

BOOK REVIEW

50 Jahre LSD-Erfahrung: Eine Jubiläumsschrift. Christian Rätsch, Ed. [Der Grüne Zweig 159]. Nachtschatten Verlag, Ritterquai 2–4, CH-4502 Solothurn, Switzerland and W. Pieper's Medienexperimente, Alte Schmiede, D-6941 Löhrbach, Germany, 1993. Pp. 126. DM 20 (perfect-bound paperback). ISBN 3-925817-59-X.

German ethnologist Christian Rätsch, a musician and graphic artist best known for his fieldwork among the Lacandón Indians of Chiapas, México (Rätsch 1985), decided to mark the 50th anniversary of Albert Hofmann's 1943 discovery of the entheogenic effects of LSD by publishing both musical and literary pæans to the fabled wonder drug, with the covers of both graced by his own paintings. The musical tribute is a compact disk (SL CD 00556) entitled *Hommage à Albert—50 Jahre LSD-Erfahrung [Tribute to Albert—50 Years of LSD Experience]* by Rätsch's 5-member group, *Acid Test*. There are five compositions with Sanskrit titles, and the box features a photograph of Albert Hofmann in a dance pose holding a *ling chih* mushroom, *Ganoderma lucidum* (Fr.) Karst., and photographs of Aztec entheogen god Xochipilli and the morning glory *Ipomoea violacea* L., which contains LSD-like alkaloids. Rätsch's book bears the same title, *50 Years of LSD Experience*, and is dedicated to Albert Hofmann, "in memory of the events and sequelae of 19 April 1943." Rätsch had already edited a *Festschrift* for Hofmann (Rätsch 1989).

After an introductory *Hymn to LSD* by Norbert J. Mayer, Rättsch presents a 15-part treatise on "LSD Culture," backed by 123 footnote references. After expressing his "Cultural/Anthropological Viewpoint," the author puts LSD in historical perspective by examining "The Sacrament: Dew of the Tree of Knowledge," including speculations on the symbology of contemporary LSD visions. "LSD Spirituality" traces the mystical modalities of entheogenic experience, after which various chapters explore "LSD and Creativity"—in literature, graphic arts, underground "comix," psychedelic music, lightshows, and dream theater. A chapter associates the "Mysteries of the Grateful Dead" (sixties-revival concerts by the "acid-rock" band Grateful Dead) with the ancient Grecian Eleusinian Mysteries, which seems a specious juxtaposition to me—I would say the ancient Athenian drama festivals involving frenzies of group inebriation by wines fortified with visionary drugs (Ruck 1982) offer a more apt parallel to the contemporary rock concert. Some notes on "The New Psychiatry: LSD Shamans" follow, and there is a curious error in this section—Rättsch speaks of "the Sandoz/Basel-produced Lysergol® (pure LSD) . . ." whereas *Delysid*® was the Sandoz trade-name for pharmaceutical LSD-tartrate, while lysergol is a simple clavine alkaloid from *ololiuhqui* seeds (*Turbina corymbosa* [L.] Raf.) and ergot of *Elymus* species (Ott 1993). A brief "Insight" rounds out this section of the book, with the author concluding that the influence of LSD and kindred drugs on our culture has been so important that: "Our contemporary world is unthinkable without LSD!"

The second part of the book is entitled "LSD Voices," and consists of short quotations from 50 individuals, the sources of which are identified in another 50 footnotes. Tibetan Lama Yeshe comments, for example, that "LSD is the wisdom of the West," and there are also remarks from Alan Watts and Aldous Huxley, religious philosophers well-known for their experiments with LSD-type drugs. There are also several quotes from scientists and psychiatrists who have experimented with LSD, like the late Walter Pahnke, Ralph Metzner, Stanislav Grof, and Albert Hofmann himself, who comments that his "problem child" LSD could become a "wonder child," were it to come to be used as an aid to meditation and as a catalyst to mystical totality experiences (Hofmann 1980). Rättsch also presents quotations from artists who have found in LSD a source of inspiration. There are remarks from Cary Grant, whose use of LSD in psychiatric treatment in the fifties became a *cause célèbre* (Hoge 1977) and from Anaïs Nin, for whom LSD was a wellspring of art. The reader encounters the words of Ernst Jünger, famous German writer and "psychonaut" (Jünger himself coined the term), as well as remarks on LSD by popular musicians Jerry García of the Grateful Dead, David Crosby of The Byrds and Canadian folk-singer Leonard Cohen.

The book concludes with the "LSD Library," a series of four bibliographies, commencing with a short annotated bibliography to LSD, followed by a 160-source bibliography in two parts: scientific and literary. Finally, there is an "LSD Discography" listing 5 publications on psychedelic music and 209 compact disks and LP records of music influenced by LSD, listed in alphabetical order by group—from Acid to The Zombies. Gracing the cleanly-designed and well-produced book are black-and-white photographs of Sandoz *Delysid*® and Spofa *Lysergamid*® ampules (LSD-tartrate), and a half-dozen photographs of "blotters" (stamp-like squares of blotter paper on which LSD has been spotted), decorated

variously with a portrait of Hofmann ("Father of LSD"), disembodied eyes, mandala-like symbols, an octopus and Mickey Mouse as sorcerer's apprentice.

Rätsch deserves praise for producing this pair of handsome and passionate pæans to LSD, the entheogenic drug of the modern shaman, and to its discoverer Albert Hofmann. Turning the analytical eye of the anthropologist inward to 20th century western culture, Rätsch's book explores the impact of LSD-like drugs on our society, on our religion, art and medicine. This, however, is no detached, exsanguinated, scientific analysis, for Rätsch is clearly an avid exponent of "acid" rock and "psychedelic" art, as evidenced by his cover art and the music of his group *Acid Test*, which is an example of the phenomenon his book examines. *50 Years of LSD Experience* is a art-historical study of the ethnopharmacognosy of LSD and allied shamanic inebriants in contemporary European and American society, which stands as a fitting tribute to one of the most significant scientific discoveries of the twentieth century.

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