Preface

Much has been said concerning the introduction of mindfulness ideology into the psychological and cognitive ‘sciences.’ I have not, however, seen much criticism of the recent resurgence of interest in psychedelic substances (such as LSD, psilocybin, and to some extent MDMA) within psychiatry. It seems to me that the value of psychedelic drugs is taken for granted without much critical thought. This is a touchy subject for many, as proponents of psychedelic therapies are quite passionate about moving past the dismal state of the mental health field, and believe that psychedelics are the way to do so.

In my view, however, this move toward a psychologized culture of psychedelic drugs—what I will here refer to as “psychologized psychedelia”—raises all of the same concerns which were raised by the overprescription of drugs such as SSRIs (for ‘depression’) and amphetamines (for ‘ADHD’), and by the newer apolitical ‘mindful’ approaches, all of which should terrify even the mildest critics of the mental health status quo. In addition to these concerns, moreover, there is another set of concerns that is unique to the glorification of psychedelic substances which is beginning to drive the mental health field into the latest frenzy of innovation in the realm of political passivity.

It is to this set of concerns that I dedicate this essay.

It will be necessary to split this investigation into two parts. Part I focuses on some of the fundamental errors which lead experts to believe that psychedelic drugs are the answer to the problems plaguing the field of clinical psychology. It is an attempt to show how the quite justified critique of the medicalization of mental health—and the harmful drug-fueled ‘treatments’ to which such medicalization leads—is
undermined by the subsequent introduction of so-called ‘psychedelic therapy,’
which is founded on the very same errors.

To make my case, it will be necessary to take a small detour through psychedelic
culture in general as it exists outside of the clinical setting, focusing in particular on
the relationship between ideology and psychedelics in ‘ordinary’ psychedelic use.
There is, in my view, an enormous amount of confusion present in psychedelic
users’ own understanding of what psychedelics do—a folk understanding which
shares its fundamental delusions with the field of academic psychology. It is
therefore important to provide a critical account of this understanding here, as such
a task can hardly be left to psychologists (who must surely be assumed incapable of
grasping any such critical account, let alone of producing one). I thus ask the reader
for patience through this detour as I make my way to the larger point.

The kind of project attempted in Part I is very delicate, and I want to be careful that
I make myself perfectly clear before moving on to Part II. Therefore it will be of
tremendous use if readers could provide feedback and ask any clarifying questions
before I begin to work on and publish the second half of the essay. Part II will
expand the critique of psychedelics for use in psychotherapy to its use within the
‘cognitive sciences’ as a whole, with the intention of showing both how the
‘cognitive sciences’ legitimate and reproduce the errors necessary for the harmful
trends addressed in Part I to continue, and how they contribute to the impossibility
of imagining alternatives.

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Tripping On Ideology: Against A Psychologized Psychedelia

Part I: Psychedelics, Ideology, and Psychology
1. Introduction

A. From the perspective of psychiatry, attempts to medicalize subjective realities such as depression, or other similar subjective realities which are generally categorized under the misnomer of ‘mental illness,’ have proved to be a complete disaster: we have come no closer to effectively addressing these realities than when we first socially produced them in the ideologies of modernity. The enormous havoc wreaked upon the minds of so many individuals in our society by this complete disaster has become too salient for the mental health field to deny. To be sure, there are still plenty of ‘experts’ and ‘professionals’ who deny the disaster that has been the medicalization of the mind. Yet such denials are becoming less frequent, and the denials are being replaced largely by well-meaning but dangerously misinformed approaches.

Among these well-meaning but dangerously misinformed approaches is the enthusiasm by which many psychologists and activists have embraced psychedelic drugs as an alternative, seemingly more ‘progressive,’ mental health program.\textsuperscript{1} The reality, despite the fact that this psychologized psychedelia presents itself as a move away from medicalization, is that this embrace of psychedelic drugs as the next big promise in mental health ‘treatment’ is founded on the same basic assumptions as those of the ideology of medicalization, the latter of which psychedelic drug advocates so wish to fight against. These assumptions will be important to make explicit if our aim is to understand how the introduction of psychedelics into the ideologies of clinical psychology and the so-called ‘cognitive sciences’ present an

\textsuperscript{1} See, for instance, the recent work of Michael Pollan or of the research organization The Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS), or the slew of columns by journalists and psychologists in support of this movement, some of which are referenced here. Or simply perform a Google search for "psychedelics and therapy."
unprecedented danger, one which the anti-psychiatry movement of the 20th century could hardly have imagined.

**B.** In order to make clear the issue at hand, it is important to first take a somewhat tedious but wholly necessary detour into the realm of psychedelic culture as it exists beyond the clinical setting. As we will see, there is in truth no such culture, as even psychedelic culture ‘on its own’ is strongly influenced by the dominant ideologies produced in the field of academic psychology and its accomplices. Still, we can meaningfully speak of such a culture, referring to the norms, practices, and beliefs which are produced around the use of psychedelic drugs outside of the professional clinic. The sociological nuances of this culture are almost entirely unknown to, much less understood by, clinical psychologists, including both those who support the movement for a psychologized psychedelia out of progressive ideals and those who reject it out of a reactionary attachment to institutional psychology in its medicalized form.

The problems raised by the sociological realities of psychedelic culture present serious obstacles to the possibility of a psychologized psychedelia as currently conceived. It is important to note immediately that the understanding of psychedelic drugs prevalent among clinicians and professional theoreticians comes first and foremost from the self-professed understanding of ‘ordinary’ or ‘non-clinical’ psychedelic users—an understanding which clinicians and theoreticians take at face-value and subsequently reaffirm—and only secondarily from the scientific literature which those same clinicians and theoreticians are, incidentally, more apt to cite. Thus a clear and comprehensive sociological account of non-clinical psychedelic culture is entirely necessary for a clear understanding of the clinical view of the nature of psychedelic drugs, with all of its errors and delusions. I do not claim to have produced such an elaborate sociology here; my aim in this essay is
only to make a convincing preliminary case for the importance of such an account to be produced, as the notion that the clinical understanding of psychedelic drugs is scientifically informed is as dangerous and mistaken as it is prevalent, and it is necessary to dispel this myth by investigating the ideology by which it is informed. As I will argue in Part II, the ostensibly ‘scientific’ literature on psychedelic drugs is in fact itself completely ideologically saturated by the folk self-understanding of psychedelic drugs espoused by its users. But we will come to that in due course.

I am fully aware that in employing a term as ambiguous as ‘psychedelic culture,’ I am risking a certain lack of generalizability. This is simply a risk I will have to take. It is beyond the scope and intention of this work to address the many nuances of psychedelic drugs as historical cultural artifacts, and the multitudes of subjectivities that psychedelics are capable of (re)-producing. Such work is better left to cultural historians. Nonetheless, I have a non-trivial amount of personal experience with psychedelic drugs, and have spent plenty of time engaging in the dominant contemporary subcultures which have developed around them as a subject of such subcultures, and thus feel quite confident in my ability to offer an informed viewpoint on the matter of contemporary psychedelic culture. Moreover, having long moved on from what I will later describe as ‘psychedelic subjectivity,’ I have learned to view those subcultures with a more critical eye. These two factors, combined with my extensive familiarity with clinical psychology both as a theoretical field and a clinical practice, places me in a unique position to wage the audacious sort of critique I hope to wage here.

C. After passing through the necessary detour of psychedelic culture, I will turn our attention back to how the clinical and professional theoretical understanding of psychedelic drugs, informed first and foremost by the ideologies thus described, functions to reproduce the same errors that have prevented any progress from
being made in clinical psychology. I will attempt to answer such questions as: What are some of the clinical assumptions around psychedelic drugs, and how do these assumptions relate to (or rather echo) those of psychedelic culture ‘on its own’? How does the clinical view of psychedelic drugs reproduce the errors produced and disseminated by the medicalized theories of mental health? What are the political implications of these assumptions and errors? With the former understanding (of psychedelic culture ‘on its own’) in our arsenal, the latter issue will become much easier to grasp. Note: Since this essay turned out to be much longer than I intended, this second half of Part I will be published separately.

With that, let’s begin our detour.

2. Ideological Hegemony in Psychedelic Culture: The Folk Self-Understanding of Psychedelic Drugs

A. For the purposes of the (very cursory) exposition of psychedelic culture which follows, I draw heavily on the work of Henry Flynt, who some time ago—years before I was born, let alone had my first psychedelic ‘experience’—wrote a compelling account of the psychedelic ideology of the twentieth century, an account which is as important as it is overlooked. I passionately nominate Flynt’s essay The Psychedelic State as a companion thesis to the present one, the former to be viewed as a classic and founding text in this frustratingly dearth area of critical inquiry. One need not adhere to Flynt’s overall theory of subjectivity in order to find the essay extremely useful as a sociology of psychedelic culture. Flynt raises many points which are absolutely crucial for any understanding of the present subject, and as such I must apologize in advance for what might appear to be an excessive use of quotations.
Aside from Flynt’s essay, I will be drawing both on the time I spent as a subject of psychedelic culture, as well as on some popular accounts of psychedelics which can be found on the internet.  

B. What are the ideological assumptions, beliefs, and intentions which inform psychedelic culture at large? Despite the seeming diversity in the kinds of people who enjoy psychedelic drugs, there are particular ideological elements which can be found almost invariably within psychedelic culture conceived as its own general category. These elements include, but are not limited to, the following ideological beliefs:

1. **Psychedelic drugs provide access to a realm—ontological or psychological—beyond the dominant modes of culture, ideology, and subjectivity.**

2. **The psychedelic experience is inaccessible to, and hence unable to be understood by, those who have not, at some point or another, ingested psychedelic drugs and ‘tripped.’**

3. **Psychedelic drugs have psychological healing powers.**

4. **Following from (1), (2), and (3), psychedelic drugs offer some universal experience that is historically invariable. As such, psychedelics can be used ‘correctly’ and ‘incorrectly,’ the former being the route to this universal experience and the latter being the route to a culturally and psychologically**

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2While I take seriously Flynt’s emphasis on the danger of neglecting the phenomenology of psychedelic experiences, I find such accounts to be quite tedious and philosophically infuriating, and since they are not wholly relevant to the particular argument I wish to make, I will refrain from making much use of them. Furthermore, given the largely delusional nature of self-reported accounts of the psychedelic experience, and our intention to understand its culture sociologically (and in particular within the context of the fields of academic and clinical psychology), any overly phenomenological approach would contribute nothing if not obscurity. The reader, making use of the critique presented here, is invited to investigate such first-hand reports on their own.
claustrophobic experience, otherwise known as a ‘bad trip’ (this phrase, despite its annoying ring, is of some importance; it will be examined later).

Those who have paid any attention to the discourse of psychedelic therapy will of course be quite familiar with (3), as this belief constitutes the founding assumption of psychedelic therapy. It is possible that some or all of the others will appear to be unrelated or tangential to the alleged subject of this essay. I ask of the reader a small amount of philosophical sympathy as I make my way to clearing up their relevance. To do so, I will have to briefly examine each of these elements as they stand, if only to raise the importance of examining them more closely in the future.

**Belief (1):** Psychedelic drugs provide access to a realm—physical or psychological—beyond the dominant modes of culture, ideology, and subjectivity.

Here arises an example of the simultaneous diversity/hegemony present within psychedelic culture, the diversity being quite real and yet productive of all sorts of confusion. There is a diversity in the sense that some psychedelic cultures explicitly posit an ontological reality outside of the material/social reality which they inhabit, whereas others posit this realm as a purely psychological reality, making no (explicit) claims about ontology. Often both of these modalities are applied at once, or more precisely, alternated between at the convenience of the subject, given the intentions they possess in a given instance. In any case: this realm is allegedly one which, when accessed, provides the subject both with an escape from and with a privileged understanding of the social material world, and of their own subjectivity—an understanding which is unavailable to ‘plain’ consciousness. For example, many users of psychedelics will report that they experienced a more ‘objective’ view of their ‘ego’ or ‘self.’ It is my position that such reports must be rejected, and although it is beyond the scope of this essay to explain in detail why, the reasons should become clear on their own as we continue our (at of yet sketchy) analysis.
Belief (2): *The psychedelic experience is inaccessible to, and hence unable to be understood by, those who have not, at some point or another, ingested psychedelic drugs and ‘tripped.’*

This belief has it that psychedelic drugs provide a unique mode of experience which simply cannot be described in ordinary language. In other words, the psychedelic experience must be *experienced* in order to be understood. Hence the psychedelic experience, while often posited as a universal one, *is inherently private.* This paradox will be immediately recognizable to those who are familiar with the ideology of meditative states. The evangelist for such states will insist on the linguistically inscrutable nature of the meditative experience, and will reject any attempt at grasping the nature of meditative states within a shared language, while also insisting that such an experience has some kind of universality. As is the case with any critical account of meditative ideology—be it Western Buddhist or otherwise—we must firmly reject this belief for a critical understanding of psychedelics to be possible. A parallel can be hastily drawn here to the sociology of religion. To describe the sociology of religious subjectivity, it would obviously be useful to have spent some time as a subject of the religion under analyses. However, such an experience, while ‘obviously’ necessary for understanding subjective religious experience (it is ‘obvious’ only in the sense of being tautological), is not entirely necessary for a sociological understanding of the practices of the subjects under scrutiny, or of the social origins of their ‘conscious’ experiences. In fact, in the case both of religion and psychedelic drugs such a critical understanding is entirely incompatible with psychedelic subjectivity, defined as the adoption of the four beliefs discussed here and the participation in the *practices* within which these beliefs are embedded.
Belief (3): *Psychedelic drugs have* psychological healing powers.

Here, as with (1) above, we can note the diversity of forms that psychedelic ideology may take on. Some psychedelic enthusiasts believe the ‘healing power’ of psychedelics to originate from some supernatural realm (for instance, those whose psychedelic ideology is informed by Shaman mythology), while others adhere to a strictly psychologized—and ostensibly materialist—view of this alleged power (the latter of which psychologists prefer, it being better suited to their pretension of wielding any scientific merit). This diversity is, as with (1), quite often rather a contradiction present within homogeneous psychedelic cultures; either ontology may be invoked depending on the intentions guiding the subject’s account of the psychedelic state, with no justification provided *vis-à-vis* their implicitly alleged unity.

Here it is crucial to point out and keep in mind that the words ‘psychological’ and ‘healing’ each carry upon their backs an enormous amount of ideological weight—all the more so when they are combined into one phrase. The reason why this is important to point out and keep in mind is that *the ideological weight of these terms, and of their juxtaposition, are ‘borrowed’ by psychedelic culture from the dominant ideologies of academic and clinical psychology, respectively.* I stated in 1.B that the clinical and professional theoretical understanding of psychedelic drugs is informed first and foremost by the folk self-understanding of psychedelic drugs posited by ‘ordinary’ subjects of psychedelic ideology. This is true, but it is only half the story. The dialectical opposite is also the case; it is also the case that the folk self-understanding of psychedelic drugs posited by ‘ordinary’ subjects of psychedelic ideology is informed by the ideologies of professional and academic psychology. As such, there is a dialectical exchange and mutual reinforcement of ideology that takes place between psychologists and ‘ordinary’ subjects of
psychedelic ideology: the ‘ordinary’ subject of psychedelic ideology (which is to say the non-academic and non-clinical subject) is only capable of understanding her own experience in one of two ways (which are actually most often combined into a confused unity)—these being supernatural speculation and psychological theory—while the psychologist, because of his familiarity and dogmatic attachment to his own ‘theories’ of human subjectivity, flatteringly accepts the ordinary psychedelic subject’s self-posited account of the psychedelic mechanism (when it is posited ‘psychologically’), as the latter reifies and reproduces the former’s own ideology. Furthermore, as Flynt notes of the ‘scientific’ study of psychedelic experiences:

The scientists' ideology of reality has absolute authority over the venture—and first-hand experience enters only in terms of snippets from reports by subjects—so that whatever happens is collapsed to the scientists' ideology.

To make these last couple of paragraphs concrete, let us take an example. Flynt describes the attitude present in the psychedelic culture during the 20th century as being in part driven by the belief that "... the content of the psychedelic experience was to be explained by the Freudian theory of the unconscious." Psychedelic subjects often describe their experience (and posit its significance) by reference to psychological theories which are either false or misunderstood, claiming to have, for example, observed their ‘unconscious’ (the outright rejection of such an absurd proposition need not be defended here). This is related to the tendency toward medicalization which accompanies the psychedelic state:

... psychedelic drugs attach you to medical introspection. You mentally reach for any authoritative doctrine which might explain your malaise ... and
Psychedelic drugs attach you to medico-biologic introspection, evoking active concern with your biochemistry, etc . . . It is difficult to refrain from probing for unseen (material) causes. You view yourself as a medico-biologic experiment. This is both a defining feature of the drug, and a liability.

Given the current dominance of ‘medico-biological’ theories of psychology, I would add that psychedelic subjects, in probing for unseen ‘material’ causes, often describe these alleged causes in terms of imperceptible and hypothesized psychological entities—hence the possibility of claiming something as absurd as having observed one’s ‘unconscious.’

This kind of popular claim goes hand in hand with the following reality, which integrates this belief (3) with the preceding belief (2): There exists within psychedelic culture a particular ideology around what psychedelics do (these are the ideological beliefs) and how they are to be used (these are the practices within which these beliefs are embedded). In general, the subject is taken to have certain psychological or social defects, which psychedelic drugs can explicate ‘introspectively’ and, more importantly, ‘treat’ or even ‘solve.’ Psychedelic drugs, according to the ideology of psychedelic culture, aid in this process by revealing to the subject his innermost desires which have been obscured by culture and by language, thereby allowing her to more effectively live according to her ‘real’ intentions. This open derision of culture and the desire to escape ideology is, I would argue, a defining feature of psychedelic ideology in toto. Take one popular articulation of this idea, as it is expressed in an article titled On the countercultural philosophy of psychedelic thinkers:

Psychedelic counterculture is not only countercultural in the sense of being peripheral or opposed to mainstream culture: It is countercultural in the deepest sense of the word, by rejecting the whole concept of culture, a
concept which is viewed as a constricting complex of values, concepts and ideas which are imposed on the individual in the name of uniformity, thereby limiting human potential for thought and expression.

Under this view—a view popularized in psychedelic circles by the works of charlatans such as Terrence Mckenna—culture is inherently oppressive, ‘victimizing’ the individual into suppressing his true self in the name of conformity:

By embracing cultural forms such as ideologies, trends or brands, we are giving up on the precious opportunity for individual expression inherent in human existence. By defining ourselves through a predetermined concept or structure . . . one gives up his chance for self-definition.

Ironically, by assuming an unconstrained individual self, an atman which exists outside of culture and language, proponents of such ‘countercultural’ ideas are in fact reproducing the most dominant and defining ‘cultural’ delusion of the modern era: the myth of self-contained individualism. This kind of misdirection—nay, this intentional ideological obscurantism—is precisely what allowed the lunatics of the Psychedelic Craze to do their deeds as what Flynt describes as the “publicity-hungry, sensationalizing hustlers” that they were. It is precisely this obscurantism which, moreover, accounts for the utterly pathetic failure of the capitalist mental health system.

There is a reason I attack this kind of ideology with such fierce: it is an ideology that has been disgustingly complicit in the enormous amount of suffering that American consumer capitalism and corporatized spiritualism have produced, suffering in which the field of psychotherapy has been deeply complicit in creating as well.

Such an ideology, in order to exist (along with the psychologized view of the human), must contain within it an implicit ideology of human psychology, of
psychological defectiveness, and of psychological soundness. To be interpolated into psychedelic ideology, then, is to accept, reify, and 'prove' experientially the validity of the particular ideology implicit in the psychedelic culture in which this interpolation takes place—which goes hand-in-hand with an interpolation into the dominant ideology of bourgeois psychological theory (and hence capitalist ideology), since it is the latter ideology which informs this folk self-understanding of psychedelics (and capitalist ideology which informs bourgeois psychological theory). To Flynt’s claim that “when private hallucinatory experience becomes a topic, there is overwhelming encouragement to conceive and interpret it as evidence of acquired supernatural powers and verification of religious doctrine,” I would add that there is also an overwhelming encouragement to conceive and interpret the psychedelic experience as evidence for the ‘naturalness’ and ‘correctness’ of one’s pre-existing ideology, religious or otherwise.

This brings us to the important recognition that no psychedelic experience can exist outside of ideology. Because of the massive popular confusion around ideology, which mostly manifests as a rejection of its material existence, this point is often completely lost both on ordinary subjects of psychedelic ideology and on theoretical and clinical psychologists (not to mention the majority of the public). It is only through such a confusion that the fourth belief of psychedelic culture is possible. Let us now examine this fourth belief.

Belief (4): Following from (1), (2), and (3): psychedelic drugs offer some universal experience that is historically invariable. As such, psychedelics can be used ‘correctly’ and ‘incorrectly,’ the former being the route to this universal experience and the latter being the route to a culturally and psychologically claustrophobic experience, otherwise known as a ‘bad trip.’
Under this view, the ‘proper’ way of using psychedelic drugs has long been established (usually by ancient ‘wisdom traditions’ which are taken as transcendent truths). This leads to the popularity of literary (as well as literal) ‘guides’ which inform the subject precisely what to expect upon ingesting a particular psychedelic substance, as well as how and to what ends they should be using it in order to have a ‘good trip,’ and to avoid a ‘bad trip.’ Flynt says of the Psychedelic Craze of the 20th century, which he experienced directly:

... the Great Psychedelic Craze—an episode of social psychology—was far more influential and powerful (in some sense) than anyone’s unmediated experience of ingesting the drug. The coercion of fashion overwhelmed the population, telling people what psychedelics were and what they meant ... the trip itself?—The Tibetan Book of the Dead had to be its geography; and beware that you did not come back speaking classical Tibetan.

In other words, the dominant psychedelic ideology of the twentieth century not only merely ‘reflected’ the psychedelic experience of the time; it directly produced and structured such experiences through the mechanisms of social expectations and, in many cases, outright coercion—as well as through the fetishization of ‘ancient wisdom’ appropriated from Asian or South American religious traditions and put to the task of realizing bourgeois ends. In contemporary psychedelic culture, some of the bizarre expectations present during the Craze, which Flynt humorously describes in some detail, are still there to be discovered, though there have certainly been changes, both in content and emphasis, in psychedelic ideology—changes that can be traced to more contemporary forms of psychological theory and clinical practice, as well as the decline of bohemian ideology and the madness of the racist Orientalism of the mid-twentieth century psychedelic movement. In any case, Flynt’s account of the ideology of psychedelics (in his case LSD) imposed on his own
experience of the drug is remarkably similar to my own. I should add that while the ideological coercion in psychedelic culture is almost certainly performed unconsciously to a large extent (as is the case generally in ideological reproduction), the practice is remarkably sinister:

In general, my acquaintances invoked their priority to inflate their importance, and showed a troubling eagerness to use their priority to acquire control.

One might go so far as to say that psychedelics can be used as a remarkable catalyst in the process of ideological interpolation, although most psychedelic users would not see it this way, preferring to construe the psychedelic state as being revelatory of deeper truths. This is not the place to develop a theory of psychedelics and ideological interpolation, though such a project would surely be as interesting as it would be problematic.

C. Can we replace these beliefs with a more realistic and not-so-ideologically-saturated conception of psychedelic drugs? Perhaps. Such a conception would be very difficult to produce, if only because the psychedelic experience itself elevates the problem of ideology in general to a level of skillful obscurity which religious ideology can only but pay its humble respects to. For now, the question can be posed of what kinds of general experiences are psychedelics capable of producing? I will expand on two of those possible experiences, which are posited as binaries within psychedelic culture. I will draw again on Flynt’s essay, as his descriptions are far more lucid than what my poetic capabilities allow.
What does psychedelic culture mean when it applies moralizing modifiers such as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ to the noun ‘trip’? A ‘trip’ is the experience a subject has for the duration for which a given psychedelic drug is exerting its effect on the subject. Flynt describes what I would say psychedelic culture considers a ‘good trip’ as follows:

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\text{. . . psychedelics provide the ability to drift in fascination . . . the psychedelic experience shows what it means to relish the destination.}
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Note the similarity of this description to the contemporary language around mindfulness and meditation. Psychedelics provide the opportunity for a child-like engagement with the world—in other words, for an engagement with the world that \textit{appears} to be unconstrained by petty ‘culture’ or ideology—which is to say an engagement with the world that is ignorant of its own ideological reality.

What, then, is a ‘bad trip’?

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\text{. . . from the other side, the psychedelic experience becomes a searchlight on everyday life, exposing it as pedestrian, barren, grating—as a rat race to uphold contemptible identities and win contemptible prizes.}
\]

In other words, a ‘bad trip’ is a direct confrontation with social reality (whereas a ‘good trip’ is a repression of large parts of social reality for the purposes of making one particular part of reality immersive and enjoyable).

There is, of course, nothing particularly unique about these two kinds of experiences, broadly speaking. They are more or less available within ordinary consciousness, and require no visual or auditory hallucinations to be had (the experience of what is called manic depression, for example, can resemble the description of a ‘bad trip’ quite closely). It remains the case, however, that these two
modes of experience are so intensely amplified in the psychedelic state, such that their character overtakes experience in its totality, and subordinates perception itself to the psychedelic gaze in either of these two forms. It is gleeful childishness or sordid hyperawareness manifested in its utmost purity and lucidity. Take a further experiential description of Flynt’s that would surely be characterized as a ‘bad trip’ on the account of the dominant psychedelic ideology:

A pervasive feature of my trip was that my mood became hypersensitive; and that I lost my tolerance of annoyance. Common human tawdriness and irritating cultural artifacts such as grating music now threatened to make me rabid. What may have been involved was not only the stimulus qua noise, like a tree branch tapping a window, but my judgment of the human qualities behind the stimulus: human tawdriness and insensitivity.

There is a sense, then, in which a ‘bad trip’ is defined in large part by a hypersensitivity to our grim social reality, sometimes to the point that the subject becomes so disturbed by this reality that he substitutes it with terrifying delusions and hallucinations (when these delusions and hallucinations are not terrifying, and are rather comforting, then it is a ‘good trip’). Notice that this kind of contempt for—or rather disturbance at—culture, is very different from the kind of ‘countercultural’ delusion advocated for by psychedelic ideology. In psychedelic ideology, the rejection of the dominant culture is viewed as individually liberating, because according to psychedelic ideology, it is the individual which has sole agency to access her innermost self apart from the ‘illusions’ of culture and often, for that matter, of material and social reality altogether. During a ‘bad trip,’ what happens rather is that one becomes disturbed by cultural and social realities precisely because of the recognition of just how real they are, of the difficulty of repressing them, and of the impossibility of escaping them as individuals.
This becomes clear if one pays attention to the kinds of strategies employed to ‘handle’ a ‘bad trip.’ This strategy typically involves convincing the subject under the influence that the social realities which disturb her are illusions, hallucinations, and nothing more, and that things will soon go back to ‘normal,’ which is to say that ideological reality will return to its state of appearing natural, inevitable, and unconcerning.

D. In summary, the core features which constitute the folk self-understanding of ‘ordinary’ or ‘non-clinical’ psychedelic subjects on the nature of psychedelic drugs are: a deluded sense of transcending ideology, and the reproduction of the ideologies of academic and clinical psychology (centered around the myth of self-contained individualism, which may be obscured by an appeal to universality, as well as reaching for psychological or ‘neuroscientific’ theories to explain one’s experience); a sense of possessing a privileged perspective on all matters of social (and, if the subject is brave enough, physical) reality; a misguided and impossible ‘counterculture’ ideology which is the farthest thing from ‘counter’ to the culture which it derides; the medicalization of one’s experience. The common fabric which threads these features together is a fundamental confusion regarding the relationship between ideology and so-called ‘conscious experience,’ a confusion shared by most psychologists and, as critical thinkers about Buddhism know, by most meditation teachers and practitioners, many of whom are quite enthusiastic about psychedelic drugs (likely for the sole reason that it reinforces their delusions).

To follow: "A Social Critique of Psychedelic Therapy"