

Managed Madness:

Foucault & McKenna's Use of Madness and The Psychedelic Experience As A Tool of Critique

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Abstract

Academia offers us many theoretical lenses through which we may find alternative perspectives to prevailing social narratives, but the ones established are not the only ones used outside of academic circles. To the French philosopher Michel Foucault, madness serves as a lens through which we can look at the culture and provide a critique. To society, what more terrifying notion might there be than to entertain the thought that a madman may know something deeper and truer than you; something you are too terrified to even try to know? The psychedelic experience in many ways fits the same template of madness as described by Michel Foucault, but to confirm this possibility I look to the literature of lecturer, author and psychedelic drug advocate, Terence McKenna. The madness Foucault describes is not, for instance, a direct comparison from specific forms of schizophrenia, or other well-known classifications to a state induced by the use of LSD, but rather the state that is understood as one outside the bounds of polite society; the animalistic, the fantastic, prelinguistic and the morbid. Foucault defines madness as folly and goes on to describe its use. “Folly also has its academic pastimes; it is the object of argument, it contends against itself; it is denounced, and defends itself by claiming that it is closer to happiness and truth than reason, that it is closer to reason than reason itself” (p. 29)

Though many scholars are familiar with the psychedelic experience, they have made little to no effort to show its value as a tool of critique in academic discussions. But we know that those who have participated in this experience often name it as one of the most transformative in their lives, providing them with a new perspective. There is no present academic discussion about how the psychedelic experience and Michel Foucault’s description of madness as a tool of critique find common ground, but Foucault’s fascination with the place where ideas meet in the

prelinguistic state sit harmoniously with McKenna's arguments about the psychedelic experience being more meaningful than words can describe. McKenna and Foucault both argue the limitations of language to capture a true taxonomy of natural experience. My research argues that the madness described by Michel Foucault in many ways matches the same mental state of what I have termed managed madness, a state which is temporarily induced by the psychedelic experience. Since Foucault claims that madness serves as a critique of culture, it is an unanswered question whether or not psychedelics do the same. Though Foucault argues that madness serves as a critique of society, only the 'madman' can have this perspective, making it difficult to confirm for the non-mad. Because the psychedelic experience is a kind of managed madness, a state that sane people can experience temporarily and return from, it allows us to reflect upon Foucault's claim by giving us the sense of madness and the ability to return from it and utilize this alternative perspective. This perspective constitutes a new theoretical framework known as the psychedelic lens.

In 2017, an interview between Boom California writer, Heather Dundas and Simeon Wade surfaced which shed new light on an element of Foucault's life that was previously unknown.. Wade was a close friend of Michel Foucault and in the interview he described his experience of taking LSD with Foucault. From the account of Foucault's own psychedelic experience by Wade, we know that Foucault was deeply moved, and by this account we understand that Foucault understood things in a new way, a way that was felt, not just intellectualized and indeed a confirmation of many of his suspicions long held about that gap between thought and language. In *The Order of Things* Foucault (1973) gives a taste of his thoughts on this when he says, "If man's knowledge is finite, it is because he is trapped, without

possibility of liberation, within the positive contents of language, labor, and life; and inversely, if life, labor, and language may be posited in their positivity, it is because knowledge has finite forms” (p. 380).

What a relief and epiphany it must have been for him to have seen the mad state as he so elegantly defined it, finally looking through the madman’s eyes and laughing in the face of death, having “disarmed it”. Finitude, the term Foucault used in much of his literature, was, according to Wade, no longer a part of Foucault’s writing. In this, we see that death was disarmed in Foucault's own mind. *Madness and Civilization* (1973), perhaps his most noteworthy work, had been lived for a short while through the practice of managed madness.

I argue that the psychedelic experience produces an experience so powerful and out of the ordinary that those who choose to use it as a philosophical tool are actually performing an act that confirms Foucault’s theory of madness as a form critique.

Keywords: Psychedelics, Psychedelic Lens, Madness, Critique, Theoretical Framework, Subjectivity, Managed Madness

Managed Madness: The Psychedelic Use of Madness As A Tool of Critique

Introduction

Perception is a delicate thing which makes it so difficult for us to find common ground at times. It is because of this difficulty that we utilize language. Language is the cornerstone of our reality and the primary building block of our shared perception. Many people have had experiences that have changed the way they see the world and I'm no stranger to these phenomena. There was one particular experience that was so confounding, so life-changing and transformative that the entire course of my life shifted. Truth be told it is the very reason why I'm writing this now and it began with curiosity. I had heard of a psychedelic brew known as ayahuasca utilized in the jungles of South America by shamans, and the stories I had heard of its effects astounded me. The primary ingredient in ayahuasca is dimethyltryptamine. This particular substance can be synthesized by extraction from *Mimosa Hostilis* root bark. When it is isolated and smoked or injected it generates the most astonishing experience that a human can have to the end of testing the boundaries of one's reality.

It was in the spirit of curiosity that I sought and found the substance known in shorthand as DMT; it was 2010 and I was alone in my apartment in Queens, New York, sitting on my couch and gazing out the window beset by two large bookcases. If I could describe who I was at the time moments before inhaling DMT I would say that I was a classic example of an American trying to live the American dream, donning a suit and tie every day and focusing on making money, gaining prestige, and savoring those choice moments in which I was not entrenched in the struggle to be on top. All of this was about to change in 15 minutes time. After consuming

the DMT, the experience I was having with my eyes open was no different than the experience I was having with my eyes closed. What was only seconds earlier a mundane apartment now became a diamond-encrusted menagerie of translucent figures, geometric shapes, and floating objects of rainbow light. The bookshelves lurched in my direction and the plants that sat beside the window bowed forward as if to reach out to me with their tendrils. *Everything was alive.* I began to laugh maniacally as I looked down at my own hands and with shock and awe observed that they looked like the hands of a 90-year-old man. Without saying anything audibly, a voice that seemed to be outside of myself conveyed to me the idea that my body was just a kind of capsule or a vessel that I was using. My body wasn't me.

Up to this point, everything in my life had become a kind of jaded dance in which I was looking for sex, popularity, glory and ever-increasing wealth. And in that single moment all of that drive was erased when I looked down and saw my hands; a direct and more real than real vision. I was sure to die, but my death didn't matter, my popularity didn't matter, my money didn't matter, I had tasted a glimpse of the infinite. I immediately felt like there was an essence to life that I had lost, something that I had forgotten like a name that sits on the tip of your tongue but won't be uttered. It was then that my direction changed and I now identify as a psychedelic person. Simply put, a psychedelic person is one who has endeavored successfully to find and enact methods of piercing standard perceptive boundaries at least once in their lifetime.

There was something about that experience that made me feel truths rather than think of them in abstraction, like the difference between being told about the joy of eating pizza and actually eating pizza. This direct experience rent the veil between the reality that I had known and the one that sat ever present on the other side of a tryptamine infused experience. Since

then, dozens and dozens of similar and even more intense experiences with psychedelic substances have continued to reinforce the idea that the reality we share is a tenuous one. Something about its effects burns away the rhetoric of social conditioning, advertisements, political arguments, and religious assertions. For me, the psychedelic experiences I've had are the most direct and powerful experiences of my life, transcending my own religious and socially constructed assumptions. Though this is not an unfamiliar concept in the humanities, it has never really been justified and acknowledged when speaking about the philosophical significance of psychedelic perspectives in academia.

The challenge that I faced after my initial psychedelic change in perception was that others did not see what I saw and so I turned to write about these experiences and the perspectives that they gave. I looked to other writers and found that psychedelic literature operated often as a critique of the culture that the writer lived in. Famous for his fictional work, *A Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley was an avid seeker of sorts, spending his private time in the study of eastern thought and pursuing methods of ecstasy not yet common in Western experience. He became immensely influential as a psychedelic writer with his autobiographical non-fiction book, *The Doors of Perception*:

That humanity at large will ever be able to dispense with Artificial Paradises seems very unlikely. Most men and women lead lives at the worst so painful, at the best so monotonous, poor and limited that the urge to escape, the longing to transcend themselves if only for a few moments, is and has always been one of the principal appetites of the soul. (1954, p. 48)

I identified with Huxley's assertion that my life was painful, monotonous, poor and limited, but it led me to ask why. There was a transformation that had occurred in which I wanted to escape the artificial paradise, not by doing lots of drugs, but by shedding as many things that distracted me from that essence of life which I had lost. Conversely, I cannot say in honesty that I would have had this kind of transformation without psychedelic experimentation. The tension lies in seeing one like Huxley experimenting with psychedelic drugs, while at the same time enjoying literary and intellectual recognition. Would anyone characterize him as a drug addict for experimenting, and what about the less educated, or those who are not famous, or low income? Do they or I get the same respect, or does achievement serve as a license for experimentation? It was clear to me that there was a sensible path I could tread with these considerations in mind.

I wondered to myself how this was any different from a massive change of heart, a kind of spiritual awakening in which the material world held less sway over me. I had lost my psychedelic virginity and it could not be undone. In that first experience with DMT my fear of death was erased and my sense of connection to the natural world increased. The plants that reached out to me seemed to reach for connection, kinship, and cohabitation and I not only saw but felt it all. The room seemed to sing for harmony. Now, the sanity I sought after, making money and being successful, became nonsensical. The idea that value was held solely in the realm of what could be acquired seemed silly. In the aftermath of that first DMT trip, the box I called my apartment seemed lackluster in contrast to the forests of the world, distant and estranged from my periphery. In my continued research to find others who had this

transformation of perception, I came across the literature and speeches of Terence McKenna.

The most compelling thing I first heard him say that resonated directly with me was,

We have to create culture, don't watch TV, don't read magazines, don't even listen to NPR. Create your own roadshow. The nexus of space and time where you are now is the most immediate sector of your universe, and if you're worrying about Michael Jackson or Bill Clinton or somebody else, then you are disempowered, you're giving it all away to icons, icons which are maintained by an electronic media so that you want to dress like X or have lips like Y. This is shit-brained, this kind of thinking. That is all cultural diversion, and what is real is you and your friends and your associations, your highs, your orgasms, your hopes, your plans, your fears. And we are told 'no', we're unimportant, we're peripheral. 'Get a degree, get a job, get a this, get a that.' And then you're a player, you don't want to even play in that game. You want to reclaim your mind and get it out of the hands of the cultural engineers who want to turn you into a half-baked moron consuming all this trash that's being manufactured out of the bones of a dying world. (Reclaim Your Mind [Terence McKenna])

It was this statement, “consuming all this trash that’s being manufactured out of the bones of a dying world” that cemented the feeling that I felt, this sense that my very existence was causing a strain on resources, that my behaviors were having a direct effect upon the world in which I lived. It was a feeling that came on so strong from the psychedelic experience that I began to change my behavioral patterns. I had seen, felt and experienced something that made me laugh maniacally at the assumptions, narratives, and ideas that had made the reality I shared with humanity a farce. It was this moment of madness that made me see the world as mad when

I returned from the psychedelic experience. The artificial paradise I had accepted as reality would no longer suffice.

It is this positionality which has driven me to drastic changes in my career, relationships, and life goals. I've gone on a literal quest to strip as many of the societal notions of worth and value as I can and have gone to great lengths to be able to share them with a broader audience. I had to temporarily lose shared reality in order to see the madness that was accepted as normal. Our way of life is untenable and yet we operate as if we are innocent subjects in a play of reality, docile and accepting of the stories we are told about the world we live in. There is revolution in a change of perception and the psychedelic experience is a powerful tool in changing our perception, playing a trickster's role, cartoonifying our reality; bringing ourselves to a managed madness. It's important to provide this autoethnography, because the nature of the psychedelic experience is so very out of the ordinary from the traditional spectrum of human experience, especially in terms of how it is discussed and approached from an academic perspective. It's important to bring this empathetic perspective to the reading, because we are trying to get closer to how deeply a gestalt type experience can transcend all other means of logic, reason and rhetoric.

Chapter 1: A Philosopher's New Set of Eyes

In this thesis, I argue that as a tool of philosophy, the psychedelic experience shows us at least three things: 1) It offers us a felt sense of what the philosopher holds in theory. 2) It offers a new form of sight in which the banal becomes sublime and the layers of our perception are peeled back, and that historically can be seen in a number of cultural practices, such as the Eleusinian cult rites; 3) It provides a relief from the macabre sense of our own finitude and a palpable sense of connection with the eternal essence of all being. We can look to Michel Foucault's own psychedelic experience to see evidence of my claims. Foucault's psychedelic experience in Death Valley was pivotal for him as a philosopher. His experience was not original but in fact a rite of passage which has historical precedence. It is not that Foucault was an incomplete philosopher without his psychedelic experience, it is that his already brilliant ideas were confirmed and clarified by it. Terence McKenna claimed that one of the benefits that psychedelic experiences have is to allow the philosopher to speak from the felt authority of experience. Speaking about himself and his own popularity, McKenna says of the psychedelic experience, "people say, 'you say things that nobody else ever says,' 'You speak clearly.' The social consequence of the psychedelic experience is clear thinking - which trickles down as clear speech. Empowered speech" (1993, p.21) and this is exactly stated about the results of Foucault's LSD experience, by his friend, Simeon Wade.

Foucault was so inspired by his psychedelic experience that he reportedly rewrote volumes 2 and 3 of *The History Of Sexuality*. I argue that Foucault does not use the experience to extol the virtues of LSD, but rather uses his new perspective as a tool of philosophy; a lens that clarifies things from a place that Foucault had only perceived in his theory. Whatever Foucault's speech was in the first manuscripts of *The History of Sexuality* volumes 2 and 3, he felt compelled to empower and clarify that speech. McKenna again sounds like he could be speaking directly to a psychedelically inspired Foucault, especially in light of Foucault's dissection of history:

It sees us as historical creatures. It has this above everything point of view where it isn't dealing in the slice of the moment. It's dealing with the phenomenon of the monkeys over the last million years; that's how it sees us. You can assimilate some of its viewpoints by having a real feeling for the ancestors, all the people who are dead, the people who went before." (1993 p. 82-83)

In his famous debate with Noam Chomsky, Foucault speaks to the grids of our understanding creating new platforms for our ideas while obfuscating other concepts worth keeping. This god's eye view as I describe it, peers through those grids and resurrects them from the discarded corners of human history. Foucault, possibly above all else was known for his dissection of historical foundations for our present understanding and the wisdom, wise or foolish, which we have left behind.

It's important to know the perspective that Foucault holds, especially in his book *Madness and Civilization* and how readily that perspective plays into the psychedelic experience. Madness is perhaps the most feared state of being that a human can have, but one that Foucault argues may hold special forms of knowledge, that sense of reason dazzled must have been so profoundly confirmed in his own psychedelic experience and can be assumed evident, given the descriptions of Foucault's reaction by his psychedelic partners in Death Valley. Terence McKenna's role in this is something like a commentator, reacting from that god's eye view, describing how the thoughts unfold and the "Logos" becomes felt in a liminal space beyond language. While McKenna's rhetoric often eludes the moorings of scientific and philosophical rigor, his approach bridges the gap between the folk knowledge roundly eschewed in academia and the formal educational terms, but regardless of the preferred methods of nomenclature, it's often, to my eyes as if McKenna was speaking directly to Foucault (though of course to my knowledge, no other academics have paired the two).

In this first chapter I've expressed how Foucault's work was made more clear by his psychedelic experience. In chapter 2 I give an overview of Foucault's theory of madness and how it pairs with psychedelic tropes in interesting ways for the philosopher. Chapter 3 shows us how Terence McKenna's narration of the psychedelic experience and its resultant influences and perceptions give us a clear parallel to Foucault's theory of madness lived out as well as an overview of the psychedelic experience as a historically venerated boundary dissolving tool of philosophers of the Hellenized world. Chapter 4 gives an overview of Foucault's friend, Simeon Wade's interview with Heather Dundas about Foucault's LSD experience. Two other qualitative interviews are conducted with interviewees Z and V respectively, both while they are

experiencing psychedelics respectively. This chapter draws some resultantly obvious parallels between the three interviews and McKenna's classic discussions about the philosophical benefits of psychedelics. Chapter 5 offers my final thoughts on how all of these threads of discourse intertwine, establishing the psychedelic lens and its methodology of managed madness and opening new channels of discourse for philosophers seeking novel tools of analysis and reflection.

Chapter 2: Foucault's Perspective on Madness

The work of French philosopher Michel Foucault began with his book, *Madness and Civilization*. In this book, Foucault addresses many issues pertaining to madness by way of defining it in the classical sense, showing how cultural changes helped to develop the modern clinic as we know it, the effect that language plays upon our perceptions, and on the treatment of those who are deemed “mad.” It should be made clear that for the sake of this discussion, I am not looking to Foucault for an absolute idea of madness defined, but rather demonstrating the sliver of space in which madness, its division from acceptable societal behavior, its baring of animalistic elements of behavior and its disquieting exposure of our lack of control, serves as a mirror to society. This space is demonstrably fearful to tread, but it is important to face the unpleasant in order to draw from it the value and knowledge that can transform worldviews. This is also not to be construed as a glorification of madness, or the tremendous suffering that it can bring, but rather a demonstration of how Foucault has shown the value of being exposed to madness so that we may gain perspective on our own ways. It should be noted that when I speak of “we” or “us”, I am speaking to both society at large and the individual who is seeking to understand the nature of our perception of reality.

In *Madness and Civilization*, Michel Foucault (1965) leads the reader on a journey fraught with insights to the mystery, terrors, and trials of the treatment of madness and how this acts as a kind of case study for the general perspective and health of Western society. It is in the spirit of finding the root cause of our treatment of the madman that Foucault pursues this question and in it, he finds a bit of madness in our own methods and behaviors, showing that the

madman, the leper, the social pariah might surprisingly be the true sane man looking in on the asylum of Western sensibility.

Foucault begins with the story of the advent of the leper in Europe, having appeared as a result of the interactions of the crusades, which brought back this plague from the Middle East. As the lepers dotted the outskirts of small towns, special buildings known as Lazar Houses were erected to tend to them. But as the crusades waned, the leper also faded from view. To this Foucault says:

Leprosy disappeared, the leper vanished, or almost, from memory; these structures remained. Often, in these same places, the formulas of exclusion would be repeated, strangely similar two or three centuries later. Poor vagabonds, criminals, and “deranged minds” would take the part played by the leper, and we shall see what salvation was expected from this exclusion (p.22)

What the leper left in his wake was the advent of a place of exclusion, an idea in the minds of European society of the person that is different, set apart and otherwise not acceptable in common society. This place, or form as Foucault calls it does not go away with the leper, but rather seeks to be occupied by some new pariah that will take the place of the leper. This is where the madman makes his entrance into our history, with the mysterious appearance of the “Ship of fools.” Though the custom is not fully understood, mad men were given into the keeping of men who sailed along the rivers of Europe. And the definitions used in the literature of Sebastian Brant of fools has more to do with the foolishness of religious immorality than with a lack of connection to social norms for mental health. In his use of the term in the book, *Ship of*

Fools, Sebastian Brant (1509) incorporates it in his middle-ages satirical literature when he speaks of the fools who stay out late playing music in the cold of the night and causing a ruckus:

He is a fole that wandreth by nyght in feld or towne, in company or alone. Playnge at his lemmans dore withouten lyght till all his body be colde as lede or stone. These folys knockynge tyll the nyght be gone. At that season thoughe that they fele no colde shall it repent and fele whan they be olde” (p.296)

But the earliest known use of the term comes from Book VI of Plato’s *Republic* in which he provides an analogy of fools and their teachability. The fools are so obsessed with their own hubris that they do not understand how lost they are without a proper philosopher captain:

The crew are arguing about pilotage; everyone thinks he ought to be the pilot, although he knows nothing of the art, and cannot tell us who taught him or where he learnt it...They use up all the stores, drinking and feasting, and make such a voyage as you might expect with such men. (p. 286)

With Brant, the fool is one who is unable to see the folly of staying out late in the cold, while to Plato, the fool is the one who believes they are wise but are incapable of clear thinking. Back to Foucault’s ship captains, they were charged with keeping and transporting the madmen elsewhere when the local villages could not handle their presence any longer. According to Foucault: “Often the cities of Europe must have seen these “ships of fools” approaching their harbors.” This approaching ship of fools captured the imagination of the artists of the time, most famous among them is perhaps the painting by Bosch which depicts this ‘dream fleet’. To Foucault, what this voyage meant was different to the town than it was to the madman:

To hand a madman over to sailors was to be permanently sure he would not be prowling beneath the city walls; it made sure that he would go far away; it made him a prisoner of his own departure. But water adds to this the dark mass of its own values; it carries off, but it does more: it purifies. (p. 22)

The idea is complex for the madman and simple for the townsfolk who have rid themselves of the madman. Now that the madman is bereft of his homeland and bound for another likely inhospitable land, it is the water that becomes the liminal realm in which he is the 'Passenger par excellence' (p. 22) and he embodies more than the simple transport of one who falls outside the bounds of societal norms. The ship of fools was a dream-like image in the minds of Europeans, to Foucault, crossing the dark waters through the myst in the corners of the minds of the artists of the day. This image conjured up a great deal of power, because: "It symbolized a great disquiet, suddenly dawning on the horizon of European culture at the end of the Middle Ages. Madness and the madman become major figures, in their ambiguity: menace and mockery, the dizzying unreason of the world, and the feeble ridicule of men." (p.31)

To Foucault, this ambiguity is closer to a kind of reality that society did not wish to perceive because it represented the yawning void; that future in the arms of death. In death's embrace there was no need for the grand gestures of polite society, no room for piety, or eloquence, but rather an incoherence that fled to the dark corners of painted canvases where the incomprehensible would be held up like a prognostication of the future of every European: "Death's annihilation is no longer anything because it was already everything, because life itself was only futility, vain words, a squabble of cap and bells. The head that will become a skull is already empty. Madness is the déjà-là of death" (p. 38). And to Foucault, this direct contact with

the very nature of our mortality through the madman's eyes bore down upon minds then as it does for us now. To Foucault, this direct display of the domain of death was a depiction of the true nature of things, the inescapable promise of ever-present death. He continues,

What death unmasks was never more than a mask; to discover the grin of the skeleton, one need only lift off something that was neither beauty nor truth, but only a plaster and tinsel face. From the vain mask to the corpse, the same smile persists. But when the madman laughs, he already laughs with the laugh of death; the lunatic, anticipating the macabre, has disarmed it. (p.38)

To Foucault, madness was and perhaps is not necessarily a loss of perception, but rather serves as an alternative form of knowledge, one that is not always congruent with the society in which it is placed. To him, it may be representative of a mind that sees what others cannot and thus perceives the mundane as ultra-mundane, or incomprehensibly strange.

Foucault explores the possibility that the madman is not after all in the dark, but rather in a light we cannot understand: Madness is knowledge, "a difficult, hermetic, esoteric learning. These strange forms are situated, from the first, in the space of the Great Secret..." (p.38). And this great secret can only be beheld by the madman, inaccessible to all but him who is the subject of the experience. That which is muttered by the madman is lost in translation, rapture, and frenzy. This loss of clarity from the madman to the individuals exposed to him serves as a kind of precipice of meaning, as if, like Cassandra, the future has been told, but none but her can know it. This gap of understanding, a mixture of meaning and utterance that to the outsider is incomprehensible is the private domain of the madman. Foucault speaks to the heart of his madness likening it to a kind of mysticism by saying,

While the man of reason and wisdom perceives only fragmentary and all the more unnerving images of it, the Fool bears it intact as an unbroken sphere: that crystal ball which for all others is empty is in his eyes filled with the density of an invisible knowledge. (p.39)

In this sense, the problem of madness, despite the possibility that there is some kind of esoteric, hidden knowledge, is one of context. If the special reality of the madman and the consensus reality of the society in which he lives can never find common space, then the madman is forever trapped in what is externally perceived as nonsense. It is important to make this point, that Foucault can only speculate on this because of the subjectivity of madness.

But Foucault makes an argument for madness for its own sake, the idea that, "Folly also has its academic pastimes; it is the object of argument, it contends against itself; it is denounced and defends itself by claiming that it is closer to happiness and truth than reason, that it is closer to reason than reason itself" (p.32), and this argument can be made more demonstrably by understanding that Foucault was very critical of western notions of natural classification. Our units of weights and measures, terms and tables are a representation of the world, but not the world itself. Furthermore, the illusory nature of mistaking representation by analytical data as foundational can be problematic. Foucault is not alone in this idea, Stephen J. Gould's book, *The Mismeasure of Man* (1996) speaks to the term reification as a kind of linguistic reinforcement of the authority of a concept through a kind of self-reinforcement. According to Gould, "reification" occurs when we create something to represent or measure something that didn't actually exist before the measurement, like IQ. It's not real, but we act like something like IQ exists simply because we have tests that purport to measure IQ, but the tests literally construct

IQ out of nothing. IQ is not only a construct it is a reification. In one interpretation, you could say it is madness. Gould says:

I began using factor analysis to study the evolution of a group of fossil reptiles...and though it's mathematical basis is unassailable, its persistent use as a device for learning about the physical structure of intellect has been mired in deep conceptual errors from the start...Reification in this case, the notion that such a nebulous, socially defined concept as intelligence might be identified as a "thing" with a locus in the brain and a definite degree of heritability and that it might be measured as a single number, thus permitting a unilinear ranking of people according to the amount of it they possess. (p. 267-8)

Gould shows concern for assuming analytical metrics as a final say in intelligence in this way.

The metrics, though helpful in many ways cannot and do not give the full story. Foucault (1972) addresses this in *The Order of Things* and challenges us by saying,

"The possibility of a science of empirical orders requires, therefore, an analysis of knowledge – an analysis that must show how the hidden (and as it were confused) continuity of being can be reconstituted by means of the temporal connection provided by discontinuous representations" (p. 190).

Within this, Foucault argues that yes we do need some means of representation between knowledge and some kind of measure for it. Of course, Foucault's oeuvre definitely shows us the limitations of such measures.

So if we are to approach madness from the perspective of Gould and Foucault, our measure of madness may never be fully reasonable, or measurable. Though we can get a sense through cultural assumptions whether or not one is engaging in a way that reacts to a general

‘mad’ and ‘sane’ societal binary, there is a lot of room for error in the quantitative sense.

Madness as Foucault sees it is a strange thing, enviable in its defeat of death and embrace of all that confounds logic and at the same time, it is a lamentable state of being to be lost in it. Aldous Huxley refers to this when he speaks about the ‘reducing valve’, a kind of faucet in the mind which holds back the endless flood of all knowledge we retain in our minds so we can function in baseline reality (1954 p. 21). To Huxley, the mind does this on purpose so that we are not permanently tripping, unable to raise crops and children. With the sensor always turned off, however, we lose that mad and dazzled part of our humanity that Foucault is scratching at.

Neuroscientist and writer, Sam Harris provides further context in review of Huxley:

It is possible, however, if not actually plausible, to seize this evidence from the other end and argue, as Aldous Huxley did in his classic *The Doors of Perception*, that the primary function of the brain may be eliminative: Its purpose may be to prevent a transpersonal dimension of mind from flooding consciousness, thereby allowing apes like ourselves to make their way in the world without being dazzled at every step by visionary phenomena that are irrelevant to their physical survival. Huxley thought of the brain as a kind of “reducing valve” for “Mind at Large.” (Harris, 2011)

It’s clear that Foucault had a suspicion about the nebulous knowledge that madness held captive and his writing style implies to us that he wanted a taste of that forbidden fruit. In *The Order of Things*, Foucault describes representation as a space inside the mind where an idea is pre-linguistic and yet, because it is not bound to language, has no form. Language fills the space the representation creates, though language is incomplete in summing all that representation provides. This space is the hidden corner of Foucault’s theory of madness, the treasure chest in

the mind where logic and sanity and the structure of language fail to contain the prize. He says of this space in the mind: “Representations are not rooted in a world that gives them meaning; they open of themselves on to a space that is their own whose internal network gives rise to meaning. And language exists in the gap that representation creates for itself” (p. 165).

It is clear to me that Foucault understood how new perspectives informed old stories about our reality and how those new perspectives could be waiting in the headspace of representation. It is possible to conceive that Foucault’s interest in LSD had something to do with his focus on madness and hidden knowledge, as it was a contemporary discussion of his time. Huxley and other psychedelic pioneers had already made the link between madness and psychedelics and knowing this, it must have seemed like a test Foucault was interested in taking. Huxley, again states, “we were back home, and I had returned to that reassuring but profoundly unsatisfactory state known as “being in one’s right mind” (p.50).

Foucault’s curiosity and love of both the forbidden and the hidden artifacts of history, paired with his theory of madness and a desire to suss out any new tools newly available could reform old notions of knowledge. In the *Archeology of Knowledge* he says:

Historical descriptions are necessarily ordered by the present state of knowledge, they increase with every *transformation* and never cease, in turn, to break with themselves...The problem is no longer one of tradition, of tracing a line, but one of division, of limits; it is no longer one of lasting foundations, but one of transformations that serve as new foundations, the rebuilding of foundations. (p. 17)

It is plain to see that Foucault believed that madness held a secret that he wanted to know because he knew that transformations serve the new and rebuild the old ideas. Given the culture

of his company, a psychedelic trip would have seemed very timely for a philosopher looking for a new transformation to peer through the grid of history in a way only the madman could see.

Chapter 3: Terence McKenna & The Psychedelic Lens

Though, perhaps not well known in academia, Terence McKenna is the most influential writer on the psychedelic experience of the last twenty years. Graham St. John (2013), author of *Mystery School In Hyperspace: The History of DMT* says of McKenna, “Magister Ludi of the spoken word, Terence McKenna, would do more to articulate the experience and popularize the compound (DMT) than any other, his rare genius leaving his audience spellbound” (p.45). Indeed, many books and lectures confront a litany of arguments posed by western culture about the validity of the psychedelic experience as a spiritual tool, perspective of critique and human right.

When I came across the work of Terence McKenna, it was the first time I heard someone speak about the psychedelic experience from that subjective first-person perspective. The articulation was lucid and kaleidoscopic in tenor. His language ushered forth with a kind of passion and sureness that only fundamentalist preachers and dictators usually possess and yet his tone was not authoritarian, but definitely revolutionary. This was academic speak dimmed, morphed and changed for the ears of the eager everyman who was looking to know more, or perhaps find some assurance that the experience they had or were about to have on psychedelics was indeed important.

Important, valid, real, worthwhile, shocking and revelatory; these are the kinds of words that those who experience psychedelics use, but can't prove to a diametrically interested and critical world of non-initiates to the experience. This is the great contribution that McKenna brought us, a kind of rhetorical commentary on a psychedelic football game. Many have criticized him for his haste in considering odd notions and following them through to the point of

folly, but those who do so have not understood the theoretical framework that McKenna was operating under.

McKenna, like Timothy Leary and Aldous Huxley, committed one of the greatest crimes to the academic thinkers of the world; he messed with the formula and decided to take his message to the non-academic world. McKenna chose this route because he couldn't say what needed to be said in academia because academia wasn't ready. From 1960 on, Timothy Leary had led the new LSD religion by advocating its use in public and another prominent researcher John C. Lilly went off the deep end in 1965, disgracing himself with LSD fueled dolphin research which culminated in sexual activity between his wife and a dolphin (Waters, 2018). Such wild occurrences caused a stir so deep and catalyzing that the lid was clamped down tight on psychedelic research until the late 1990s when Dr. Rick Strassman was allowed to study the effects of DMT in a controlled setting at the University of New Mexico. For McKenna, rhetoric and mystically infused tropes of reality construction served as a launching pad for his quest to catapult us into his dream of Archaic Revival, a kind of Shamanism based return to nature, hybridized by modernity and technological advancement. Perhaps McKenna was unaware, but he was helping to put the finishing touches on an incubating theoretical framework that I call the psychedelic lens.

McKenna often expressed the idea that it was the western world that was mad, that the route most had chosen to follow led to certain ecological and mental misery. The idea that we are buying up trash manufactured out of the bones of a dying world gives us a strong idea of what McKenna is saying about the madness of everyday life. It is a matter of perspective, one that changes when one looks through the psychedelic lens. He describes how psychedelics break

down our cultural barriers like boundary dissolving agents. By showing us a mad menagerie of experience that is direct and personal, the psychedelic experience breaks the linear narrative which our everyday shared reality is comprised of. The benefit of leaving the mundane state of everyday consciousness, exploring the weird and returning once again to the mundane instantly ushers in a challenge to assumed notions of normality imposed upon us by the culture in which we live.

In Chaos, Creativity and Cosmic Consciousness, McKenna describes the state of being with and without what he refers to as 'plant hallucinogens' and the results of each state. He describes the psychedelic experience as a direct connection to the Gaian mind:

This boundary-dissolving relationship to the vegetable, Gaian mind left our tradition only about seventeen hundred years ago. In that seventeen hundred years, in the absence of a dialogue with the Gaian expression of chaos, successively more deadly cultural forms, beginning with the phonetic alphabet and moving on to movable type and all the rest, evolved. Each one of these technologies has had a tremendous negative impact on our self-image and has entangled us deeper and deeper in a kind of Faustian pact with the physical world. It's that blindness that has led us to the present situation. In the absence of any boundary-dissolving ecstasies, we are left with the machinations of the ego, which has led very quickly into a cultural cul-de-sac from which there may or may not be an escape. (p. 93)

McKenna declares in this statement that it is the absence of boundary dissolving ecstasies which has brought us to this imbalanced way of operating in the world. It is this lack of direct experience, a kind of separation from our own direct knowledge of the unknown that makes us

vulnerable to an obtuse sense of what reality really is. Foucault and McKenna meet in the pre-linguistic realm that provides the space for and is filled by language. And language, as McKenna and Foucault agree, is both a scaffolding and a cage. This is what McKenna means when he critiques these tropes in society. They are not wrong, or evil, but rather, they are incomplete, and if we are to find a better sense of completion, it must be found within the self. This is not foreign to academia, but it is indeed a theme that can be found.

To argue more plainly and from a non-psychedelic perspective, Sociologist, Walter Truett Anderson focuses deeply on differing views of reality around the world, describing an a la carte approach that is taken without our direct knowledge. In his book, *Reality Isn't What It Used To Be*, he draws from his research experience and tells us how these changing views of reality have become possible in postmodern society:

We all become consumers of reality (although, as in other forms of consumption, not with equal buying power), and greater numbers of us also become creators and merchandisers of reality. As the faith in old absolutes wanes, the season opens on the construction of new realities for those who do not care to be seen in the standard models. In earlier times, the invention of cultural forms was shrouded in mystery; now it becomes, for better or for worse, democratized. Individuals feel free to create new identities for themselves, and entrepreneurs of reality dabble gaily in the creation of new history, new science, new religion, new politics. (p. 27)

Anderson's view of a socially accepted, yet imperfect reality template confirms the McKenna and Foucauldian theory that each template for reality has its limitations. This might be best seen

in the ideologies of economics where capitalists bemoan the bland, soup kitchen distribution of socialism, while the socialists, in turn, decry the injustice of unfettered generation of wealth.

Foucault's ideas about new experiences informing old themes meshes well with Anderson's statement, while at the same time we are seeing the distinction between culture as dealt with in a non-psychedelic sense, but still how it is recognized that new models are necessary to refine and purify the bridge between the pre-formed mental place of ideas and the externally expressed analytically. In this sense we can see that the kind of conversation McKenna is having is only possible now that we have gotten to the crossroads of inner and outer realities; inner being free at its inception until it is captured by language, and outer which for better or worse can be manipulated for the reification of whatever ideology needs it. And this idea harkens back to McKenna's assertion about what we are told to do, get a job, get a degree, get a this, get a that and then you're a player. Foucault shared this view of these models in the entire body of his work. As The School of Life philosophy archive, an online educational page rigorously researched and centered on giving overviews of famous philosophers and philosophies on Youtube claims, "Foucault...spent his career forensically criticizing the power of the modern bourgeois capitalist state, including its police, prisons, doctors, law courts and psychiatrists. His goal was to understand how power worked and how to change it" (School of Life, 2015).

And in my own review of Foucault's works, I've found this to definitely be one of his central movements. Foucault systematically and poetically pulled apart the clinic, the prison, the madhouse and sexuality in order to provide a way to improve them. Interestingly, Foucault's literature isn't seen like a manifesto proclaiming the right way to go, but by providing his

dissection of these accepted norms across society, he's provided space to analyze what needs to be removed or changed for a more equitable and perhaps better way forward.

The very structures that dictated the kind of life McKenna was riffing against are the same that Foucault has directed his historical raid on. While we know Foucault's work was written, largely uninfluenced by psychedelics, we can easily see the same disruptive spirit in his and McKenna's bodies of work. Central to McKenna's solution, the boundary-dissolving nature of the psychedelic serves as a threat to dominating power structures that are controlling the consensus reality, or quite literally the mechanisms of hegemonic ideals within our societies which Foucault disassembles in such detail throughout his oeuvre. McKenna steps further than Foucault in that he directly advocates psychedelics as a key element in the resolution of these problems and argues that present hegemony stands in the way of psychedelics because of the deleterious effect it would have on prevailing social structures (McKenna, 1987).

“Psychedelics are illegal *not* because a loving government is concerned that you may jump out of a third story window. Psychedelics are illegal because they dissolve opinion structures and culturally laid down models of behavior and information processing. They open you up to the possibility that everything you know is wrong.” (p. 53).

The challenge that comes from this is the potential for chaos because there is nothing more terrifying than to have a society of people who are rudderless and have lost their sense of what their world is made of, a literal ship of fools. I myself have experienced this when I stepped out of Christianity and had no new ideology to step directly into and I described this very moment in *Born Again To Rebirth* (Roberts, 2013): “With so much doubt and a sense that what I had

believed was not the truth, I looked outside of my faith at what might as well have been a black hole...The steps I took were like the steps of a drunken blind man, though, for it was not anything I was familiar with” (p. 120) The utter madness of having your boundaries dissolved by means psychedelic or otherwise can have a seriously destabilizing effect, but it is this challenge to hegemony which creates a space for something newer and better, just a Foucault explained in creating new and improving old structures.

In terms of why we should not challenge our reality, we can only really chalk it up to fear of the unknown. But we are speaking about this experience in academic and philosophical terms and because of this, it can only be seen as irresponsible to not consider the possibilities of exploring a different take on reality for the sake of philosophical integrity.

This tradition of looking through the psychedelic lens is not the sole domain of psychedelic writers and explorers in the 20th century, but in Western philosophy, it goes all the way back to the Eleusinian mystery cult. The history of psychedelic use among the intelligentsia goes back as far as written history can show us, but for the Western philosopher, the Hellenized world and its philosophical superstars serve as the primary forebears. This is why it’s so important to note this history of psychedelic use by the likes of any ancient Greek of authority. In their essay, (Valencic, 1994) at the psychedelic library database states:

Researchers who attempted to solve the Eleusinian mystery according to the Hymn to Demeter directed their attention to barley since few if any mints are psychoactive. Barley has been known to have been infested like other grains by rust-ergot fungus (*Claviceps purpurea* and *Claviceps paspali*) since ancient times

Many written testimonies exist about that. Ergot does have established psychedelic effects, it is after all the source of Lysergic acid, the precursor of many psychedelic substances, among them LSD. It seemed only natural that the *parasitic fungus* growing on barley rendered to the Eleusinian sacrament its psychedelic power.

So we definitely have a solid connection to Eleusis as a locus for an LSD analog in sacramental use, but we need more context.

In *The Road To Eleusis* (1978), Carl Ruck, Albert Hoffman, and R. Gordon Wasson discuss the mystery cult to which all great philosophers of our history took part. It should be noted that Albert Hoffman was the man who actually discovered and synthesized LSD from ergot mold and as such would be considered the highest possible authority on the origins and feasibility of ergot as the primary sacramental ingredient based on historical record. It is important to take note of this because it is an experience that was required of those who developed the foundations of Western Philosophical traditions:

The ancient testimony about Eleusis is unanimous and unambiguous. Eleusis was the supreme experience in an initiate's life. It was both physical and mystical: trembling, vertigo, cold sweat, and then a sight that made all previous seeing seem like blindness, a sense of awe and wonder at a brilliance that caused a profound silence since what had just been seen and felt could never be communicated: words are unequal to the task. Those symptoms are unmistakably the experience induced by an hallucinogen. To reach that conclusion, we have only to show that the rational Greeks, and indeed some of the most

famous and intelligent amongst them, could experience and enter fully into such irrationality.” (p. 20)

This cult functioned as a rite of passage for all Greek leadership because of its effect on the initiate, pushing the boundaries of experienced reality within a sacred context of veneration to Demeter. But the rite itself was not seen to be a lifestyle choice like one might assign to a user of LSD, but rather a ritual in the sacred temple where the veil of reality was pierced and for a moment, even the most esteemed among the Greeks could bathe in the breathtaking mystery of managed madness. Now we can see that there is not only precedence for the psychedelic experience in terms of academic thought but actually a present deficiency because it has been forgotten as a component in the ancient philosophical sense. With the domination of The Holy Catholic Church arising in the Roman empire, psychedelic rites of paganism were weeded out, homogenized, symbolized, or diluted over the centuries and the office of an intermediary to the gods was amassed under the church's total authority. With its lingering influence still experienced today, much of the fear of psychedelic use stems from liturgical demonization.

This loss of a sacred psychedelic rite of passage for philosophers and seekers was well known to Terence McKenna and was easily one of his greatest lamentations, that we as leaders, thinkers, teachers, and philosophers had been building a society without this integral tool. In an interview in his book, *The Archaic Revival*, McKenna alludes to the history of psychedelic use in philosophy:

T.M. - The central platonic notion, that of ideas - archetypal forms that stand outside of time is one that is confirmed by the psychedelic experience. The Neoplatonists...Plotinus and Porphyry are psychedelic philosophers.

Interviewer - What I think most of us don't realize is that Greek culture and the Eleusinian mysteries incorporated the use of something very akin to psychedelics. Essentially, western civilization is based on a culture that had at its core experience and a ritual that used psychedelics.

T.M. - Yes, for over two thousand years everyone who was anyone in the ancient world made the pilgrimage to Eleusis and had this experience that Gordon Wasson and Carl Ruck have argued very convincingly was a hallucinogenic intoxication produced by ergot. (p.162)

So why all the fuss about showing the history and perspective of the psychedelic experience as a historically important rite of passage for philosophers? The plainest answer is that the psychedelic lens as a tool is one of the things that has been obfuscated by our western discourses and social norms and standards. It is an artifact of another time and place that might be retrieved and restored. Foucault looked for these kinds of things lost beneath the new grids of our structures of understanding. So not only was LSD a sacrament of the philosophers dating back over two thousand years, but it was also in its own way an artifact that Foucault stumbled upon and by partaking and having his experiential account come to life, restore a piece of true philosophical heritage. According to the Philosophy of Life, Critics find Foucault's work to be spurious, because, "they think it inaccurate and keep pointing out things he hadn't quite understood in some document or other, but Foucault didn't care for historical accuracy. History, for him, was just a storehouse of good ideas and he wanted to raid it rather than keep it pristine and untouched" (School of Life). It was indeed something that Foucault raided from history and better yet, experienced and partook in by imbibing the same essential sacrament as his Greek

philosophical forebears. McKenna in *The Archaic Revival* states so harmoniously: “All that is needed to go beyond an academic understanding of plant hallucinogens is the experience of Tryptamine induced ecstasy. Each person who has that experience undergoes a mini-apocalypse” (p.94).

Chapter 4: The Interviews that Attempt to Make Sense of Managed Madness

Without a context for the psychedelic experience, we are bereft of a closer feeling to what it must have been like for Foucault, McKenna, The Eleusinian cult and all who have embraced the psychedelic experience in earnest. It seemed to me that the best approach to this was to perform qualitative interviews with people who were actually experiencing psychedelics at the time of my interview. On one hand, this provides an honest discourse from direct experience and on another it allows us to reflect on how these conversations come back to the fundamental ideas of this work: 1. Sensory confirmation of a philosopher's (or thinker's) suspicions about the nature of reality. 2. The dissolution of entrenched social concepts and ideologies. And 3. Exposure and relief in ideas of life and death in a deeply emotional way.

For this work, I've conducted two qualitative interviews to allow psychedelic users to explain how their experiences have changed them. Because of the subjective nature of personal experience, the only way to gain an understanding of it in terms of how it changes perspective is through interviews. Through a consensus of interviewees, we are able to understand the underlying theme and how it applies to Foucault's experience and McKenna's contributions. In this we can also see the way in which individuals step out of their everyday perspective into a seemingly mad realm and return with newfound insight that profoundly influences their personal and professional philosophy. It is important for those who frequently use qualitative methods to understand that parallel questions could not be offered word for word, but the essential framings remained as consistent as possible. Working with people who are on psychedelics requires the

ability to follow with interviewees own stream of consciousness, which must be handled gently. For this reason there are no direct parallel questions between interviewees. The personal interviewees known in this chapter as “Z” and “V” have given full permission to publish these interviews under the condition of anonymity.

I’ve also included the interview between Simeon Wade and Heather Dundas in which Wade describes Foucault’s LSD experience. The Wade interview is the closest representation of what happened to Foucault in the moment and as such, it makes sense to include it here in this chapter.

Z

Z is a 36-year-old man who has had lengthy experience with psychedelics since his teen years. He has given his express permission to be interviewed for qualitative purposes under the condition of anonymity. He is the manager of a popular bar in Brooklyn, NY. This interview was conducted in August 2016 and for about 20 minutes audio was recorded while he was under the influence of LSD.

G. When was the first time you took a psychedelic and what happened? Did it change anything for you?

Z. I was a teenager and it was the first time I ate mushrooms. I was just mad for any drug I could get my hands on. So getting to that level of something like psychedelics, It changed my life.

G. How?

Z. I fell in love with a girl.

G. On mushrooms?

Z. I could talk to her without opening my mouth. We just walked around and communicated the whole night. I had never met her before. It was really beautiful. At some point, the cops came and we ran...forever and hid in my friend's basement. The whole night was very epic.

G. How do you feel about the psychedelic experience as the way you see the world? Is there a specific thing about any given moment that, makes you not see things the same afterward?

Z. Psychedelics shake something loose. It forces you to see things. It's not what you're seeing, like hallucination-wise. It's basically introducing you to the idea that everything you understand could be wrong. It's jarring. And the more it happens, the more you accept it. Your opinions become less concrete. Because you've already had things shaken so many times that you would be a fool to think, "This is the only way." This is how I think it might be right now.

G. What do you do to keep yourself from being completely unmoored from the society that you live in? What's the benefit of that feeling?

Z. It's the blue pill or the green pill...like talking about (the film) The Matrix. That moment of snapping out of the dream. That's what psychedelics do, to jar you loose.

G. Do you think that society would be better or worse if everyone had this experience?

Z. I think that's completely arbitrary because there's nothing inherently peaceful about psychedelics, it's just that most people who endure that kind of high tend to be more peaceful.

G. Is there a connection between psychedelics and madness?

Z. Taking a large quantity of psychedelics and ending up in situations where you don't have a choice of what you do. You can't run from it.

G. In your opinion, do you feel like the psychedelic experience is participating in an act of madness, or is it a test of sanity?

Z. I feel like it's a test of sanity. It's how you keep yourself together. It's why it's called tripping because you find yourself tripping all over yourself. Falling to the ground, laughing, tears streaming down your face. Enduring that changes the way you look at reality like things are more tangible, or changeable.

G. Do you think it's wise to go into those uncharted waters?

Z. Do you think it's wise to look inward and understand yourself? If that is the unknown and the uncharted if that is about you? How can that be a negative, ever?

G. Why can't people do that without psychedelics? Why is the experience important for that sort of work? Why is it important for looking inward?

Z. Because when you're floored, you are destroyed as a human, because it is causing you to react that way. Everything you understand is shaken and the only thing left is you.

G. What would you say to somebody that has never done psychedelics before who seems to be trying to find means of self-reflection. What advice would you have for them?

Z. I think you have to look at the kind of person you are and the amount of secrets that you hold. I would ask, how prepared are you to look at everything that exists in your head because depending on how terrified you are of that thought would depend on whether or not you should take psychedelics. That's why people have bad trips because they are not ready to deal

with something that they have hidden away. I have confronted that; I have confronted my demons and self-image and self-understanding, high on a lot of LSD over a long period of time, to sit very honestly in my own skin. I feel like I sit and belong in my skin like I've earned it.

G. Is there a unifying thing in different psychedelics.

Z. It's you, you are the common substance. Otherwise, they are very different.

G. How?

Z. They are very different in design and structure of a high. Acid is very clear and lasts longer. Mushrooms come in waves. Mescaline is its own thing.

G. What about DMT?

Z. DMT is in its own category. I don't know if there is any more experience more terrifying and beautiful than my first DMT trip.

G. Why is that?

Z. I don't have any fear of dying because I know what happens when I die, because I witnessed it. I was taken, I went to a place. Just my soul, just the spark of life that is Z. Not my ego, not anything else. I just existed there unable to remember who I was, or who I had been, or what it meant to be a human. I just existed as the atom of life that is Z. There's nothing more terrifying and overwhelmingly lonely and beautiful about existing in that moment because I realized everything we do doesn't matter in the bigger scheme of things. It's our ego that paints this world like we matter. We look at this world through the filter of our own ego, we look at history, history is based on us.

In this interview with Z, I could clearly see the interlaced ideas of life and death, the self, the felt presence of seemingly intangible theories and was also interested in his quickness to

answer questions with other questions in a rhetorical move that echoes the kind of responses Socrates would make. Z really focused on what is perceived to be real and what is not, with a consistent conclusion that it all returns to the self; history, reality, and fear of the unknown. He claimed that by facing death in life and laying bare his own ugly thoughts and ideas otherwise hidden, he has earned freedom not easily found by other means. It reminds me of Foucault claiming that the madman has disarmed death by dwelling in the space where death abides. Z tells us that we can't run from madness, as if in my response to the question about madness it's assumed that you know it's going to be a bit mad. It's these kinds of glossy assumptions that are made when on psychedelics, the feeling that all the questions in life are answered; it makes Z respond to my question about madness with a nonchalant tone that serves to acknowledge without full response.

In contrast to my conversation with Z, I thought it would be interesting to interview another person who had limited exposure to psychedelics and had just tried LSD for the first time.

V. is a 32-year-old man who works as a master distiller for a whiskey brand. His experience with psychedelics is limited to a single Ayahuasca ceremony which he up to this point listed as one of the most influential moments of his life. In August 2016 at Central Park, he consumed psychedelics and we observed the natural world as well as the human activity. On the cab ride back to his apartment, the cab we took chased an ambulance and people in the streets were screaming at one another. The night was hot and humid, full of lights and sounds from all around. A few hours after he had consumed 1 hit of LSD-25 and 2 grams of Psilocybin mushrooms, I asked him about his experience to see what a relative newcomer to the psychedelic

experience might have to say about his perspective changing, or staying the same in relation to his own sense of self and the world around him. This interview was audio recorded for about 20 minutes..

G. How do you feel about reality now compared to six hours ago?

V. It feels like a construct, that's the only word I can use to describe it.

G. Reality feels like a construct? Can you explain more?

V. I feel like there is so much more and we can't be a part of it because as humans it's too much, far too much for us. We have to be connected to the earth, we have to be connected to our bodies. We have to be who we are, but there is this whole everything beyond.

G. So you don't feel like now you've taken LSD and mushrooms together that all of a sudden you should remain in this state? How do you deal with the everyday world from here?

V. Yeah, right, how do I? I guess you have two choices, you can either acknowledge it or deny it.

G. You were saying a bit ago that you were feeling like you felt small against the largeness of the infinite. Could you explain what you meant? There is no wrong answer.

V. I just felt like I was under the magnificence of everything. It was important for me on my journey to feel weak, to feel human. Once you have that shed away, you realize that you are a part of it.

G. The bigness or smallness has a sort of acceptance there?

V. Yes, I think so.

G. How would you say this experience relates to your understanding of madness?

V. What I'm experiencing now? I don't know if I'm connected to who I'm supposed to be. If I think enough about it, there is a history that is there. Can you repeat the question, I'm sorry.

G. Let me rephrase this. We experienced some crazy shit tonight which happened whether or not you took this substance. How did being on this substance make you feel in relation to the things happening in the 'real world'?

V. I think we both felt like everything was happening outside of our control. I guess it was just the lack of control. Maybe I strive to control things, I probably do in some regard.

G. So there's some sort of virtue in not having the reins?

V. Absolutely. I think that's the start to any good journey, to let go of control and allow yourself to be part of that journey wherever it takes you. I think that's the only way you can get there. At least it rang true for me this evening.

G. We don't even pay attention to the things that are going on around us, but crazy shit is happening around us all the time and we completely block it out. With this, our perception was heightened and in fact, it opened our eyes too much. We had to be flooded. How does it make you feel in terms of humanity? Do you feel disgust? Do you feel empathy?

V. I feel empathy, I think it resonates with things that you know, that you hear, to be part of the human condition; but to be shown it for yourself is different altogether.

G. so to feel it instead of hearing about it?

V. Yeah and I feel like that was part of the journey for me tonight at least was to...we talked earlier about how I am a man and that's ok. You're not good enough for this infinite magnitude, but that's ok. 'We still love you exactly where you are.' Being able to pass through

that. To answer your question, I think it's important to take people on that journey with you. That exact journey, of course, I can't bring everybody on the street. But to be able to at least carry myself with that mantle to meet people where they are.

You asked me about the consequence of facing reality now that I have seen and now that I feel what I have from this journey. You can either let yourself be a victim, or you can take the path that I always like to tell my brother...because we lost our mom to murder when I was 16 and he was 2. And I'm always like...you can let yourself be the victim in that situation, or you can let it be a part of who you are and you can own that and move forward from that for the rest of your life with that power. And I think the same rings true for losing your mind and moving forward afterward.

You never think that come 5:30 in the pm you make a decision that has you going on a journey where you can't leave a six-foot area of your own living room, standing in front of your maker.

The contrast between Z's assertive tone and V's more soft one should be noted. V spoke about the endlessness and bigness of how things felt; that he felt small in the bigness of all reality, but at the same time felt accepted as a small part of that bigness. In concert with Z's "red pill, blue pill" reference, V seemed to demonstrate that the only way to navigate the vastness of the psychedelic experience was to embrace it or to totally avoid it. The bigness of the experience does not allow a way to get off, just like on a rollercoaster. I was really caught by surprise when V began to speak about the murder of his own mother and discussed it from a place of resolution, peace, and love. As I watched him speak, he had a serene look on his face, as if some blockages within him that were difficult to articulate had dissipated in this mental space where he felt

connected to infinite love. We will see a very strong parallel to this in Simeon Wade's description of Foucault's reaction. For V, it seemed that his concepts of control and letting go were very important, while Z's most key themes seemed to hang on releasing everything of the self, but both hinge on the idea of what we do and don't hold onto in terms of our reality and both show just how big a difference a psychedelic experience can have on our moorings. Our thoughts on death, our sense of self in the context of our culture, and our ideas about who and what we are are all so interlaced in both of these conversations in such unique ways. My takeaway from both interviewees was that the experience was deep, at times disarming, but overall very therapeutic and revelatory.

Now that we've seen two contemporary examples of the implications of the psychedelic experience, let's compare that to the description that we are seeing of Foucault's experience. We have an account of a psychedelic Foucault in an interview between journalist Heather Dundas and Simeon Wade, a close friend of Foucault's who took him to Death Valley in June of 1975 to have his first LSD experience. (Dundas 1997) kept the piece very brief in terms of her own commentary, except for a few notes at the end, but the clear takeaway is that Foucault had an interest in trying LSD and his friends in California were up to the task of taking him through the experience in Death Valley. Death Valley provided an open landscape in which the philosopher would feel unencumbered or distracted, the vastness of the space complimenting the vast possibilities of the psychedelic experience he was to embark on. Boom California is an online academic focused publication in which Heather Dundas published her interview with Foucault's

friend, Simeon Wade. In the interview Wade provides his thinking on Foucault's LSD experience, why he did this and how Foucault reacted to it:

Wade: I thought, if I give Foucault clinical LSD, I'm sure he will realize that he is premature in obliterating our humanity and the mind as we know it now, because he'll see that there are forms of knowledge other than science, and because of the theme of death in his thinking up to that point. The tremendous emphasis of finitude, finitude, finitude reduces our hope.

Boom: So you took Foucault to Death Valley for a kind of rebirth, in a sense?

Wade: Exactly. It was a transcendental experience for Foucault. He wrote to us a few months later that it was the greatest experience of his life, and that it profoundly changed his life and his work.

Boom: At the time of this trip, Foucault had just published the first volume of his projected six-volume work, *History of Sexuality*. He'd also published an outline of the rest of the work, and apparently already had finished writing several volumes of it. So when did this post-Death Valley change become evident in his work?

Wade: Immediately. He wrote to us that he had thrown volumes two and three of his *History of Sexuality* into the fire and that he had to start all over again. Whether that was just a way of speaking, I don't know, but he did destroy at least

some version of them and then wrote them again before his premature death in 1984. The titles of these last two books are emblematic of the impact this experience had on him: *The Uses of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self*, with no mention of finitude. *Everything* after this experience in 1975 is the new Foucault, neo-Foucault. Suddenly he was making statements that shocked the French intelligentsia.

The Connection between Z, V and Foucault's described experiences is pretty clear, especially in terms of addressing the question of finitude, death, rebirth, and clarity. Unfortunately we have to take Wade on his word as we do not have the letter in which Foucault directly attributed his LSD experience as the greatest experience of his life, but we can certainly get a clear sense of the impression that LSD has on people when we compare Z and V's commentary while they are experiencing it. A clear theme of revelation can be seen between all these interviews where a revelation is given and death and life are clarified and revived in the minds of the users. In the video portion of this project, I perform a reenactment of this interview with a longer version, the above quotation is provided to show the most essential element of the conversation.

Chapter 5: Final Thoughts

Through this project, I've sought to take seriously the idea that the psychedelic experience has a valid place in the philosopher's toolkit. It may not be enough to simply believe the accounts of Foucault's experience with LSD and the effect it had on his revisions to his later works and so I have made an earnest attempt to provide both a historical and contemporary context for this idea of managed madness. I have not sought to evangelize rampant random psychedelic use, but instead to follow in the footsteps of Foucault in the spirit of breaking down structures of thought, behavior, and power to offer up a sacramental gift; the chance to look at psychedelic tools outside of the western war on drugs and see it how philosophers, both lettered and common throughout the ages have; as integral boundary dissolving agents, welcome in our quest for understanding this strange and majestic world in which we live.

There are few arguments that could be posed in opposition to the idea that the psychedelic experience is a philosophically valid method of changing perspective for the sake of providing a critique of culture. It's important to understand the context of the American attitude towards psychedelics in light of the war on drugs and why it was created in the first place. As a matter of historical record, we know that the war on drugs was a cultural project insidiously led by Richard Nixon. The war on drugs was a war on black people and hippies according to former Nixon domestic policy chief John Ehrlichman

"The Nixon campaign in 1968, and the Nixon White House after that had two enemies: the antiwar left and black people," former Nixon domestic policy chief John Ehrlichman told Harper's writer Dan Baum for the April cover story published Tuesday.

"You understand what I'm saying? We knew we couldn't make it illegal to be either

against the war or black, but by getting the public to associate the hippies with marijuana and blacks with heroin. And then criminalizing both heavily, we could disrupt those communities," Ehrlichman said. "We could arrest their leaders, raid their homes, break up their meetings, and vilify them night after night on the evening news. Did we know we were lying about the drugs? Of course, we did." (Harpers [Dan Baum])

It's clear that the demonization of psychedelics was foundational to Nixon's political strategy and had very little basis on the idea of care for the public. This slur on a very effective and powerful experience for philosophers and seekers must be rebuked in order to restore the rightful place the psychedelic experience should have as a lens through which philosophers can make vivid and clear observations.

From MDMA, Ketamine, Mushroom and Ayahuasca treatments for PTSD to the same drugs helping terminal cancer patients pass away in peace, the qualitative evidence and metrics on psychedelics point much more to their therapeutic, spiritual and philosophical value than to destructive potential. *Popular Science* (Peek, 2013) provided an infographic on all popular drugs and the deaths associated with them. Speaking to psychedelics, they say:

And while cocaine, heroin, and alcohol are all responsible for enough deaths to warrant their own stripes on the chart, many popular illegal drugs—including marijuana and LSD—are such a tiny blip as to be invisible.

Managed madness, as I have coined it must be able to stand on its own, even in light of opposition. As courageous as I view Foucault to have been, he still had to hide his true self, the deepest and most extreme experiences of his life, because academia and the world at large could

not handle the message. But how much more splendid indeed would the world be if Foucault and all those before and after him were truly free to speak wisdom, unbounded by the sanctimony of the educational and social edifices which did and continue to serve as the gatekeepers of degrees, prestige, the power to lead and power to destroy. What books were never written and words never spoken because of the panopticon present in the mind of Foucault? The message is clear for us in the here and now that we cannot accept hiding from truths which teenagers and closeted scientists and thought leaders understand as obvious, that the psychedelic experience in the mind of a thinker is a powerful and revolutionary thing.

Thankfully, the tide has turned in many regards, and well-respected thinkers today are speaking openly about their psychedelic experiences while at the same time cautiously sharing the clinical sense of caution that should be used in approaching them. Sam Harris for a long time seemed to be an unlikely champion of the experience in his own way and I feel his thoughts confirm this very claim I am making in this project:

However, it cannot be denied that psychedelics are a uniquely potent means of altering consciousness...If, however, a person ingests 100 micrograms of LSD, what happens next will depend on a variety of factors, but there is no question that something will happen. And boredom is simply not in the cards. Within the hour, the significance of his existence will bear down upon him like an avalanche. As the late Terence McKenna never tired of pointing out, this guarantee of profound effect, for better or worse, is what separates psychedelics from every other method of spiritual inquiry.”

Harris reminded me of Foucault's statement in *The Order of Things* about words and their ambiguous counterparts in the sign, that pre-linguistic image. Foucault explains:

Knowledge necessitates two kinds of apprenticeship, first in words, as with all languages, then with written signs that have no bearing upon the pronunciation of the words; a human life-span is not too long for this double education; and if one has had in addition the leisure to make some discovery, one has no signs at one's disposal to hand it on."

(p.187)

Foucault's interest in language and the interplay between the meaning of written signs and what they represent is vast space in the light of an LSD experience, with the significance bearing down on us like an avalanche. To anyone who has read Foucault and experienced a psychedelic trip, the connection is easily made as to how a mind like Foucault's would be turbocharged on LSD. This space of words and ideas, forms and letters is the playground of LSD, as limitless as the landscape of Death Valley and as vividly foreign as the astrally perched vista of the mundane world through the eyes of the madman.

So what is Managed Madness? It's the philosophical approach to the unknown in the pursuit of alternative forms of knowledge, the kind of knowledge Foucault described "madmen" as having in his works. Managed Madness is using a psychedelic tool for these purposes with the full understanding that not all, or much of the experience may be used in traditional channels of inquiry, but what will be found can only be found there. Again, Sam Harris describes:

Ingesting a powerful dose of a psychedelic drug is like strapping oneself to a rocket without a guidance system. One might wind up somewhere worth going, and, depending on the compound and one's "set and setting," certain trajectories are more likely than others. But however methodically one prepares for the voyage, one can still be hurled into states of mind so painful and confusing as to

be indistinguishable from psychosis. Hence, the terms psychotomimetic and psychotogenic that are occasionally applied to these drugs.

I have visited both extremes on the psychedelic continuum. The positive experiences were more sublime than I could ever have imagined or than I can now faithfully recall. These chemicals disclose layers of beauty that art is powerless to capture and for which the beauty of nature itself is a mere simulacrum. It is one thing to be awestruck by the sight of a giant redwood and amazed at the details of its history and underlying biology. It is quite another to spend an apparent eternity in egoless communion with it. Positive psychedelic experiences often reveal how wondrously at ease in the universe a human being can be—and for most of us, normal waking consciousness does not offer so much as a glimmer of those deeper possibilities.

Simply the fact that Harris has chosen to use psychedelics frequently enough to publicly speak about it tells us what we need to know about it as a philosopher's tool. Harris has used it to clarify his own views in a current context. We can draw a connection between Harris and Foucault in the same way we've seen the connection with Z and V. In the final analysis, the evidence for the profundity and power of the psychedelic as a philosophical lens is clear.

If we look back to the description of Foucault's LSD experience and his subsequent removal of the term *finitude* from his philosophical vocabulary, we can see a direct link with what Sam Harris is saying about a human being at ease in the universe. I can't help but feel a bit emotional thinking about a man like Foucault who due to his harsh upbringing and socially forced closeted homosexuality was not able to be at ease; seeing him in my mind's eye in that

desert coming to a place of peace in the only space on earth where he could truly be free, in his own mind.

As for me, the path that led me to write this paper here and now began in Joshua Tree national park in the summer before I began grad school. Out among the Joshua trees in the middle of the night, I stood gazing at the full moon which illuminated the landscape. As I gazed upon it under the influence of psychedelics, it gazed back on me with its golden beam. I walked among the trembling trees which vibrated with life, the sandy ground flowing like waves of soft silk blankets as far as I could see and every shadow cast in the moonlight seemed to move gently like a swaying curtain in a breezed window. My life was changing and I was becoming the philosopher that I am now. Foucault has been my companion in this experience and he's served as my guide through the last couple of years. We met at a crossroads; I the psychedelic writer who began to yearn for academic structure and understanding and he, the academic powerhouse in the pantheon of the greats who near the end of his life became psychedelic. Somehow we met in the middle and his books, *Madness, and Civilization*, *The Order of Things*, *The Archeology of Knowledge* and *The History of Sexuality* volumes retroactively clarified my most profound psychedelic experiences. For me, these experiences are so sacred and profound and will continue to reveal new facets on the prism of knowledge for the rest of my life, even though they exist in the past. Foucault has given me a more psychedelic perspective than ever before, and it's this suspicion that his ideas were so complementary to those found in psychedelics that has driven me so far. It is frankly impossible to properly reduce either Foucault or a psychedelic experience to a couple of pages, for each can yield new treasures whenever our attention is turned there. Foucault was correct about the curious knowledge that madness held, and I'm sure

his LSD experience confirmed it for him. With my own life, my sense of eternity, my lust for knowledge and experience, with Foucault in one hand and the sacrament of the Eleusinian mystery in the other, I have for this moment become the madman. I am not solely a creature of reason, I am reason dazzled.

This short film is intended to be watched as a part of my project. It is a reenactment of the interview Heather Dundas conducted with Simeon Wade. It is intended to provide a kind of connection to Foucault and his experience, taking us for a moment into a mindset of wonder, limitlessness, and awe as we travel with him through the desert. Much of the reading within the body of this project can be read and passed over with academic eyes and still be fairly light in giving a felt sense of the power of a psychedelic experience. In this short film I have attempted to recreate the flight of experience one may have under the influence of LSD in the setting of Death Valley. Experience is central to understand the weight of purpose one feels under the influence of a psychedelic. In the film I feature footage of Foucault describing the grids of new knowledge building and covering over old grids, while obfuscating some treasures. I attempt to visually depict this theme in the experience of the film to give a sense Foucault's spoken words and the flood of imagery which both mimics and complements his language.

[Foucault and LSD](#)

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