

The acts of altering the sober mental state and making art have been somewhat synonymous throughout history. As the human mind evolved and became more complex, so followed the birth of curiosity, leading people to seek to alter their consciousness and express it in whichever way they could: through song, dance and or rudimentary forms of painting and writing. From Native Americans and their use of peyote (mescaline) to Ancient Egyptians and their use of blue lotus, getting high has been an act present through anthropological history. Archaeological evidence shows that humans were taking opium and magic mushrooms as far back as 10,000 years ago. Some scholars even believe that a few notable Greeks, like Pythagoras, couldn't have come up with their genius theories and philosophies *without* some form of drug use (Knox, 2019). Even after thousands of years, a certain mystery still surrounds the topic of drugs and art. So why are we still so intrigued, and still have so considerably little knowledge about the two of these topics entwined?

During my first psychedelic experience, my mind seemed to heavily consider art - in the way that *everything* looked as if it were art. I was overwhelmed by the feeling that all things somehow made sense - that classic feeling of mass unity that psychedelics are often said to bring about. I looked through books of images and photographs on my phone and felt like I connected with the artist behind each one. Art that I would, in my sober mind, consider to be 'bad' or not to my taste, simply appeared to me as a manifestation of some part of the human psyche, and thus seemed to be filled with meaning and purpose. Inspired by my own experiences with psychoactive substances, I would like to use this essay to explore the development of psychedelics through time, as well as the effect that an altered state of consciousness, especially concerning psychedelic drugs such as LSD, psilocybin mushrooms and marijuana, has on various creative practices.

First Key Word - Drugs

Two of the most prolific people in the advancement of understanding LSD and similar psychedelic drugs that became popular in the 20th century were Aldous Huxley, who was an author, and British psychiatrist Humphrey Osmond. In 1954, Huxley published his experiences of the drug mescaline, a psychedelic very similar to LSD, in an essay named *The Doors of Perception*. In this essay, Huxley expressed his view that drugs such as mescaline allow the user to access his or her "Mind at Large," a state of consciousness in which one may appreciate thoughts, feelings, and sensations that the brain normally filters out because they are not relevant to homeostasis (Meneer, 2015). After much correspondence about the subject, it was Osmond that combined the words

psyche (mind, soul, spirit) and *dēlos* (clear, manifest) from the Greek language, thus coining the term 'psychedelic'. (Bonneau 2018)

It was the scientific exploration and tales of other-worldly visual experiences undertaken by Osmond and Huxley that launched the interest amongst scientific and creative-types alike in the 1960s. This includes, perhaps most prolifically, Harvard scholars Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert (now Ram Dass). At the age of 40, Leary was profoundly affected by an experience whereby he consumed psilocybin mushrooms whilst on a trip to Mexico. He would later describe taking them as “the deepest religious experience of [his] life” (Meneer, 2015).

Following his return to Harvard that year, he introduced magic mushrooms to Richard Alpert, and thus began the Harvard Psilocybin Project - a project that administered psilocybin to graduate students from the university and asked them to write reports describing their experiences of taking the drug. In addition to the official activities that the pair were running through Harvard, Leary's home in Massachusetts is said to have become a hub of psychedelic experimentation. It is here that Leary introduced psychedelic drugs to many prominent creatives and intellectuals of the era, including Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs, Maynard Ferguson, Alan Watts, and Huston Smith (Meneer, 2015). The publication of Alpert and Leary's book in the summer of 1964, *The Psychedelic Experience: A Manual Based on The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, a guide on how to take and experience psychedelic drugs, further helped with the dissemination of psychedelic culture, even reaching perhaps the most prolific people in 1960's popular culture - the Beatles.

It was my interest in the Beatles that first introduced me to the idea of psychedelics, and they are a classic example regarding the use of mind-altering substances for creative processes. The track “Tomorrow Never Knows” on their 1966 *Revolver* album is a great example of this. At the time of its release, the song was by far the most experimental piece of music the Beatles and their producer, George Martin, had created to date. John Lennon wrote the lyrics following his own experience with LSD after reading *The Psychedelic Experience* by Leary and Alpert. When questioned about his inspiration for writing the album Lennon said:

[Timothy] Leary was the one who was going around saying, “Take it, take it, take it,” and we followed his instructions in *The Book of the Dead*, his how-to-take-a-trip book. I did it just like he said in the book, and then I wrote “Tomorrow Never Knows,” which is almost the first acid song. (Beatlesinterviews.org, 2019)

Following this, the Beatles' music evolved at a rapid pace and they went on to create many more songs of this sort of surreal aesthetic, changing the world of rock music as they went. Their vision of the transmigration of the soul was an eerie and credible rendition of what taking LSD might sound like. Other bands – the Grateful Dead, Jefferson Airplane, Quicksilver Messenger Service, the Doors and Pink Floyd – tried making music from within that state of mind itself, in extended improvisation passages. (Gilmore, 2016) In this way, I think it is fair to say that the use of psychedelics such as LSD, contributed to the evolution of creative processes of making music in the 60's and 70's, which in turn has birthed and inspired many creative methods in the years since.

Furthermore, as well as helping to birth new forms of creativity, psychedelic drugs can also be seen to help with the understanding of art. The perception of some kind of common understanding, sometimes referred to as a mass consciousness, is something widely documented in literature concerning drug use and the arts. As explored through his own experience of drugs, Walter Benjamin in his writings *On Hashish*, writes that these mind alterations allowed for him to experience a deeper understanding of art:

“I suddenly understood, how a painter – didn't it happen to Rembrandt and many others? - would find ugliness appearing as a true reservoir of beauty, or better, as a treasure keeper for beauty, as the torn mountains with all of the contained gold of beauty, with beauty flashing from the wrinkles, glances, and expressions.” (Benjamin, 2006)

Benjamin valued these insights gained from his psychoactive experiences, which he would later use as an art critic. (Marincolo, 2019)

Second Key Word - Altered

From as early as the Stone Age, evidence can be found for the presence of altered states of consciousness in art. It has been hypothesized that some of the earliest art ever created by humans, such as the cave paintings in Lascaux, relate to visuals found to be induced linked to an altered state of mind. Specifically known as "Turing instabilities," these hallucinations are common after ingesting a number of different plants with psychoactive properties. The patterns resemble "neural patterns" that mimic the structural makeup of the brain. (Froese, Woodward and Ikegami, 2013). Early archeological findings such as these also support the 'Stoned Ape' theory, in which

psychedelics advocate Terence McKenna argued in his book *Food of The Gods* that what enabled Homo erectus to evolve into Homo sapiens was its encounter with magic mushrooms and psilocybin, the psychedelic compound within them, on that evolutionary journey. (Sloat, 2019) That is, that this act of altering the mind is what allowed mankind to expand their consciousness and develop their creativity in order to learn new concepts and invent new things, such as spoken language.

Moving on to more modern times, one of the most obviously prominent figures of the 20th century to explore the idea of altered states of consciousness was Sigmund Freud. In particular, his foundational text for psychoanalysis, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), was revolutionary in analysing mysteries of dream symbolism and became very influential to creative types interested in the subconscious, such as those involved in the surrealist movement. Interestingly, Freud's ideas about the different layers of the consciousness are thought to come from his own use of mind-altering drugs, particularly cocaine. According to an article titled '*How Cocaine influenced the work of Sigmund Freud*' by Vice, not only did cocaine influence psychoanalysis – from the discovery of the "royal road to the unconscious" in dreams, and the therapy based on that, to the intellectual discipline itself – but Freud influenced the number of nostrils into which cocaine found its way. Indeed, according to Dominic Streatfeild, author of *Cocaine: An Unauthorised Biography*, "If there is one person who can be held responsible for the emergence of cocaine as a recreational pharmaceutical, it was Freud." (Oliver, 2017)

There is also recent empirical evidence to suggest that altering our mental state may have a positive effect on creative practices. In a study by researchers at the Imperial College London, 20 patients were given weekly microdoses of psilocybin and tested for a range of personality traits. Among them was "openness," which, according to the researchers, is at the crux of imagination, aesthetic appreciation, non-conformity, and creativity. After 3 months, results showed that the patients displayed a significant increase in "openness" (Erritzoe et al., 2018).

Furthermore, adding another interesting dimension to this relationship, here is also research to suggest that art itself may lead to an altered state of consciousness. For example, when listening to music, researchers have found that brain waves move from the high-beta of normal waking consciousness down into the meditative (trance-inducing) ranges of alpha and theta. Meanwhile, levels of stress hormones like norepinephrine and cortisol drop, while social bonding and reward chemicals like dopamine, endorphins, serotonin, and oxytocin spike. (Artsy.net, 2019)

Third Key Word - Psyche

Sigmund Freud's theory of art focuses on the ideas of what leads people to make art. His understanding of art was centred around an artist's psyche, their innermost self, and their reasons for what they create. According to Freud, his theory was to:

“...take inter-relations between the impressions of the artist's life, his chance experiences and his works and from them construct his [mental] constitution and the instinctual impulses at work in it – that is to say that part of him he shared with all men” (Glover, n.d.).

In this way, we can view creative practices to be explicitly linked to the expression of unconscious feelings and even biological or evolutionary elements, such as sex and anger. Freud therefore considers art as a manifestation of one's unconscious desires or fears.

Another important name in terms of evaluating the relationship between art and the role of the human psyche is Carl Jung. Similarly to Freud's art theory, Jungian psychology places a large emphasis on the relationship between an artistic outcome and the relationship that it has to the human psyche. Jung believed that art itself had no inherent meaning, suggesting that perhaps it is like nature – something that simply “is”. (Dilks, 2019). He suggested through many of his writings that art was, in fact, an unconscious expression, stating that: “personal causes have as much or as little to do with a work of art as the soil with the plant that springs from it.” (Jung, CW 15, Para 115.) He often likened art to the unconscious nature of dreams - both are acts of translating deep unconscious processes into visual, conscious forms;

“The artist seizes on this image, and in raising it from deepest unconsciousness, he brings it into relation with conscious values, thereby transforming it until it can be accepted by the minds of his contemporaries according to their powers”
(Jung, CW 15, Para 130)

Jung found that great creativity lay in an altered mind through his own personal experience, through looking beneath the conscious realm. However, he did not seek these experiences through psychoactive substances, but rather through almost entertaining his own mental illness - he was thought to have suffered with some form of psychosis. Jung began a project whereby he would actively induce hallucinations - what

he called “active imaginations.” He found himself in a liminal place, as full of creative abundance as it was of potential ruin, believing it to be the same borderlands traveled by both lunatics and great artists (Corbett, 2019). These views are important in relation to my topic because it suggests that if art is indeed an innate process, then the acts of altering the mind have an undeniable effect on creativity.

Contextualisation of the question

After briefly exploring these 3 key words it is obvious that there is great room for expansion on the topic of the mind in its altered states and the effect that it may have on creativity. Since studying psychology at A-Level I have always been interested in what lies beneath the conscious mind and, more recently, the way in which psychoactive substances can reveal this. Paired with my love for art, it seems natural to explore the relationship between these two topics further going forward in my practice. With regards to my dissertation, I would like to expand further on some of the topics I've mentioned, especially both Freudian and Jungian psychology, and various hypotheses such as Terrence McKenna's 'Stoned Ape' theory. I would also like to go in to more detail about various artistic practices, discussing more in depth specific mediums such as painting and photography and expanding on topics such as music that I've already touched upon. I hope to explore these concepts through a question such as this:

Explore the effects that an altered state of consciousness, especially concerning psychedelic drugs such as LSD, psilocybin mushrooms and marijuana, may have on various creative practices.

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