

# *Epistème la gris:* Foucault and Psychedelic Neoliberalism

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*Michel Foucault laughed.*

*He stood in bell bottom trousers, brown loafers, white turtleneck, at the edge of a cliff. The desiccated ancient lake bed lay far below him. A molten explosion of compacted sediments burst in flight to the starry sky over vibrating incandescent hills.*

And so on. Thus could begin an obnoxious rewriting of the free market fundamentalism Ayn Rand tortured into a preposterous existentialism: a *New Fountainhead* supplanting Howard Roark with the great philosopher—apparently, perhaps, who knows?, less fabricated, more real than Rand's hero—marveling at the otherworldly expanse of Death Valley from the lookout at Zabriskie Point, on the edge of an LSD-induced epiphany that would change everything. On returning from his trip, Foucault will invent postmodernism, embrace neoliberalism, and join the vanguard of the state-phobic Second Left. With his historico-surgical implements he will gut collectivist struggle and cut the heart out of the revolution, delivering in their place an era of identity politics and solipsistic self-obsession about which the agents

and beneficiaries of our shared exploitation could only dream. Thanks a lot, Michel. Thank you and your acid trip for ruining everything.

This, at least, is a caricatured but not unfair condensation of the criticism issuing from a branch of the academic left that blames Foucault for our present political fragmentation and defenselessness against late capitalism's corrosion of the public sphere. Beginning around 1975, the story goes, and turning upon his first serious psychedelic experience, Foucault was seduced by forms of experimental self-discovery that invited divestment from meaningful political struggle; the structures of thought and practices of domination he had done so much to elucidate, the whole apparatus of disciplinary power and the carceral archipelago, were set aside in favor of a new "care of the self" and an imperative to confront the "fascist within," a reflective, exploratory individualism which called itself political but was anything but. "This shift," according to Mitchell Dean and Daniel Zamora, "made the self just another market to conquer, with self-help coaches, new age gurus, energy healers, food counsellors, alternative therapists and lifestyle brands all trying to profit off this turn inwards." The authors' disdain is patent; "re-presenting social questions as personal ones," they lament, relocates politics and the self at the center of a new confessional culture—precisely at odds, then, with Foucault's suspicion toward technologies of subjection and subjectivation, from Christianity to criminology, for which confession is a principal technique.<sup>1</sup>

Does this not suggest that Foucault has equipped us with the very tools, the concepts and sensibilities, to resist this new confessional marketplace, despite or even because of his late investments in the politics of the self? Who else so extensively and meticulously excoriated the notion that to speak oneself is to be set free? Who more emphatically theorized the dangers and dominations that develop when representation is conflated with truth?

Alas, attempting to promote their book on the same subject, advertising their voice in a competitive marketplace, the attention-grabbing headline under which Dean and Zamora launched this accusation reads: "Today, the self is the battlefield of politics. Blame Michel Foucault."

Never mind that nobody more steadfastly, even symptomatically, rejected what Dean and Zamora, citing Christopher Lasch, call "the rising 'therapeutic sensibility.'"<sup>2</sup> Never mind, too, that Foucault consistently decried the lures of identity and its politics, insisting to the end that the self is not an essence but a practice, that freedom is fragile and fleeting and consequent upon the constancy with which one problematizes the representational matrices encircling the self. Forget all that. Announcing the need and opportunity to reinvent our relationships to ourselves, Foucault apparently committed the Original Sin of postmodern anti-politics. Because

of him and his onanistic self-concern we all must suffer under the whip and lash of Reiki and workplace sensitivity trainings, the antediluvian paradise of union and party receding like the crumbling mountainscapes of the Amargosa Range on the horizon at Zabriskie Point.

For reasons I hope to make clear, this is not a compelling story. It does, however, present the opportunity to consider Foucault's vision of neoliberalism as well as his flirtations with psychedelics in light of their contemporary legacies. Doing so in what follows, I will demonstrate that Foucault did not endorse neoliberalism, strategically, tacitly, or otherwise; that he occupied neoliberalism's point of view in order to address his larger critique of governmentality to the exigencies of his moment. This manner of occupation is at the core of Foucault's method and the ethics which orients it. Critics like Dean and Zamora confuse it, though, for a short-sighted embrace of neoliberalism's most expansive theories of the economic subject. Following his method, I will argue to the contrary that Foucault's analysis of neoliberalism has aged better, not worse, than he may have predicted, and is vital to our understanding, therefore to our strategies for acting upon, the neoliberal hegemony consuming our present.

To bear this out, I will consider how Foucault's critics have capitalized upon and sensationalized his experiments with LSD, opportunistically exploiting both a simplistic romance of psychedelics counter-culture and an emergent psychedelics marketplace even as they decry Foucault's vulnerability to the same. In fact, Foucault's critical review of neoliberal governmentality is indispensable to our understanding the lingering effects of this romance as well as the interests, stakes, promise, and dangers of the contemporary, rapidly expanding psychedelics industry. In this increasingly corporate space, we will find, psychedelics are (attempting to be) remade into devices for the subtle yet profound governability of individuals and populations. What this means for the future of the psychedelic experience, and for the human experience it obscures or illuminates, will remain to be seen. On arriving at that uncertain future, we will want to occupy the angle of vision Foucault affords.

Bending this conversation toward the so-called "psychedelic renaissance" may seem odd. But this pairing of psychedelics and neoliberalism is neither incidental nor frivolous. The trade in altered states of consciousness draws into relief the contradictions and inconsistencies that, more than any grand narrative of neoliberal triumph, characterizes, here at the outer edge of the liberal economic episteme, the status and stakes of the subject as Foucault has taught us to define it. Our task, therefore, is to bring a Foucauldian sensibility to bear upon the history of psychedelics and Foucault's own implicatedness within it, and in this way to develop

an account of the psychedelic renaissance's ethical complexities, regulatory challenges, and the possibilities there for new forms of domination and resistance.

## I. Transaction

"Neoliberalism" has become a floating signifier and epithet for any form of economic abuse, or for democracy's technocratic subversion, or the ideological insistence that history is over and capitalism has won, or the corporatization and privatization of public goods like education and healthcare, or the reduction of personal identities into client categories, or the sabotaging of labor unions and solidarity movements of all kinds, or whatever the future of exploitation may bring. Even if we can draw all this under a common heading, Foucault's treatment is far more specific. What concerns him are those institutions and practices that developed, from roughly the Second World War to the end of the 1970s, out of and in many ways against the liberal economic tradition. These practices and their key players may be divided into two overlapping camps: Ordoliberalism, which circulated around Freiburg and the (re)construction of West Germany; and the "American anarcho-capitalism" centered in the Chicago School, including especially Gary Becker, Milton Friedman, Theodore Schultz, and, originally from the Ordoliberals, Friedrich Hayek.<sup>3</sup> The immediate backdrop of Foucault's investigation involves the political and economic upheavals instigated by French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and his economic *aide-de-camp*, Raymond Barre. The new neoliberal order was the world Foucault inhabited. In many ways, it is still our own.

No subject, therefore, is better suited to Foucault's ambition to write "the history of the present."<sup>4</sup> First and foremost, this sort of history is a methodological challenge and experiment. It overturns any notion of historical continuity to which the present belongs, as if the present were history's latest repetition. "The problem," he explains, "is to let knowledge of the past work on the experience of the present" (130).<sup>5</sup> The present is not the past again, it is not the inevitable effect of a precedent whose situation, set, and setting were not and cannot be our own. To imagine otherwise is to exercise a deterministic, implicitly fatalistic conception of history and historical method. More than a misconception, that sort of history abandons us in ignorance of the everyday workings, internal logic, formal conditions and, above all, actual practices that constitute our reality and—according to—our place within it.

This point of place is at the heart of Foucault's method, which in 1979 afforded him a uniquely contemporary opportunity to examine the domain of power relations that supplanted or displaced but did not, for all this, dissolve the sovereign subject and the discourse of right upon which that subject is founded. Obviously, neither

sovereignty nor its effects have vanished.<sup>6</sup> But nor is sovereignty, of the state or the subject, sufficient to explain the complex, at times contradictory, ensemble of techniques for managing human behavior Foucault calls governmentality. His many prior objects of analysis can be considered elements of this ensemble, but with neoliberalism Foucault was able to show how governmentality is not confined to any “precise domain” of its exercise. Like his general theory of power, governmentality is a “point of view, a method of decipherment which may be valid for the whole scale” of its operations, “whatever its size” (186).<sup>7</sup> Governmentality is a strategy of observation and critique rather than an objective set of facts.

Objectivity is a trap. With madness, sickness, social deviance, sexuality, and (with Foucault's lectures and shorter works we may add) the author, the degenerate, the outside, the state, history itself, or finally with neoliberalism the question is “by what conjunctions a whole set of practices—from the moment they become coordinated with a regime of truth—was able to make what does not exist (madness [...], etcetera), nonetheless become something, something however that continues not to exist” (19). Even or especially if it is written in blood and terror, history is a moving text. Ideas are fluxional; their reifications are both solid and impermanent; they are functions for the conduction, diversion, amplification, or attenuation of regimes of truth which, as regimes, are hegemonic and not inevitable. To track these hegemonies, therefore, is to ask how they are made real without, in so doing, determining or being determined by the reality they organize.

This is not a matter of unveiling a history of error and illusion. The task is not to measure particular instances of these things that do not exist against some universality, some absolute truth they represent or misrepresent. On the contrary, Foucault's methodological challenge and experiment begins with “the decision that universals do not exist” (3). This decision is also a scission, a cutting into history that severs the past from the present and splits truth from necessity—without hope for repair, since, as a decision, the method is also an ethical commitment to the cut and the act of cutting. Faced with objects of inquiry that are real but do not exist, we do not ask what history *is*, but “what kind of history we can do” (3). History, what Foucault calls *effective history*, does more than gather and decipher: it dissects, and, since it cannot be excepted from the history it engages, cannot operate outside its own moment, it dissects itself.<sup>8</sup>

The scission and decision are neither arbitrary nor capricious. They are the ethically invested historian's response to the exigencies of the present, traced along those marks in reality that move bodies, make minds, build and destroy worlds. There is no madness, no sexuality, no author, no neoliberalism beyond these marks,

nothing of them beyond the history of relations and material practices that are organized and ramified by the discourses bearing their name.

Foucault calls these relations and practices “transactional realities.” Their values are not innate or inert, but differential; they develop, are deployed, and decompose within adventitious economies of exchange, “from the interplay of relations of power and everything which constantly eludes them, at the interface [...] of governors and governed” (297). These interfaces are the inexistent realities of governmentality.

Tracking a transactional reality, fabricating the interests at stake among the processes of exchange which constitute it, further evades the trap of objectivity because it is an exercise in self-regard. Any point of view, however provisional or heuristic, whatever its object, is by definition peculiar to the observer. History can be neither impersonal nor disinterested—not for normative reasons, but because it simply never is. With Foucault, then, we dare to assume the neoliberal point of view because it is only by cutting into the present according to the terms of the transactional realities which constitute it that we may consider how we are implicated or made by them. Understanding how neoliberalism thinks, why it does what it does, what it fears and what it wants, the truth of its desire, we dissect our understanding of ourselves.

This, it seems to me, is the basis of his critics' recriminations. From their point of view, what distinguishes neoliberalism from Foucault's other domains of inquiry is that it thinks and behaves in much the same way as Foucault himself. This may be true, but it confounds interest with affinity. Foucault was thinking his moment. He made neoliberalism an object of his critical regard, he thought like neoliberalism, because it was neoliberalism that needed thinking. Does this mean Foucault was a neoliberal, accidentally or openly? Does his attempt to think power and resistance within the context of neoliberalism mean he was seduced or duped by it? More to these critics' point, is he responsible for having seduced the Left toward a politically bankrupt marketplace of self-expression and self-care?

Oh—and what does any of this have to do with acid under the stars at Zabriskie Point?

The fabled acid trip is a point of entry into the question of Foucault's engagements with neoliberalism because it is an especially illustrative symbol of Foucault's turn away from traditional leftist politics and toward the uses of pleasure and the aesthetics of the self. As a symbol, it is not nothing, but nor is it an actual and independently existing thing; it is inseparable from the symbolic economy in which it circulates and its value is accrued. It is something out of which a certain reality is made, a reality which takes place only through the discourses and practices

surrounding it. It bears upon the interface of governors and governed. It both does and does not exist. In short, Foucault's Death Valley adventure is a transactional reality. And business is good.

The concrete foundation of this transactional reality and the point of view from which it develops is Simeon Wade's psychobiographical romp, *Foucault in California*, a personal, diverting admixture of hero worship and humanization in which Foucault is reported to have spilled much tea and mongered much gossip. Wade, a young Claremont professor, baited him from Berkeley to southern California early in 1975 with the promise of a trip to the desert. Once there, Wade and his partner, Michael, offered Foucault "a powerful elixir, a kind of philosopher's stone" so that they "might enjoy a visionary quest together" in what Foucault endearingly called the Valley of Death.<sup>9</sup> Having never tried the drug before, Foucault was enthusiastic, then pensive, then convinced despite his hesitations to take a full dose. They walked and chatted, sipped chartreuse, sat in silence against the evening winds, listened to Richard Strauss and Karlheinz Stockhausen. Michel Foucault laughed. He cried. "The sky has exploded," he exclaimed, "and the stars are raining down upon me. I know this is not true, but it is the Truth."<sup>10</sup> He seems to have had a great time.

While the fact this trip took place is basically beyond dispute, the whole of Wade's memoir is just that: Wade's memoir. It is a testimony, written by an avid enthusiast of both LSD and Michel Foucault. This does not mean it is untrue, only that like any testimony its details are neither falsifiable nor verifiable; its truth is Wade's truth. His account is plausible but not especially interesting—at least no more interesting than any other trip report—except to the extent that it reveals some shift in the direction of Foucault's thinking. So, Wade insists, "The Death Valley trip did not change the world, but it transformed Michel Foucault, who said it was the greatest experience of his life. When he got back to Paris, he wrote to Mike and me that he had to begin anew. The Death Valley trip had changed him completely."<sup>11</sup>

Had it? Completely?

And if so, could this not but change the world?

Prior to its publication in 2019, Wade's manuscript was the stuff of legend, details of which first appeared secondhand in James Miller's 1993 biography, *The Passion of Michel Foucault*. Miller accepted Wade's testimony whole cloth, but also corroborated it through supplemental investigations. "The Death Valley 'limit-experience,'" according to Miller, "was, in fact, so important to Foucault that he frequently mentioned it to friends and acquaintances, both in the United States and France—it is perhaps the one episode in his personal life that virtually every person I interviewed had heard about from Foucault himself."<sup>12</sup> And why not? Anyone who has walked the iridescent sands of Death Valley at twilight will sense that it is one of the

most astounding and radically dislocating landscapes on the planet; augmenting the scene with a good dose of acid, especially for a novice, likely will have been infinitely remarkable.

The question, then, is not whether this really was a sublime and memorable trip, but just what sort of change it may have wrought in Foucault's mind and, more importantly, his work. The question, in other words, is: What difference does it make?

Wade insisted Foucault burned much of his growing *History of Sexuality* after his return to Paris later that year. This and a moment in *Foucault in California* when Foucault muses, tears streaming at the peak of his trip, that "I now understand my sexuality. It all seems to start with my sister," convinced Miller that the event triggered a total overhaul of the sexuality project.<sup>13</sup> This is why Dean and Zamora locate the Death Valley experience at the beginning of Foucault's turn, in the last two completed volumes of that project, toward pleasure and aesthetics. But Stuart Elden has convincingly rebuffed Miller's position, attending to the consistencies joining Foucault's published and unpublished work on sexuality before and after 1975, as well as inconsistencies between these facts and Miller's and Wade's conclusions.<sup>14</sup> Miller himself admits (albeit in a footnote) that evidence for this "epiphany" is circumstantial and anecdotal, and that his and any other conclusions about what may have befallen Foucault that night are hopelessly speculative.<sup>15</sup>

If not the history of sexuality, certainly not conclusively, then perhaps Foucault's attitude toward drugs was changed and, through this, some other trajectory of his thought? Kurt Borg has taken up this question in order to frame a survey of Foucault's remarks on drugs in general (not only LSD) both before and after 1975, but again this is something of a dead end. The distinction between theory and autobiography in Foucault's work was, by his own account, hazy, but the coincidences are equally obscure. In 1982, he asserted the need for a serious cultural study of drugs and the pleasures they enabled, in part because of his personal experiences at Death Valley and elsewhere, but there is nothing surprising or scandalous about this.<sup>16</sup> In any case, Foucault never realized such a study. All that remains, in Borg's account, is an intriguing but vague "drugs-pleasure-death" configuration, stitched together from a patchwork of interviews and passing remarks.<sup>17</sup> Borg himself is rightly circumspect: "We readers," he admonishes, "would do well to keep in mind Foucault's views on identity, confession and hermeneutics of the self when attempting such interpretations. We would also do well to be wary of how over-enthusiastic uses of philosophers' lives can function to consolidate cults of personality and academic superstardom, whereby philosophers' lives are reduced to commodities devoid of their potential critical power."<sup>18</sup> We can accept this trip was not, for Foucault, a trivial event, without reading Wade's memoir like a tabloid or



extrapolating consequences from it that contradict or totally reverse Foucault's lifetime of critique.

Much hay has been made from this orange sunshine. Still, the question remains: What difference does it make if, one night among near-strangers in the strangest of environments, set to the fitful warbles and bloops of Stockhausen's *Kontakte*, under the influence of a medical-grade psychedelic, Foucault looked to the starry sky raining upon him and saw the Truth?

It does not make a difference. Not itself, not really. But as a transactional reality, difference is made of it. This is where it exists and its symbolic currency accrues. Wade and Miller invite the madding crowd to gawk at the eminent philosopher in bell-bottoms and white turtleneck smiling ecstatically against the backdrop of the Valley of Death; and through him, they tout the transformative joys of LSD. Despite or without regard for all the speculation, uncertainty, and evidentiary inconsistency in these accounts, Dean and Zamora advertise their book, *The Last Man Takes LSD*, with this same image in order to market their story of the evisceration of the welfare state, and class consciousness more generally, by a voracious egoism the neoliberal order is only too happy to accommodate.<sup>19</sup> On either side, for the devotees or the detractors, the conclusion is the same: *This changes everything*. Thanks, Simeon. Thank you and your powerful elixir for breaking Foucault in half, and with him history itself.

In this way, through these transactions and the interest they accumulate, the meaning of Foucault is fused with the meaning of LSD. For some, this Acid-Foucault is the apogee of a great mind's precipitation to a higher consciousness, a true freedom of consciousness; for others, it is that mind's acquiescence to false consciousness and the cryptonihilistic, pseudo-spiritual marketplace of the self. Either way, this is the old story of forbidden fruit, and the story still sells. Acid-Foucault is made into a commodity whose value hangs upon a psychedelic romance signifying a convulsive generational rebellion that dreamed of radical psychosocial transformation and awoke to the nightmare 1980s—and worse, the 90s—and worse, the growing material and mental conflagration of our present—or worse.... To venerate Acid-Foucault is to appropriate his intellectual and social capital and invest it with that beautiful dream of a better world, beyond good and evil, transmogrified from the ruins of a wasted reality and restored to its proper enchantment. To blame Acid-Foucault is to mold him into an avatar, or at best another victim, of the other Pied Piper in this fairy tale adventure of internal freedom, Timothy Leary, whose favorite psychedelic instrument lured the naïve philosopher into the wilderness of the American West, where he abandoned the hard truths of real political struggle—like the rest of the children of Hamelin, never to return.

This story of victims and villains, however, with its magic potion and enchanted helpers, its heroic journey into the Western wastelands, its psychosexual awakenings, its happy or tragic ending, its book of secrets lost and found—this is not effective history. Nor is our task to defend Foucault one way or the other, as if summoning him before some tribunal on charges of acid-induced neoliberalism. Our business, rather, is to follow Foucault's method and cut through the romance on the way to the reality it organizes in order to consider how this transactional reality functions within a larger regime of truth, as well as what of his thought eludes it. To do so, we first have to dissect the Acid-Foucault amalgam, separating this transactional reality from what Foucault has actually said about neoliberalism and what it means for the other zones of governmentality surrounding it. Cutting through the romance, we then can ask what of Foucault, before and after his encounter with the ineffable at Death Valley, remains indispensable for our thinking through the resurgent field of psychedelic research and the emergent psychedelics marketplace.

## II. Inflation

Transactions are subject to inflation.

Having taken the story of Foucault's acid trip to its furthest negative extreme, pinning his California acid test to what they read as his betrayal of the Left, Dean and Zamora are Foucault's best worst critics. Their book is a useful compendium of the controversy surrounding his dalliance with neoliberalism—although “controversy” here is perhaps too strong a term. For them and their principal interlocutors, there is no question whether Foucault really was a convert. The debate concerns just how heartfelt his engagement was. Was it a “strategic endorsement,” as Michael C. Behrent has it, from which he therefore maintained some critical distance?<sup>20</sup> Or, as Andrew Dilts suggests, is “engagement,” strategic or otherwise, already too much, even if neoliberalism burrowed into the heart of Foucault's thought?<sup>21</sup> For their part, Dean and Zamora describe Foucault's encounter with neoliberalism as “decisive” for both the trajectory of his work and the emergent anti-statist Left he is supposed to exemplify. On their reading, neoliberalism opened a “new field of experimentation” within which Foucault sought to “invent a left governmentality” that “no longer rejected the market.” We will set aside the question whether there ever was a left that “rejected the market,” and what this could possibly mean. For our purposes, this “experimental attitude” is for Dean and Zamora what unites his LSD experience with his embrace of “the modes of truth-telling that arose from the market,” and eventually his last works on the care of the self.<sup>22</sup>

*The Last Man Takes LSD* pushes the argument still further, locating Foucault's temptations toward the market well prior to that evening in Death Valley. Beginning with "What is an Author?," in 1969, Dean and Zamora generate a unifying narrative arc, the keystone of which is Foucault's critique of sovereignty (of the author, the state, the subject) and of sovereignty's interpretation as the paradigm of truth-telling.<sup>23</sup> On their interpretation, this is the big bang that exploded sovereignty and revolution into infinitely minute fragments of power and resistance which, Foucault famously theorizes, are local, discontinuous, strategic, omnipresent, multivalent, immanent within and constitutive of a field of force relations. Pursuing this "new pluralist ontology" (their term) in his immediate political context, they argue that his embrace of the market was not a strategic political posture or historical accident but an inevitability.<sup>24</sup>

This is the ground of Dean and Zamora's impressively audacious conclusion: "If [Foucault's] thought maintains a relevance today, it is for what it fails to observe, and for what it perversely anticipates," namely, that "the relation of self to self is not simply a source of resistance to power, a modality of counter-conduct to the hegemonic forms of the government of conduct, but will become the essential weapon of neoliberal governing and politics."<sup>25</sup> From authorial interpretation to textual experimentation; from revolution to resistance; finally, from a politics of solidarity to "the diverse preferences of the sovereign political consumer": this is the longer journey within which the Death Valley trip is supposed to have taken place, and for which LSD turns out to have been an accelerant rather than a sufficient cause. It is a story not of unfortunate seduction or a lack of foresight, but of moral failure if not raw complicity.

What is most striking about this judgment is that it does not suppose Foucault to have welcomed the hollowing-out of a viable leftism, but rests upon the Foucauldian *resonances* the authors hear in neoliberalism. His "conception of resistance as self-invention through a critique of the state and its *assujettissement* techniques resonates with the unfolding of neoliberal governmentality, which Foucault considered to be less normative, more open to plurality and to the creation of new spaces for experimentation."<sup>26</sup> What is this? An acoustics? A physics? A coincidence? At any rate, resonance is not harmony. It is reverberation or entanglement. As one would notice while tripping on acid while Stockhausen echoes through the Amargosa mountains, it is at once separation and connectedness, the uncertain limit or undoing of the limit between resemblance and identity. Press the 440hz "A" key on a piano and the guitar standing next to it will ring with the same tone. This is resonance. Yet, a guitar is not a piano. They may share certain characteristics, but they have different mechanics, constructions, histories,

sonic and compositional limitations. They serve different functions, even if they—really, the musicians operating them—can sometimes play the same tune. Too easily, though, this critique of Foucault confounds resonance with consonance, playing him to the tune of neoliberalism, obfuscating the differences between him and the discourses he investigates in order to render him culpable of permitting, even inviting, what Dean and Zamora call the “rogue neoliberalism” of the present.<sup>27</sup>

In so doing, *The Last Man Takes LSD* puts into circulation what Foucault terms “an inflationary critical currency,” committing the very error he found endemic among neoliberal criticisms of the state. The Ordoliberals, for example, argued that any state interference upon the marketplace’s independent rationality entails an “anti-liberal invariant” (111) that tends inevitably toward National Socialism. Their survey of the problems with social security thus “ends up, via some slippages and thanks to some plays on words, referring us to the analysis of concentration camps,” so that “the requisite specificity of analysis is diluted” on the way to “a general disqualification by the worst.” Foucault continues: “Whatever the object of analysis, however tenuous or meager it is, and whatever its real functioning, to the extent that it can always be referred to something which will be worse by virtue of the state’s intrinsic dynamic and the final forms it may take, the less can always be disqualified by the more, the better by the worst” (187-88). As with the neoliberals against the state, so with Foucault’s critics and neoliberalism: adopting the neoliberal point of view—not naively but, as we have established, heuristically, methodically, and with profound rigor—means for Dean and Zamora a shared set of values and ideological commitments. At the least, Foucault is made to be responsible for the worst of what neoliberalism has become. And through him, LSD, no stranger to this sort of inflation, is supposed to be the gasoline that really spread the fire.

Though they are alone in having forged this tenuous link between Wade’s memoir and Foucault’s neoliberal point of view, the vagaries of resonance and the inflationary error are not unique to Dean and Zamora. Whatever its complications, “Blame Michel Foucault” is the punchline to a long series of accusations which revalue his experimentalism (including with drugs, of course) in view of the worst of neoliberalism. The most prevalent variations on this theme include: the marking of certain coincidences between France’s anti-statist “Second Left,” with which Foucault sympathized from the end of the 1970s, and the cynical demolition of democracy by proponents of free market radicalism and the cult of private property;<sup>28</sup> the accusation that Foucault’s shift in the emphasis of social critique from exploitation to exclusion “replaced political struggles against inequality,” as Zamora elsewhere writes, and “paved the way for the neoliberal assault on the welfare state”;<sup>29</sup> and the assertion of guilt by association, for instance, between neoliberal

proposals that intrigued Foucault, like Milton Friedman's negative income tax, and these proposals' later influence on the "Third Way" politics of Tony Blair and Bill Clinton.<sup>30</sup> In each case, these loose correlations begin with some detail concerning Foucault's engagements with the controversies of his moment and extrapolate his culpability for the systematic destruction of the public sphere that has unfolded largely since his death and against his method, ethics, and many of his conclusions.

The loudest and most compelling variation on this inflationary theme is that Foucault was drawn to neoliberalism's less disciplinary, less normative theory of the subject, namely the Chicago School's reinvention of *homo oeconomicus*. This is true. Since the market operates on principles that, in Behrent's words, "epitomized power as Foucault had come to understand it,"<sup>31</sup> it also affords opportunities for resistance that are entrapped within neither the sovereigntist paradigm nor the disciplinary configurations developed under the regime of liberalism. Foucault saw in this new conception of the subject an "essential epistemological transformation" (222), through which appears "the image, idea, or theme-program of a society in which there is an optimization of systems of difference, [...] in which minority individuals and practices are tolerated, in which action is brought to bear on the rules of the game rather than on the players, and finally in which there is an environmental type of intervention instead of the internal subjugation of individuals" (259-60). Does this mean Foucault found in the neoliberal subject an answer and solution to discipline and disciplinary power? That for him "neoliberalism offers us a way out of subjectification," as Dean and Zamora write?<sup>32</sup> That neoliberalism would set us free?

No. Obviously not.

The basis of this new subject, in Foucault's account, is Becker's "colossal definition" according to which *homo oeconomicus* is "someone who accepts reality." Whatever else this may mean, for Becker it entails someone who is "susceptible to modifications in the variables of the environment" (269), "someone manageable, someone who responds systematically to systematic modifications artificially introduced into the environment" (270). This environment extends beyond monetary exchange, encompassing the whole social field, symbiotically conjoined with the rational individual who, knowingly or otherwise, calculates and is calculable according to the available set of choices within a situation of scarcity. In this way, through this environment's manipulation, Foucault defines *Homo oeconomicus* as "someone who is eminently governable" (270). Even if Becker's purely economic logic were realized and, miraculously, preposterously, all prior forms of the subject were to vanish, this would not eliminate the effects of power; it would radicalize them by other means. It would not do away with external constraints on individual autonomy, but renders the very notion of self-governance incoherent.<sup>33</sup>

It bears repeating that the development of one regime of truth does not evaporate its precedent. The total network of governmentality which defines politics since the eighteenth century is one of multiple, heterogenous, simultaneously operative, irreducible and irreconcilable conceptions of the subject—of right, of economics, of discipline, and so on. This is how Foucault defines modern civil society. Extensive with such a society is the subject's eminent governability, and the multiplication of technologies of governance that include but exceed the state. Nor is the conception of power at play here a reversal of what Foucault had established in *Discipline and Punish*. It is an elaboration, complication and alternative specification of the same "micro-physics" of power framing that earlier investigation as well as his later studies of sexuality. To suppose that, after dropping acid in 1975, Foucault was drawn to a less disciplinary power because he imagined it to be kinder and gentler, less nefarious, more respectful of individual autonomy, is to misunderstand what power is: "a perpetual battle rather than a contract regulating a transaction or the conquest of a territory."<sup>34</sup> The battle does not cease, the tensions between the governing and the governed are not dissolved, simply because the strategies have changed.

And that is what neoliberalism entails. It is an epistemological transformation of the subject based upon a more efficient means to its manipulation. This opens new opportunities for resistance, but, given how power operates, this is true of any novel context. There is nothing in Foucault leading us to suppose such resistances are normatively better than their precedents; quite the contrary, he made clear that, according to the micro-physics of power, every resistance is always also a new opportunity for domination. As there is no opting out of this perpetual battle, Dean and Zamora's suggestion that Foucault "claimed [...] neoliberalism offers us a way out of subjectification" presumes an absurd voluntarism that nobody more thoroughly debunked; such a claim "resonates" with nothing so much as the earlier counter-culture's greatest advertising slogan, "Turn On, Tune In, Drop Out."<sup>35</sup>

### III. Speculation

*A specter is haunting the specter of Michel Foucault—the specter of Timothy Leary.*

It is Leary who, by another inflationary error, better symbolizes the dangers, recklessness, and selfishness of a cultural revolution gone awry. In this regard, like Foucault among the Chicago School economists, LSD is adjudged guilty by association with the last century's most notorious mad scientist. Once the key sacrament and namesake for Leary's psychedelic church, the League for Spiritual Discovery, acid remains at the center of an epistemic upheaval and ongoing crisis of

scientific legitimacy psychologists, therapists, neurologists and biochemists still struggle to resolve, alongside new pharmacopsychedelic drug companies and a growing field of venture capitalists and entrepreneurs looking to cash in on how to change your mind.

A full telling of this rupture and ongoing repair campaign might begin with the molecule's clinical origins. After Albert Hofmann, an unassuming chemist at Sandoz Pharmaceuticals, accidentally (!) discovered Lysergic acid diethylamide's psychotropic effects in 1943, it was thought to induce temporary psychotic states in otherwise normal subjects and classified as a "psychotomimetic"; with it, psychiatrists believed they could study "model psychoses" and practice "model therapies" without inducing or exacerbating a permanent psychosis.<sup>36</sup> Soon, it was an exciting new psychotherapeutic tool to which nearly anyone (psychotics, as ever, excluded) could be subjected. It became one device among others, alongside or in tandem with insulin-induced comas or electroconvulsive therapy or lobotomy, for the medicalization and normalization of unruly, untreatable, or otherwise difficult subjects. And it was a historical basis (along with other drugs like methamphetamine and chlorpromazine) for contemporary psychopharmacology.<sup>37</sup> Clinicians reported that a few weeks of LSD-assisted therapy could accomplish what might take years of typical psychoanalysis. Case histories treating everything from alcoholism to homosexuality demonstrated LSD's diverse applications for both acute and chronic symptoms of mental distress or social deviance.

It was only once popular enthusiasm for the drug exploded that LSD's fortunes reversed. When the scions of the 60s counter-culture, Leary foremost among them, couched its consciousness-expanding properties in scientific discourses borrowed from the august institutions from which they had been banished, the medical establishment and the rule of law marshaled the full force of their censure, resulting in prohibition. By the end of the 1970s, this robust field of research had generated an archive of more than 10,000 published professional papers—and was all but dead.

Had he written his proposed cultural history of drugs, Foucault would have found no shortage of material in the LSD archives, which unfolded amid the apparatuses he detailed in his account of the medical gaze and its extension and elaboration in the domains of mental illness and criminology.<sup>38</sup> The incorporation of sexual deviance into the symptomatology LSD was supposed to treat, as well as its place within the sexual liberation movement, recall Foucault's critique of the "repressive hypothesis" at the heart of the modern history of sexuality.<sup>39</sup> Its status at the vanguard of Leary and his comrades' International Federation for Internal Freedom, who asserted expanded consciousness was a "major civil liberties issue," as well as the psychiatric establishment's reactions against this kind of psychedelic

populism, update and dramatize Foucault's history of the earlier struggle for psychiatric power.<sup>40</sup> The resulting prohibition, the consequent expansion of the modern surveillance society and global police state, and the spectacles of delinquency to which they have given rise, reflect the core insights of *Discipline and Punish*. Military and intelligence agency investigations into LSD's potentials for weaponization, including these investigations' racist origins and legacies, manifest the sacrificial logics of biopolitics.<sup>41</sup> The simultaneous inclusion and exclusion of the psychoses; the use and reuse of madness as the supreme danger which, the experts insisted, psychedelic consumers courted when not bound by strict medical supervision; the ways in which the moral panic surrounding LSD reproduced and reinforced the socially constructed limit between sanity and insanity—all this sustains the historical problematic and contemporary realities of “the Great Confinement” Foucault uncovered in the *History of Madness*.<sup>42</sup> In sum, LSD's clinical and cultural adventures before and after his trip in 1975 reflect and enrich nearly every one of Foucault's major interventions.

To bring any one of these interventions to bear on the current state of the biomedical and psychotherapeutic marketplace for psychedelics would be a true history of the present. The laws have not substantially changed since prohibition was instituted in the late 1960s, even as current research outcomes drive billions of new investment dollars toward psychedelics' curative potentials. In order to navigate this symbolically and legally restrictive regulatory environment, research scientists, therapeutic practitioners, and corporate entities must genuflect to the methods, interests, expectations, and anxieties of mainstream science and psychiatry, which are often coextensive with social and institutional interests and anxieties writ large. Robust research controls are now essential to government approval of any study, but this is more than a matter of correcting the first wave's sub-optimal data harvesting techniques or installing ethical safeguards for experiments with human test subjects.<sup>43</sup> Such controls also ensure studies are oriented toward the objective scientific or medical merit of psychedelic compounds or treatment protocols. As we have seen, however, objectivity is a trap. The laws which enforce these standards are not themselves objective, and are organized by systems of thought and social structures, regimes of truth, transactional realities, that prevailed before prohibition and that will not simply vanish even if select psychedelics' legal status were to be substantially revised.

The research conducted in this regulatory context is organized and oriented by norms of thought and action that remain allergic to psychedelics' lingering anti-establishment connotations. Danielle Giffort's review of the tactics and techniques by which contemporary psychedelics scientists self-police their work, their broader



professional fields, and even their minute behaviors and styles of speech and dress, makes clear that they have yet to excise Timothy Leary's ghost.<sup>44</sup> The specter of the mad, bad scientist remains a productive, formative force, only now Leary exemplifies what Foucault would call a disciplinary mechanism.

These financial and disciplinary realities mean research is developed and outcomes are presented in ways that aim to integrate psychedelics into mainstream medicine while attracting investors and consumers within the lucrative biomedical marketplace. In this race to monetize everything from post-traumatic stress disorder to existential end-of-life anxiety, scientific studies are sometimes twisted or their results misrepresented (even by some scientists) to provoke investor enthusiasm in this still-inchoate economic environment.<sup>45</sup> Dozens of venture capital agencies, investment funds, law firms, data companies, and research corporations now vie for position in the emergent psychedelics economy. Some firms alter the chemistry of known psychedelics, patent the derivatives, and rebrand these "new chemical entities" in order to broaden their access and appeal. Others pursue forms of drug administration that make the experience more "controllable" and "convenient," as one executive put it, so that a patient's "time in the clinic looks a lot more like a dentist appointment than it does a surgery."<sup>46</sup> DMT nasal spray, MDMA without the duration and hangover, psilocybin or LSD derivatives without the hallucinations, the destination without the trip—all opportunities to increase the range, rapidity, and appeal of potential treatments.

As psychedelics healing practitioners Ross Ellenhorn and Dimitri Mugianis have written, "the psychedelic experience is in danger of being commodified and turned into a kind of Botox or CoolSculpting for the mind. That's happening in a preexisting landscape of for-profit behavioral health care that treats its patients as commodities—at best, machines in need of repair; at worst, ATMs."<sup>47</sup> Points of market entry and transaction cost analyses recast psychedelics not in terms of expansive experience—no *Kontakte* necessary, surreal natural landscape not required, transformative epiphanies not included—but as an increasingly diverse set of offerings in a proliferating pharmacopeia, tamed and tailored for personal use. Whatever makes you comfortable. Whatever you can afford.

Nor are these efforts confined to the treatment or cure of mental illness. The psychedelics industry, already worth billions of dollars, is increasingly enveloped by the nebulous and powerful notion of *wellness*. The discourse of "microdosing" promises users augmented productivity without the need to endure psychedelics' estranging hallucinatory effects.<sup>48</sup> Retreats to Ibiza and Costa Rica minister "integration therapies" to help individuals incorporate their psychedelic experiences into, rather than jarring them out of, their daily lives. Psychological and spiritual

wellbeing are conflated and sold at rates that place them out of the reach of most consumers. As it happens, you can put a price on existential fulfillment.<sup>49</sup>

And, of course, the culture industry is not without its investments and hopes for return. Thus do Dean and Zamora peddle their critique of Foucault's supposedly formative contributions to today's rogue neoliberalism under the heading of LSD, accusing Foucault in their opening pages of dropping acid only after it was cool, of having been dazzled in the ether of Leary's apolitical enchantments—even though Foucault's acid test is at best a loosely associated framing tale that adds little to their ensuing analysis.<sup>50</sup> In so doing, they both surrender to and traffic in the enduring and emergent allures of psychedelic sensationalism, joining the madding crowd and inviting us to do the same.

None of this marketization is intrinsically or simply bad. But as Foucault has taught us, all of it is dangerous. Psychedelics' absorption into this sort of economic environment is riven and driven by neoliberalism, which we know is an extension and enlargement of the more specialized domains of governmentality traversing the history of this present. Here is a marketplace with the potential for vast wealth creation (and, as ever, its inverse) where prices are not determined or centrally regulated even as psychedelic entrepreneurs must navigate a restrictive legal context organized according to, and on behalf of, social, scientific, and medical norms. Science and medicine in this context, whatever the dispositions or values of the actors involved, are means to the end of capital growth, folded into the economic logics of commodity and profit. Even as capital fund managers admit no amount of mainstreaming will appease an inflexible demand for the far out, the mystical, and in general the highly weird, consumers no longer need follow the way of the psychonaut to indulge, casually or otherwise, psychedelics' health and wellness benefits.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, many operating in this space hope for just the opposite: the multiplication of available options for all levels of potential consumer interest. They see psychedelics as the next great disruptor of the enormous healthcare industry, at once a complement and a challenge to entrenched pharmaceutical and therapeutic paradigms. In this economy, choice determines price. And choice—What sort of magic elixir would you like? How much magic do you want?—is overdetermined by a complexity of distinct, heterogeneous, at times irreconcilable variables: legal access and risks; psychiatric normativity and power; prevailing or local moralities; lingering social stigmas; personal curiosities and hesitations; demand and availability.

Clearly, freedom of consciousness is not free—not only because it comes at a cost, but because any consciousness is inseparable from the array of mental or material constraints, the set of transactional realities, structuring its contexts and limitations. This also means there is no universal consciousness. Or with Foucault we

begin with the decision that such a universal does not exist. Cutting into the psychedelic romance and the consciousness industry from the point of view of governmentality, opening them to a history of the present, we find that the prospect of freeing one's mind is increasingly integrated into the same systems of thought and action that locked it up to begin with. The subject's manageability and manipulability are extended and transformed as state power, disciplinary power, biopower, and capitalism conjoin and are reconfigured to accommodate or induce a properly expanded consciousness.

Shall we blame Foucault for this?

Or is it rather the case that we cannot really think the simultaneously transformative and conservative direction of this new reality, and what it means for the history and future of the subject, without him?

In any case, we cannot simply apply Foucault here as one applies a lens to a camera without reducing his thought to a series of portable universals. To avoid this worst error of reading, and to further disentangle him from the Acid-Foucault commodity that, we have seen, has little to do with either acid or Foucault, we arrive at our final question. We want to know how governmentality, as a point of view and a practice, can illuminate the stakes of the psychedelic renaissance today—for law, politics, economics, and the subjective human experience they wish to objectify, calculate, and circumscribe.

#### IV. Regulation

Foucault's story of neoliberalism takes many surprising turns, none more important for the question of the psychedelic renaissance than the discovery that the market, like any game, requires radical regulation—radical, as in, from the roots.

This seems to deny the obvious facts of massive *deregulation* from the last quarter of the twentieth century to the present. Global pauperization, environmental depredation, the runaway extractive energy industry, widespread political destabilization, the privatization of the public sphere, erosion of collective bargaining power, the virtualized attention economy, the hollowing out of the welfare state, healthcare profiteering—all this and more suggest neoliberalism is precisely, acutely, disastrously anti-regulation.

So it is. But only from the very perspective against which Foucault warns us, the point of view that mistakes the present as a repetition or retrofitting of the past. The very name of neoliberalism invites this misprision and obfuscation, since its relation to liberalism is more resonance than revival. In fact, neoliberalism breaks

epistemologically and practically from the liberal economic tradition, and from the regulatory practices it established, in at least three ways.

At the end of the eighteenth century, Foucault shows, with Adam Smith or Jeremy Bentham or Immanuel Kant, liberalism naturalized the mechanisms of market exchange. The state's new role, the source of its legitimacy, became self-restraint, minimal government, because in this way its power would no longer inhibit the market's natural course. Whence *laissez-faire*. Neoliberalism abjures any such "naive naturalism" (120) and, doing so, replaces liberalism's emphasis on the mechanisms of exchange with the logic of competition. This is its first major break with liberalism. Competition is not an instinct; its principles, the rules of the economic game, reside on the other side of the split Kant drove through metaphysics, in the domain of pure reason, where they tend infallibly toward rational order—provided they are not subjected to external (therefore irrational, or what Kant called "pathological") interference. The market is not a force of nature but a rational form and, as such, it deserves and demands not so much restraint as respect.

Neoliberalism's second rupture with liberalism follows from this. The liberal doctrine of *laissez-faire* capitalism still operated under the rubric of the state, which, restraining itself, was still in the position of accommodating the market. Neoliberalism shatters this hierarchy. Now, the state is formed from the ground up (as was the case with Germany beginning in 1948) or torn down and reformed (with Giscard, Thatcher, or Reagan; or in international lending and neocolonial "structural adjustment programs" that forcibly integrate smaller economies into the global neoliberal order) in service to the rational economic game. "The market economy," Foucault explains, "does not take something away from government." Instead, the market "constitutes the general index in which one must place the rule for defining all governmental action" (121). The state becomes the market's enforcer.

Third, such governance is not passive; it requires "an indefinitely active policy" to ensure "pure competition," defined as "a formal game between inequalities" (120). Thus does neoliberalism transform inequality from either a social problem to be redressed or a universal fact of nature into the basis and objective of all regulatory action. A healthy economy requires inequality, since it is only this that ensures competition.

There is no absence of market regulation here. The realities of systematic neoliberal violence against alternative forms of collectivity and whole lifeworlds seem to be the consequence of deregulation because we are holding the apparatus upside-down. From this inverted point of view, we mistake the contemporary dynamics of regulation and deregulation as a reflection of the older, liberal model, wherein the state's accommodation of the market could be revoked and the

economy subjected to sovereign or democratic adjustments. But the neoliberal state, while not less powerful than its liberal antecedent, is fundamentally different. It has been rebuilt as the market's strong arm and guarantor, and especially in the American anarcho-capitalist context has substantially refashioned the social order in the market's image.

The difference, in other words, is in the direction of this regulation. The neoliberal government is active, its interventions are constant, but the object of these interventions is "society as such, in its fabric and depth [...], so that competitive mechanisms can play a regulatory role at every moment and every point in society," resulting finally in "a general regulation of society by the market" (145).<sup>52</sup> With neoliberalism, the state breaks, smooths, and otherwise eliminates local and historical resistances to the formal conditions and total framework of pure competition, which entails total privatization, therefore pervasive inequality. Subsistence economies; populations consolidated around territories and traditional industries; all manner of economic planning; import controls or job creation programs; notions of justice and right driven by compassion or sentiment—all this is to be ground down, rearranged, or eliminated to the extent that it interferes with the incontrovertible rules of competition. This is the organizing principle of neoliberal governmentality.

Or, at least it is the story Foucault tells, which I have augmented and updated not only to reflect the worst of neoliberalism since his 1979 lectures, but to emphasize that this "worstness" is not the effect of an inflationary error, as was the case with the neoliberals against the state or with those critics who blame Foucault for the worst of neoliberalism. I mean to show, rather, that this worstness is already thinkable within the framework Foucault developed, even if it had not yet come into view. Nobody better prepares us to recognize the paucity of any definition of "regulation" that confines it to the sovereign power of the state constraining or correcting the market's more savage tendencies. Regulation, from the point of view Foucault occupies and enables, according to the conception of power which is also the core of his critical method, is not primarily about constraint, but control. And like power in general, regulation is productive.

So, although power may no longer be centralized in the state, the state remains an important nodal point for its transmission and enforcement. Politics in this context does not do away with the older model of the subject of right, but nor can we ignore the economic subject and the extensive domain of regulation and calculation in which this other subject is inscribed. This is why, after liberalism, politics can be patterned after neither the bourgeois revolutions nor the sovereigntist conception of power liberalism inherited and adapted. Nor can we retreat into the

sureties of simplistic oppositions or zero-sum allegiances—such as those Dean and Zamora impose, for instance, between the market and the state. In truth, this sort of dichotomy never made much sense. With Foucault, the primary question on the political battlefield is not Whose side are you on? That is an immanent strategic determination, and it cannot be avoided. Neutrality is not an option. But neither, for the ethically invested critic of history, is dogmatism. Prior to all such strategic determinations, Foucault asks: From where, according to what interests, and with what techniques is the subject actually governed? Or, how is the subject, which otherwise does not exist, made to be? Foregrounding the problem of the subject in this way enables us to consider by what practices we might experience a microgram of freedom before it, too, is assimilated by the colossal, expansive, but nimble and creative micro-physics of power that moves and scaffolds our social realities as well as our most intimate sense of self.

There are several lessons here for the psychedelic renaissance. In the first place, the term “renaissance” functions like the “neo” in neoliberalism: it supposes a rebirth or return which is not, in fact, a continuation or repetition. In the intermediary decades between the first and new wave of institutionally sanctioned psychedelics enthusiasm, psychoanalysis was displaced by behaviorism and the new therapeutics of adjustment, transforming the clinical, conceptual, and ethical context for psychedelic psychotherapies. Psychedelics' underground use has flourished and they have more than recuperated the counter-culture currency for which they were initially sanctioned, which is why the contemporary professional field is saturated with performative sobriety. Timothy Leary—proud caricature of unauthorized experiments with your own consciousness, the true target of Dean and Zamora's attack on the anti-politics of the spaced-out self—is dead, but his anti-establishment spirit lives on in an entirely inverted form: in the cautionary tale about psychedelics' propensity to escape the laboratory and freak out the squares in the college quad, Leary is the anti-establishment anti-hero whose fabled antics now keep science and scientists in line. The increased corporatization of psychedelics, which depending on one's perspective either robs or rescues them from their home on the other side of normal, places us—to repeat another of Leary's most enduring coinages—in a substantially different set and setting. So, too, does the late history of neoliberalism, which seems also to be the late history of the world, if not the planet.

In terms of competition and the rationalization of the economic game, the distinct, coterminous, and entwined histories of psychedelics and neoliberalism make clear that an epistemic break does not obliterate the epistemes that precede it. We have just seen how neoliberalism subordinates the state's regulatory powers to the rational ideal of pure competition, but there are few more spectacular exceptions

to this than the war on drugs. This centralized repression of a marketplace of goods for which there will always be a demand has entailed immense capital expenditures and loss of productive power (a neoliberal synonym for “life”), but the effects of this repression are by no means purely negative. The discourse of drugs creates the imaginary figure of the “good subject,” an ideological construct whose happiness is entangled with the pleasures of obedience, compliance, and prescription; thus does illicit drug use inversely carry the value-added pleasures of subversion, rebellion, and curiosity of a dangerous knowledge. Thereby contributing to the very demand it wants to quash, a hard limit of legality that positions the state *against* the market abdicates the neoliberal state’s regulatory role, so that an absolutely unregulated, anarchic economy develops in which vast sums of money are siphoned and redistributed without oversight, taxation, or standardized production and distribution. In other words, prohibition does not eliminate a marketplace, it produces a marketplace without a state. Psychedelics have largely escaped the worst of narcotrafficking and its suppression, but maintaining a narrow window of permission that best serves prevailing corporate and ideological interests entails all those other, structural and systemic sorts of violence operative throughout the neoliberal world order, “rogue” or otherwise. The industry’s growth within this narrow window suggests psychedelics will help accelerate rather than attenuate these less spectacular but more pervasive consequences of the total neoliberal environment.

To rationalize this marketplace within a neoliberal framework would be, first, to eliminate its artificial controls—to prohibit prohibition. This would put a stop to the absurdities of the war on drugs. It would abjure the state’s tendency to legislate behavior based upon puritanical moral prejudices. It would be a classically liberal instance of the *laissez-faire* doctrine—the state exercising self-restraint. But this is not enough. The state also would be repurposed to serve and protect the logic of competition. Drug enforcement policies would be driven by cost-benefit analysis, decided by bean-counting technocrats concerned only with minimizing inputs and maximizing economic benefits. The state’s considerable power would be marshaled to grind and smooth all resistances to the unfettered flow of capital throughout the psychedelic-economic game. Consciousness itself—which more than any chemical substance is what the psychedelics industry truly sells—would be a commodity less subject to disciplinary mechanisms and subject instead to the price mechanism, a different but no less extensive means for the management of individuals and the choreography of their environment. Consciousness will be the new transactional reality which, like madness or delinquency, exists not autonomously but opportunistically, and will be valuable to the extent that it can be objectified: made into an object of economic calculation, severed from the irreducibly subjective

dimension of experience for which the economic field has no use except perhaps as a marketing ploy and means to a population's more precise manipulation. A psychedelically hospitable environment would be a less disciplinary one; it would also exercise another sort of regulation, that of the economic subject's, and the wider society's, radical governability, from the roots, with all the danger and potential for domination this implies.

Free the market, free your mind. What is it worth, and can you afford it?

Or is the psychedelic experience allergic to this sort of valuation and calculation? Can that allergy be suppressed? Does an encounter with the ineffable, in its very ineffability, expose the illogic, implausibility, preposterousness, of a calculating and calculated society based on competition and exchange? Is this, more than any apolitical, hedonistic allure, perhaps what Foucault encountered that night at Zabriskie Point? Is this a use of pleasure and a care of the self that, while not without its history, affords a glimpse, however ephemeral and uncertain, of what lies beyond the regimes of truth and transactional realities that encircle the human experience?

Or is this just another sales pitch?

Back in 1977, Foucault signed his assent to Wade's manuscript with an enigmatic, poetic flourish: "Epistème la gris." Maybe this was an inside joke, or reference to some unrecorded moment of friendship during that legendary desert night. Or perhaps in Wade's memoir and the experience it recalled Foucault sensed the edge of another epoch, a new set of historical-discursive conditions for the subject and its resistances to subjectivation—as yet unknowable, hidden in the mists of Death Valley at dawn. Perhaps this episteme was or will be like any enlightenment: a muddle of shadow and luminance, concealment and revelation, the gray terror of a freedom not yet constrained by the knowledge it wills. From my point of view, Foucault's odd farewell is nonsense. In this, it conjures the specter of that other student of the human experience, William James, who wrote of his own chemically-induced tours through the realms of the ineffable: "Depth beyond depth of truth seems revealed to the inhaler. This truth fades out, however, or escapes, at the moment of coming to; and if any words remain over which it seemed to clothe itself, they prove to be the veriest nonsense."<sup>53</sup> And this ill-fitted nonsense, draped in discourses which reveal only by concealing the truth that eludes them, is as yet impossible to regulate.



## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Mitchell Dean and Daniel Zamora, "Today, the self is the battlefield of politics. Blame Michel Foucault," *The Guardian*, June 15, 2021; <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/jun/15/michel-foucault-self-individual-politics>; accessed May 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Dean and Zamora's argument here is largely an updated condensation of Lasch's classic diatribe, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: Norton, 1979).

<sup>3</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-79*, trans. Graham Burchell, ed. Michel Senellart (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). All subsequent references are to this edition and will be given parenthetically in the main text.

<sup>4</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1995), 31.

<sup>5</sup> Foucault continues: "It is this transfer of the political effects of an historical analysis in the form of a simple repetition that is undoubtedly what is to be avoided at any cost" (130-31). Elsewhere, Foucault accuses this way of squeezing the present between the past and future of "a metaphysics of a crowned and coherent cosmos, of a hierarchical world" (Michel Foucault, "Theatrum Philosophicum," *The Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume Two: Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, ed. James D. Faubion [New York: The New Press, 1998], 351).

<sup>6</sup> "The problematic of the economy is by no means the logical completion of the great problematic of sovereignty," Foucault insists, but it does mark the irruption of a theory of the subject "governed by a completely different configuration, by a completely different logic, type of reasoning, and rationality," which is "heterogeneous and incompatible" with "the totalizing unity of the juridical sovereign" (*The Birth of Biopolitics*, 282). Heterogeneity does not mean that an epistemic rift swallows whole the era that precedes it. Also see *ibid.*, 311-313.

<sup>7</sup> Foucault also calls his theory of power a "viewpoint"; see *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990), 92-93; importantly, this most famous account of power occupies the chapter titled "Method."

<sup>8</sup> "'Effective' history leaves nothing around the self, deprives the self of the reassuring stability of life and nature, and it will not permit itself to be transported by a voiceless obstinacy toward a millennial ending. It will uproot its traditional foundations and relentlessly disrupt its pretended continuity. This is because knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting" (Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow [New York: Pantheon, 1984], 88).

<sup>9</sup> Simeon Wade, *Foucault in California: A True Story—Wherein the Great French Philosopher Drops Acid in the Valley of Death* (Berkeley: Heyday, 2019), 31.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 58-60.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 9. In a later interview, Wade insisted the trip was “a transcendental experience” after which Foucault utterly abandoned his emphasis on finitude (which, to be sure, is an organizing principle of his thought). “*Everything* after this experience in 1975 is the new Foucault” (“Michel Foucault in Death Valley: A Boom interview with Simeon Wade,” September 10, 2017; <https://boomcalifornia.org/2017/09/10/michel-foucault-in-death-valley-a-boom-interview-with-simeon-wade/>; accessed May 2022; emphasis in original). Beyond the details of Foucault's trip, Wade's account evokes the often closeted or repressed erotics of theory and philosophy; see Douglas Dowland, “Flirting with Foucault,” *The Rambling*, February 14, 2020; <https://the-rambling.com/2020/02/14/valentines-dowland/>; accessed June 2022.

<sup>12</sup> James Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault* (New York: Anchor Books, 1994 [1993], 437-38, n. 1; emphasis in original).

<sup>13</sup> Wade, *Foucault in California*, 61; Miller, *The Passion*, 251-52.

<sup>14</sup> Stuart Elden, “The Problem of Confession: The Productive Failure of Foucault's *History of Sexuality*,” *Journal for Cultural Research* 9, no. 1 (January 2005), esp. 34-36. For a broad survey and timetable of Foucault's project on sexuality, see Stuart Elden, *Foucault's Last Decade* (Cambridge: Polity, 2016), 45-81; on the continuities between this project and his lectures on neoliberalism, see 109-10. The best overview of this controversy is Andrew Marzoni, “Foucault in the Valley of Death,” *The Baffler* 46 (July 2019); <https://thebaffler.com/salvos/foucault-in-the-valley-of-death-marzoni>; accessed May 2022.

<sup>15</sup> Miller, *The Passion*, 438-39, n. 16. This concession does not, however, stop Miller from venturing some substantial, if vague, speculations.

<sup>16</sup> “We have to study drugs,” Foucault says. “We have to experience drugs. We have to do *good* drugs that can produce very intense pleasure. I think this puritanism about drugs, which implies that you can either be for drugs or against drugs, is mistaken. Drugs have now become a part of our culture” (Michel Foucault, “Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity,” *The Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume One: Ethics*, ed. Paul Rabinow [New York: The New Press, 1997], 165-66; emphasis in original).

<sup>17</sup> Kurt Borg, “Foucault on Drugs: The Personal, the Ethical and the Political in *Foucault in California*,” *Foucault Studies* 28 (September 2020), 152.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 160-61.

<sup>19</sup> Dean and Zamora assert, “The effect on Foucault was profound. He would indeed radically alter the direction of his research in the following years” (*The Last Man Takes LSD: Foucault and the End of Revolution* [New York: Verso, 2021], 4). Another article by Dean and Zamora plugging the book, an adaptation of its introduction, bears the headline, “The true story of Michel Foucault's LSD trip that changed history” (*Salon*, March 13, 2021; <https://www.salon.com/2021/03/13/the-true-story-of-michel-foucaults-isd-trip-that-changed-history/>; accessed May 2022. There is no basis for this other than Wade's memoir, Miller's suspect reproduction of its grandest claims, and what Dean and Zamora's own reading generates from these problematic materials.

<sup>20</sup> In fact, Behrent's position is far from sympathetic. On his reading, Foucault's turn to biopolitics was entirely under the influence of neoliberalism and reverses his earlier study of disciplinary power: “What emerges from Foucault's lectures on economic liberalism is, then, a different Foucault—at the very least, one considerably at odds with the Foucault that has been so vehemently debated in the

American academy" ("Liberalism without Humanism," in *Foucault and Neoliberalism*, ed. Daniel Zamora and Michael C. Behrent [Cambridge: Polity, 2016], 54). If his lectures on neoliberalism really are a "strategic endorsement," this total capitulation suggests, for Behrent, Foucault was an extraordinarily bad strategist.

<sup>21</sup> I am here summarizing Dean and Zamora. Dilts' position is more nuanced than their gloss suggests; Foucault's last works, Dilts shows, were inspired by a neoliberal conception of a subject beyond sovereignty, but his turn to Antiquity in volumes two and three of *The History of Sexuality* is an implicit but damning rebuke of neoliberalism's ethical bankruptcy. See Andrew Dilts, "From 'Entrepreneur of the Self' to 'Care of the Self': Neo-liberal Governmentality and Foucault's Ethics," *Foucault Studies* 12 (October 2011), 130-46, esp. 143-44.

<sup>22</sup> Dean and Zamora, *The Last Man*, 11-12, 36-37, 57, 71. The phrase "experimental attitude" is Foucault's, cited by Dean and Zamora (ibid., 36); for their account of the Behrent/Dilts divide, see ibid., 29-31. On the neoliberal enticement of a subject beyond discipline or biographical anthropology, also see Dilts, "From 'Entrepreneur of the Self,'" 136-37.

<sup>23</sup> "Foucault's criticism of the author will constitute an intellectual framework for gradually thinking of the subject as a text: as something that needs to be invented, experienced rather than interpreted" (Dean and Zamora, *The Last Man*, 80).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 231.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 203, 229-30.

<sup>28</sup> Exemplary in this regard is Michael Scott Christofferson, "Foucault and New Philosophy: Why Foucault Endorsed André Glucksmann's *The Master Thinkers*," in *Foucault and Neoliberalism*, 6-23. For an extended rehearsal of these charges, see Dean and Zamora, *The Last Man*, 32-35; for their take on the Glucksmann affair, see, 47-52.

<sup>29</sup> Daniel Zamora, "Foucault, the Excluded," in *Foucault and Neoliberalism*, 72-73.

<sup>30</sup> The notion of negative income tax supposes that in a standard tax scheme the distribution of revenues means the poor actually subsidize the rich, undermining equality of opportunity for economic competition; if those at the bottom of the economic ladder, below a certain income limit, were instead provided a minimal income (a "negative tax"), this would ensure their capacity to participate in the game of the market without any need for the state to enforce work mandates or otherwise discipline behavior. It is a sort of universal basic income without the universality. Dean and Zamora conflate negative income tax with universal basic income (*The Last Man*, 9). On the economic and moral differences between Friedman's proposal and universal basic income, see Davide Tondani, "Universal Basic Income and Negative Income Tax: Two different ways of thinking redistribution," *The Journal of Socio-Economics* 38 (2009), 246-255. On Foucault's guilt by association with center-left neoliberalism in the 1990s, Daniel Zamora offers the following commentary on a commentary on Foucault's commentary:

Colin Gordon, a leading translator of and commentator on Foucault in the English-speaking world, does not hesitate to declare that "parts of the formulae of Clinton and Blair for a 'third way' may have effectively carried out a form of the operation which Foucault might have been

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taken as challenging the socialists to contemplate—the selective incorporation, in an updated and corrected social democracy, of certain elements of neoliberal analysis and strategy.” (“Foucault, the Excluded,” 76)

If, like me, you had to read the above more than once, you also will find it perplexing that Zamora asserts Gordon “does not hesitate to declare” this assessment, as if thereby to enlist Gordon’s scholarly authority on his own behalf. In fact, Gordon’s remark is entirely hesitation and exceedingly vague. What is more, the “third way” welfare reform agenda introduced precisely the sort of disciplinary regulations (employment mandates, social worker surveillance) Foucault imagined proposals like the negative income tax would render inoperative. What “parts of the formulae,” then, does Gordon here have in mind? Zamora does not say.

<sup>31</sup> Behrent, “Liberalism without Humanism,” 48.

<sup>32</sup> Dean and Zamora, *The Last Man*, 160.

<sup>33</sup> From another, Marxian angle, Jason Read’s reading of Foucault’s lectures arrives at a similar conclusion: “neoliberal governmentality follows a general trajectory of intensification. This trajectory follows a fundamental paradox; as power becomes less restrictive, less corporeal, it also becomes more intense, saturating the field of actions, and possible actions” (“A Genealogy of Homo-Economicus: Neoliberalism and the Production of Subjectivity,” *Foucault Studies* 6 [February 2009], 29).

<sup>34</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 26.

<sup>35</sup> On the advertising origins and eventual cooption of Timothy Leary’s phrase, see Tim Wu, *The Attention Merchants: The Epic Scramble to Get Inside our Heads* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2016), 151-169.

<sup>36</sup> There is no solid scientific evidence of any causal link between psychedelic use and the onset of a psychosis; see Spencer A. McWilliams and Renée J. Tuttle, “Long-Term Psychological Effects of LSD,” *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 79, no. 6 (June 1973), 341-351; and Teri S. Krebs and Pål-Ørjan Johansen, “Psychedelics and Mental Health: A Population Study,” *PLoS One*, Vol. 8, issue 8 (August 2013); <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3747247/>; accessed June 2022.

<sup>37</sup> See, for instance, David B. Yaden, Mary E. Yaden, and Roland R. Griffiths, “Psychedelics in Psychiatry—Keeping the Renaissance from Going off the Rails,” *JAMA Psychiatry* 78, no. 5 (May 2021), 469-70.

<sup>38</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Vintage, 1994), esp. 22-37 and 149-173; *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1974-1975*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2003).

<sup>39</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, esp. 3-49 and 115-119.

<sup>40</sup> “Letter from Alpert, Leary,” *Harvard Crimson*, December 13, 1962; <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/1962/12/13/letter-from-alpert-leary-pfollowing-is/>; accessed June 2022. Also see “Statement of Purpose of the International Federation for Internal Freedom,” January 24, 1963 (retrieved June 2022 from [www.pbagalleries.com](http://www.pbagalleries.com)). On the psychiatric establishment’s reactions against LSD’s popularization, see, for example, Roy Grinker, “Editorial: Lysergic Acid Diethylamide,” *Archives of General Psychiatry* 8, no. 5 (1963), 425 (Grinker was the journal’s editor at the time). Foucault’s most extensive engagement with drugs’ importance to the constitution of psychiatric

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power can be found in *Psychiatric Power: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1973-1974*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); see the session from January 30, particularly his remarks on Jacques Joseph Moreau de Tours' book, *Du haschisch et de l'aliénation mentale*.

<sup>41</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, esp. 122-25 and 135-159. On LSD's weaponization and related matters, see Martin A. Lee and Bruce Shlain, *Acid Dreams: The Complete Social History of LSD: The CIA, the Sixties, and Beyond* (New York: Grove, 1985). A detailed account of the racist history of LSD research can be found in Dana Strauss, et al., "Research abuses against people of colour and other vulnerable groups in early psychedelic research," *Journal of Medical Ethics* (epub accepted June 13, 2021); <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/medethics-2021-107262>; accessed June 2022.

<sup>42</sup> Michel Foucault, *History of Madness*, ed. Jean Khalfa, trans. Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalfa (New York: Routledge, 2006); given the ways in which LSD's story is a cross-section of this whole history, it is impossible to pinpoint the most relevant sections of Foucault's book.

<sup>43</sup> The term "sub-optimal" does not mean the first wave of research efforts reached false conclusions, only that the results are not properly falsifiable; see James J.H. Rucker, Jonathan Iloff, and David J. Nutt, "Psychiatry & the psychedelic drugs. Past, present & future," *Neuropharmacology* 142 (2018), 200-218; for an informative interview with David Nutt along these and related lines, see Helen Collis, "A New Dawn for Psychedelics?," *Politico*, June 23, 2022; <https://www.politico.eu/article/psychedelic-next-chapter/>; accessed July 2022. On the history and contemporary uses of randomized control trials for psychedelics research, see Danielle Giffort, *Acid Revival: The Psychedelic Renaissance and the Quest for Medical Legitimacy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), 23-44.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* Giffort's sociological approach discovers how Leary's ghost is endemic to the spontaneously enforced norms of research and personal conduct the new psychedelic science obeys and reproduces, and includes an expansive collection of references especially to the psychedelic research literature before prohibition.

<sup>45</sup> See Russell Hausfeld, "How To Open Your Wallet: The Distorted and Exaggerated Claims of Online Corporadelic Advertising," *Psymposia*, April 28, 2022; <https://www.psymposia.com/magazine/psychedelic-online-advertisements-marketing/>; accessed June 2022. For a related example of psychiatric hand-wringing, see Anna Wexler and Dominic Sisti, "Brain Wellness 'Spas'—Anticipating Off-label Promotion of Psychedelics," *JAMA Psychiatry*, June 29, 2022; <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapsychiatry/article-abstract/2793902>; accessed July 2022.

<sup>46</sup> Bethany Halford, "Drug companies are investing big in psychedelics, but can they engineer out the trip?," *Chemical & Engineering News*, March 6, 2022; <https://cen.acs.org/pharmaceuticals/drug-development/Drug-companies-investing-big-psychedelics/100/i9>; accessed June 2022.

<sup>47</sup> Ross Ellenhorn and Dimitri Mugianis, "The Corporatization of Psychedelics Would Be a Disaster," *Jacobin*, February 18, 2022; <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2022/02/psilocybin-mdma-drugs-psychiatry-mental-illness-profit>; accessed June 2022.

<sup>48</sup> Hannah Kuchler, "How Silicon Valley rediscovered LSD," *Financial Times*, August 10, 2017; <https://www.ft.com/content/0a5a4404-7c8e-11e7-ab01-a13271d1ee9c>; accessed June 2022.

<sup>49</sup> For a broad survey and useful collection of resources regarding the intersections of scientific enthusiasm and wellness consumerism, see Stuart Ritchie, "Everything you need to know about psychedelics and mental illness," *Science Fictions* blog, April 14, 2022;

[https://stuartritchie.substack.com/p/psychedelics?r=1cqdz&s=r&utm\\_campaign=post&utm\\_medium=web](https://stuartritchie.substack.com/p/psychedelics?r=1cqdz&s=r&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web); accessed June 2022.

<sup>50</sup> Beyond its introduction, *The Last Man Takes LSD* downplays Foucault's interest in drugs as only one sort of "limit-experience" among many, and not an especially important one at that; see, for instance, 119-20.

<sup>51</sup> I am here making glancing reference to Stanislav Grof, *The Way of the Psychonaut: Encyclopedia for Inner Journeys*, two volumes (Santa Cruz: Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies, 2019); and Erik Davis, *High Weirdness: Drugs, Esoterica, and Visionary Experience in the Seventies* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2019).

<sup>52</sup> Contrary to previous forms of intervention, "none of the kind of instruments used by planning will be resorted to, namely: price control, support for a particular sector of the market, systematic job creation, or public investment. All these forms of intervention," according to neoliberal doctrine, "must be rigorously banished" (*The Birth of Biopolitics*, 139). And again: "The Rule of Law," applied to capitalism, "or formal economic legislation, is quite simply the opposite of a plan" (172).

<sup>53</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Penguin, 1985), 387.