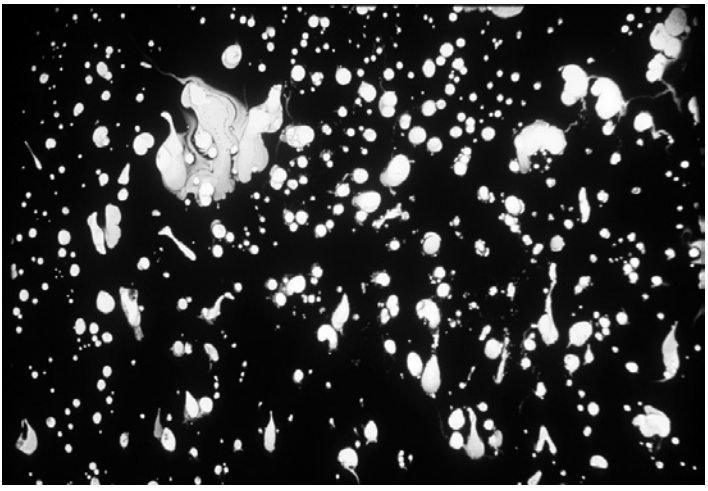
"It is not an effect merely in the causal sense; it is also an effect in the sense of an 'optical effect' or a 'sound effect,' or even better, a surface effect, a position effect, and a language effect. Such an effect is not at all an appearance or an illusion."

In this light, feedback can be perceived as radically reorganizing the relation between cause and effect. It produces not only a discrepancy, but also a new coexistence between them; a "heterogeneity of cause and effect," Deleuze would say, that compromises "the connection of causes between themselves and the link of effects between themselves."

Feedback is a synthetic and vital flow—each moment is the whole of the previous sound sequence condensed into a single point that unfolds in two directions at once. Considered from this perspective, its sonic or ecological distortions are not alienating, but are a form of *pure potentiality* that we don't yet know how to experience. And we may potentially speculate that, in terms of bringing forth new worlds, sounds are more powerful than images: the act of amplifying already amplified sound heaps event upon event and produces spaces in which the future can arrive.

4. The way it was documented (LO-FI)





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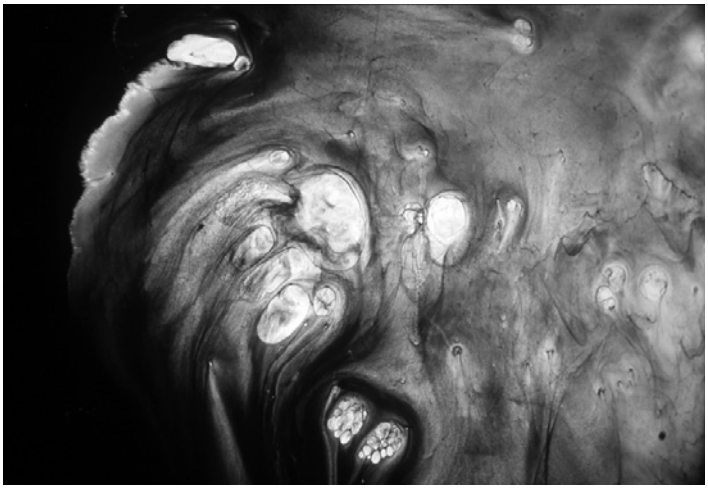

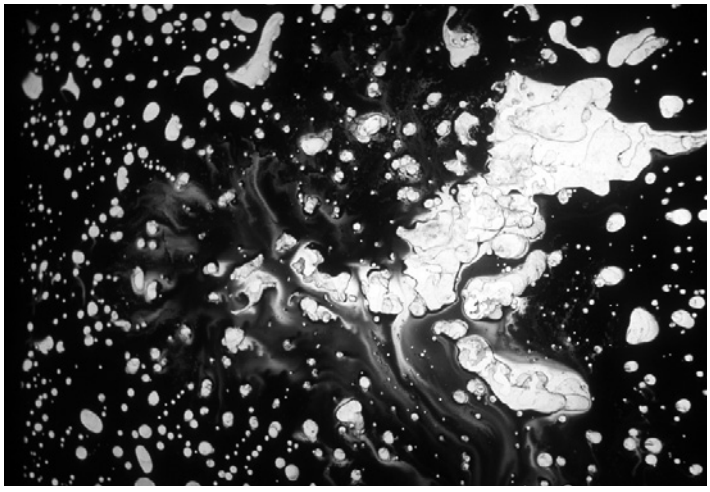

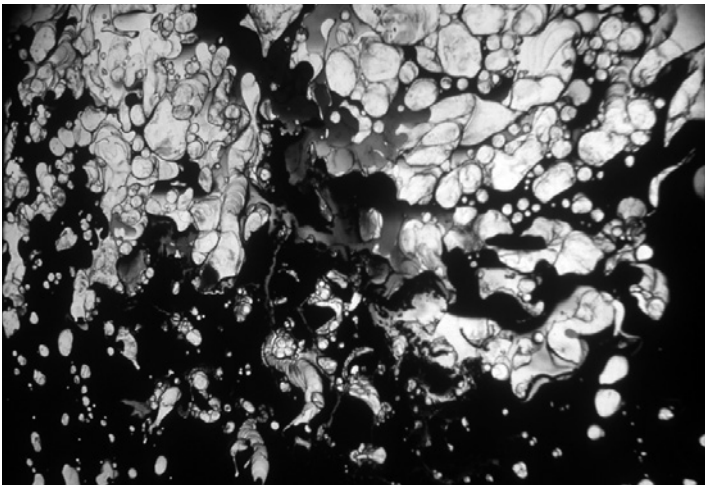

King Kong Metamorf wetslides, circa 1970. Courtesy Steen Thure Krarup

5. The way it travelled (UNDERGROUND)

Meanwhile in Malmö, Swedish artist Sture Johannesson started a gallery salon in the studio of his partner Charlotte, who had incorporated under the name Cannabis a few years earlier, hence the name Galleri Cannabis. This was a non-commercial, tribal hang-out that served informally as the local underground scene's workshop, information hub, and (during downtime from the regular be-ins and smoke-ins) exhibition space. Johannesson has described how the changing cast at the Galleri didn't represent any single, organized movement, but included "ecological cultivation, geodesic dome construction, bootlegging, transcendental communication … a kind of multicultural awakening; not in today's governmental definition of multiculturalism, but a community whose coexistence was stimulated by a diversity of identities and ideas."

Johannesson's underground art, as he prefers to call it, was not above markets and institutions. In fact, his aim in producing psychedelic posters was to make money, albeit in the literal sense of producing a new currency. As a primary fiction of capitalist society, money credited by the state is a magical, abstract object, and both the stylishness and high-end production values of Johannesson's posters afford an equivalent aura—indeed, they are as desirable as bank notes. His 1968 poster *Art Crisis* even carries a manifesto for a new sovereignty that will not only lay bare the commodity character of art production, but also bypass the established art market by setting up an independent one:

"Demonetizing paperminted posterprints has caused an international art crisis for the art's monetary* system, oil on canvas—a thing of beauty and a joy for ev'ry. The keepers of the pool have now decided to split into two markets; A FREE & HIGH one & a guaranteed low controlled & fixed one for transactions between government & GOVERNMENT! *From MONETA, a surname of JUNO, in whose temple money was coined."

Sture Johannesson: *Art Crisis*, 1968, from the Danish Collection, 1977–79

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This euphoric declaration of independence instituted underground art's home rule, founded on the political need to democratize art in easily and inexpensively disseminated forms. With the mass-produced, offset-printed poster, Johannesson established a new marketplace for art, cutting out the middlemen by selling work via mail order, at concerts and be-ins, or from Galleri Cannabis. This was a mercantile position that returned to the principle of the elementary market, as opposed to the pro-capitalistic subversiveness of the burgeoning Californian (counter-)cultural industry. Pop Art, by contrast, could be said to have established a super-market by turning everyday signs into abstract value in art objects. Johannesson carried out an ACTUAL deconstruction of the original—an idea that Warhol flirted with, but ultimately rendered operational, albeit with maximized irony: at the Factory, the copy re-authenticated the original.

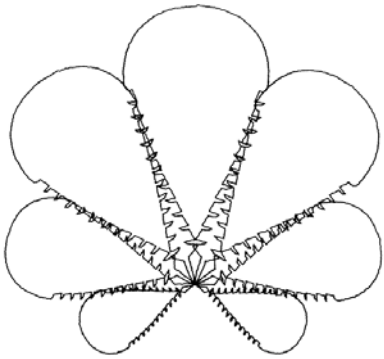
In this way, *Art Crisis* can be seen as the declaration of a media war via the subversion of a traditional medium, "oil on canvas." In fact, the poster also commemorates Johannesson's abandonment of painting, and accordingly cannibalizes some of his old canvases with countercultural motifs. The pictorial elements of the poster re-establish countercultural codes. They include an allegorical 19th-century engraving of Europe's imperial powers, Johannesson's own drawing of a still life with two fish skeletons on a plate, a score of the first few bars of Bob Dylan's song "Visions of Johanna," and various underground slogans. All these elements represent Aquarian lore, a cornerstone of the psychedelic movement.

Compared with the obvious service function of the West Coast Acid Rock poster, Johannesson's posters were critically autonomous. In most cases, however, they did announce events, as they were contributions to competitions for architecture and public art works, or exhibition posters. This connection to the art scene is atypical, since psychedelic posters were usually conceived and perceived as *The Art of Rock* (as at least one book title suggests). There are formal differences, too. In Johannesson's posters—up to twice the size of their Californian cousins—surface remains a painterly concern. In other words, they are emphatically flat, eschewing the trend for depicting text as if stretched or projected onto a convex surface. Since he used standard fonts or geometric ones of his own design, Johannesson's graphics were "faster"—closer to advertising or political posters. Yet these posters were not designed to be flyposted in public space, rather hung in the living space where they could be studied at close quarters, like Michaux's research, in "the laboratory of one's home." Here we could easily spin off on another paradoxical tangent (this time between the propagandistic and the domestic) but it seems more relevant to consider the way in which the counterculture's subterranean ethos was displaced to the laboratory—and this time not only as a metaphor.

At the end of the 1960s, Johannesson turned from montaging underground posters in Copenhagen to programming digital graphics at IBM's headquarters in Stockholm. By this time, he was a fairly notorious character, controversial and frequently censored by the establishment, and IBM were presumably keen to collaborate with the artist for PR reasons. He was introduced to a programmer, Sten Kallin, who helped

him operate a punch-card-fed mainframe computer. This was a large machine with a memory of 100 kb that was "blind," meaning it didn't have a monitor, and whose activity was followed by engineers who observed blinking signal lamps and studied printouts on the console typewriters. Its only output medium was a drum plotter with a width of about 30 cm on its paper roll.

If, for American artist Sol LeWitt, the idea is the machine that makes the art, for Johannesson and Kallin it was rather the case that the machine *becomes the idea* that makes the art. For Johannesson at least, this was a ritualistic process in which the data machine itself performed. The nature of their project was suggested by the name they gave it, *Intra Secus*, from the Latin *intrinsics*, meaning intrinsic, inherited, built in. They investigated the medium's potential by conducting experiments with the graphic effects of the drum plotter's behavior. When input parameters were changed, the only way to check the result was by plotting, and in this way the machine's interpretation of the input carried an element of surprise. The plotter would create blots, moirés, and plateaus of ink on the paper that deviated from the mathematically exact forms calculated beforehand. The result was an exploration of geometry through algorithms. Emblems from psychedelic lore—cannabis leaves, yin and yang, or the 1+2+3 figure—were abstracted as equations by Kallin, then rendered in the plotter's seismographic scribbling.



Sture Johannesson, *Hemp Leaf*, 1972

These proceedings were equivalent to cerebral brushwork: during plot-out, the machine could act in random, anthropomorphic ways. It printed in incremental steps. A plotted circle without noticeable visible jags was actually a polygon with hundreds of corners. If the parameter for the steps had too high a value, the medium would jot down a drawing in a rage, while a low value would cause the plotter to proceed slowly and thoughtfully. Kallin and Johannesson would observe how the line evolved on paper as it suffered such "emotional" turbulence, and for the benefit of those who were not present to watch, this machinic "temperament" was inscribed in the drawings.

Rather than a clean departure from his underground production, then, Johannesson's digital experimentation reattached the transformative

ethos of psychedelia to historical time through tactical shifts between media, methods and technologies. In both cases, the morbid reverie and organic ornamentation of the psychedelic canon were displaced onto a social stage, into what we might consider a *sociodelic* art—one that is society- rather than mind-manifesting; a new social body that grows from the ground up, and isn't governmentally instituted.

6. The flicker and the strobe (YES. YES. YES)

No one can deny the counterculture its shared planetary signifiers, ranging from a metaphorical India to real conflict zones, whether Vietnam, the Cuban revolution, Paris '68 or the Prague Spring. Still, it is odd to observe the extent to which the counterculture was concerned with the identity and boundaries of the nation state (especially given the prevalent psychedelic notions of tripping/travelling). Even if you dropped out from straight society, it seems you didn't bail on your country. The nation was something to be reconstructed and improved—healed, turned on—with the conviction that the colors of the flag could burn brighter and more intensely in some kind of radiant homecoming. At the same time, the nation was hardly considered a discrete entity, for the counterculture relied on international trade routes of ideas and commodities through which music, images, and magazines were distributed. Their reliance on the culture industry's spheres of circulation formed a geopolitical backdrop. It was a given, for instance, that one was tuned in to Anglo-American music, not least in Brazil of the late 1960s, when the Tropicalists started bastardizing 1950s Bossa Nova with Psychedelic Rock.

In the 1960s, the question of national identity loomed large in third world post-colonial and anti-imperialist movements. Looking back in his 1997 memoir *Tropical Truth*, the musician Caetano Veloso writes that the goal of the Tropicalists was "to free ourselves from the Brazil we knew. We had to destroy the Brazil of the nationalists … and do away once and for all of its image." At the same time, the artist Hélio Oiticica argued in favor of the "immediate reduction of all external influences to national models." The National was also a signifier for countercultures elsewhere in the Western world. It could be difficult to distinguish the hippie tribe from the national demographic, and the yippies professed a love/hate relationship to their "Amerika." In an early essay on the hippies, British cultural critic Stuart Hall remarked that even *Time* magazine couldn't help noticing a "pure American species" under "the long hair, the beads and the kaftans," while philosopher Marshall Berman commented on a similarity of spirit between "the megalomaniac in the White House" and those protesting outside the Pentagon, shouting the words of The Doors' song: "We want the world and we want it now!"

Since the poet Oswald de Andrade wrote his *Manifesto antropófago* —literally, "manifesto of human-eating"—in 1928, cannibalism has been a revenant concept for a specifically Brazilian social identity. A brain-child of the Latin American avant-garde, *antropáfagia* was a critical concept for the *movimenta modernista* and post-war aesthetic experimentation generally, most prominently the 1960s counterculture that came

to be called "Tropicália." Artists like Oiticica rejected Anglo-American psychedelia and proposed instead the concept of the "suprasensorial" as an explicit alternative to the example of Leary and co.—a rejection that questioned psychedelia's universal status, as well as its formative relation to countercultures outside the U.S. As a quasi-mythical cannibalization of symbolic forms, then, *antropáfagia* offers yet another perspective on psychedelia's perpetual proliferation.

Antropáfagia signifies the devouring of dominant culture. It describes a consumption of cultural difference conceived as a process of incorporation in which origins, materials and signs are consumed, reinvested and hybridized. The consuming or appropriating subject is herself involved in the resulting mix of bodies—a fact that echoes in both Surrealist and psychedelic morphologies of an ecstatic loss of control, with a view to a remodeling of the self through "ego-loss." Cannibalism, De Andrade writes, is:

"Against all catechisms … Against all importers of canned consciousness … Against the plant-like elites … Against the stories of man, beginning at Cap Finisterre … Against the truth of the missionary nations … Against urban scleroses. Against Conservatories, and speculative boredom … Against the torch-bearing Indian … Against Memory as habit-source … Against Goethe, the mother of the "Gracos," and the Court of Don Juan VI … Plague of the so-called cultured and Christianized nations, that is what we are acting against …"

The movement owes much of its popularity and viability to the humor of De Andrade's manifesto, particularly its non-moralizing attitude, as well as the powerful aesthetic traditions of Brazil that have continued to work in this vein. When he wrote the manifesto, Brazil was still a segregated country, where European immigration was encouraged in order to whiten the population. Once the cannibalistic concept loses its barbaric edge and becomes culturally acceptable, however, it risks producing a kind of repressive tolerance. Indeed, to the poet Waly Saloma, "the myth of racial democracy"—of which *antropáfagia* is without doubt a proponent—is "disproved by the actual apartheid of the slums."

The name of the Brazilian Tropicália movement can be traced back to an art work. In April 1967, Oiticica exhibited his environment *Tropicália* as part of the exhibition *Brazilian New Objectivity* at the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro. According to its author, the work was an experimental image field, "a tropical scenario, as it were, with plants, parrots, sand, pebbles," and was explicitly connected to De Andrade's cannibalistic discourse. Oiticica declared that his *Tropicália* installation was pitted against "the universalist myth of Brazilian culture based on Europe and North America" and amounted to a SUPER-*antropofógia* —a project for another modernity based on hybridization and the conviction that "purity is a myth" (as the legend over the entrance to the *Tropicália* environment ran). The term was subsequently popularized by Caetano Veloso, Gilberto Gil and others on the LP *Tropicália: ou panis et circensis* (bread and circuses) from 1968, and came to denote the contiguity of protest and creativity. The poet Décio Pignatari poignantly called this state of affairs the *geléia geral*—the "general jelly,"

a fantastic image of virtuality, with gelatin as the archetypal substrate of the psychedelic imaginary, wobbling instituted distinctions and conducive to the smallest vibration.

The movement came into existence during a brief relaxation of the military dictatorship's repressive politics, though its twin nemeses, the Communist Party and the Old Left, asserted an equally ideological control over culture, creativity, and lifestyle. Despite these claustrophobic conditions, the movement was not a particularly subterranean phenomenon. Oiticica and other artists of his generation were institutionally sanctioned, and musicians such as Caetano Veloso, Os Mutantes, Gilberto Gil and Gal Costa gained their fame performing in TV shows like *Chacrinha*, a carnivalesque entertainment program named after its host, a chubby, middle-aged man who wore outrageous costumes and awarded a pineapple to the program's worst band. "Like some Dada experience for the masses," Veloso writes, "it seemed at times dangerous just for being so absurd and energetic. This was the program that the domestic help wouldn't miss." Tropicália didn't have the esoteric dimension of an underground culture, but was imbued form the beginning with a popularity that was probably unique for a 1960s counterculture.

Sensitive to such assimilation, massification, and the dilution of life-experience, Oiticica lamented the popularity of Tropicália in an essay written only a year after he presented his eponymous environment. It had, in effect, become a folklore invested in a Brazilian Pop Art. "And now, what do we see?" He despairs:

"Bourgeois, sub-intellectuals, cretins of every kind, preaching Tropicália (it's become fashionable!)—in short, transforming into an object of consumption something which they cannot quite identify. It's completely clear! Those who made 'stars and stripes' are now making their parrots,

banana trees, etc., or are interested in slums, samba schools, outlaw anti-heroes ..."

Oiticica's anti-conformist program for re-connecting art and life included "the use of hallucinogenic drugs on the collective plane," though this was expressly NOT a psychedelic position. Psychedelia was asked to observe its place. For Oiticica, there was a considerable difference between his proposition—newly dubbed "suprasensorial"—and that of the likes of Leary and Kesey. Oiticica posits such West Coast psychedelia on a par with what he called the "aestheticism" of Pop, Op, Minimalism, and Happenings, and we can surmise that his skepticism towards Leary in particular stems from a reading of psychedelia as a phenomenon similar to those European avant-gardes that blithely assume their own universality. Their Latin American counterparts instead tried to unravel modernity as an expansionist force. Oiticica therefore invented a concept to overwrite psychedelia and restore agency to the native national: they have psychedelia, we have the suprasensorial.

Oiticica introduced the idea at a conference in August 1967. Proposing to dispense with the use of images altogether—another significant departure from an image-laden, mainstream psychedelic art. The main aesthetic vector of Oiticica's suprasensorial can be understood in terms of a social transformation of the object and its aesthetic status. This sociality "englobes" the subject's authentic relation to the artwork, conceptualized as a *proposition* in opposition to the "fake" idea of the "solid work to be sold." The suprasensorial thus finds rhythm, sensuality and experience in the "non-event," an artistic *hypothesis* that radically displaces the world of objects and the ways in which we perceive them. Which is to say that, in spite of its social location, Oiticica's "supra-forming" is virtual and uninhabitable—an "idea of form and structure [that] will not exist," but instead "lies in wait for the possibility to manifest itself, and awaits --» ultrawaits."

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