From Changing the World to Rhetorical Worldbuilding: Toward a Constitutive Theory of Transformative Psychedelic Rhetoric

By

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Dedication

To Jasper Sage Wickham: may you continue building worlds with care and love.

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Table of Contents

Abstract

This dissertation emerges in response to overblown claims about psychedelics' ability to positively transform minds, culture, and worlds, despite a growing concern to attend to the harm perpetuated in psychedelic contexts. I forward here a constitutive theory of transformative psychedelic rhetoric, informed by two key rhetorical paradoxes that emerge from psychedelic phenomenology: the paradox of noetic ineffability and the paradox of psychedelic ethos. This theory illuminates the ways in which transformative psychedelic rhetoric works constitutively with "set and setting" to construct psychedelic subjectivity. Further, this theory has implications for rhetorical new materialisms (RNM), in arguing that rhetoric can be usefully thought of as a non-specific amplifier of rhetorical ecologies of set and setting. In critically examining psychedelic rhetoric across the contexts of neoliberal culture, biomedicine, and industry, this dissertation also meaningfully contributes to the rhetoric of health and medicine (RHM) concept of wellness discourse as perpetuated by a rhetorical circuit, by showing how transformative psychedelic rhetoric amplifies and accelerates hype in wellness discourse.

Two twin case studies focus on "QAnon Shaman" Jacob Chansley and holistic psychiatrist and disinformation superspreader Kelly Brogan, M.D. respectively to develop the theory of transformative psychedelic rhetoric in the context of "conspirituality" culture, and to outline implications for health literacy sponsorship. A third case study illustrates the commodification of psychedelics in industry in outlining the public humanities methodology of patent activism via applied rhetorical historiography seen through the non-profit psychedelic prior art library Porta Sophia's intervention in the world of overly broad claims to psychedelic innovation. Throughout, I also include four interchapters containing excerpts from interviews with past participants in psychedelic clinical trials to illustrate the stakes of transformative

psychedelic rhetoric in the context of biomedicine, and to weave together broader themes. In arguing for a shift from panacea rhetoric to the ethical cultivation of rhetorical ecologies of set and setting, this dissertation ultimately has implications for the importance of worldbuilding in psychedelic and otherwise transformative contexts.

Chapter 1. Introduction: Transformation

In March 2021, Marianne Williamson sat down to speak with the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS) founder and enduring psychedelic thought leader Rick Doblin, for a segment of her podcast titled "Spirituality and Psychedelics" (The Marianne Williamson Podcast, 2021). The conversation took place just over a year after Williamson ended her campaign for the 2020 democratic Presidential nomination, and just under two years before launching her 2024 Presidential campaign; in her campaign website bio, she identifies as "a bestselling author, political activist, and spiritual thought leader." Williamson's Substack newsletter is called, simply, "TRANSFORM with Marianne Williamson," with the tagline: "Transform yourself, transform the world." The interview was conducted via video chat and taped for YouTube, allowing audiences a glimpse into the two interlocuters' respective worlds: where Williamson dons a sharp lilac power suit[1] and is set against an artfully designed background of stacked books and roses in a vase, Doblin is comparatively disheveled—he appears to be in an attic with a moon painted on the wall adjacent to him and stacks of papers, boxes, and MAPS merchandise strewn around him.

At around the twenty-minute mark, Doblin makes a strong claim in describing MAPS' purpose that undoubtedly plays to Williamson's audience: "What MAPS is about is really trying to embed technologies of spirituality and healing in modern culture, aboveground rather than underground, and the vehicle that we have mostly been pursuing has been the non-profit pharma approach." Psychedelic rhetoric is a natural fit for the transformative ethos of Williamson's

[1] A suit which presumably prompted one top YouTube commenter to respond "Wow! She looks so illuminating in her lilac jacket! Could well [*sic*] that her aura is violet and white. She is a visionary with a humble heart. It's so incredible that she has this gift to bridge spirituality, health, politics and community."

podcast, and Doblin's messaging here is in line with a longer history of espousing the role of MAPS—and the mainstreaming of psychedelic substances more broadly—in cultural evolution and the forging of a "global spirituality" (see also, e.g., Doblin, 2016). MAPS has indeed been leading the charge on working toward mainstream access to psychedelics; the non-profit has been granted "breakthrough therapy" status from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) with MDMA[2]-assisted therapy.

MAPS has also come under fire for their support of the police, the military, and violent white supremacy (Nickles, 2020a). Further, the 2022 "Power Trip" podcast has documented a troubling history of abuse in MAPS-sponsored clinical trials, and even more troubling, the non-profit's continued attempts to cover up instances of clinical abuse (New York Magazine & Psymposia, n.d.). Williamson, for her part, is embroiled in her own controversy of sorts. Her spiritual thought-leadership is guided by an allegiance to the polarizing spiritual text *A Course in Miracles*, which has in fact served as an important anchor of analysis for understanding "conspirituality"—a cultural milieu at the intersection of conspiracy theories and New Age spirituality that has been central to perpetuating a wave of pandemic-era disinformation influencers, spiritual grifters, and QAnon supporters (Remski, 2021a).

This brief anecdote serves to set up the central problem that this dissertation is in response to: namely, that transformative psychedelic rhetoric has major baggage. In developing the project here, I was guided by the following questions: how might a rhetorical understanding of psychedelic experience help to understand the nature of rhetorical transformation? What might the rhetorical relationship between psychedelics, conspiracy, and spirituality tell us about the

[2] MDMA, or 3,4-Methylenedioxymethamphetamine, while not considered a classical serotonergic psychedelic, is a powerful empathogen-enactogen that is central to the psychedelic biomedicalization movement.

stakes of psychedelics as therapeutic adjuncts? What might the baggage of transformative psychedelic rhetoric tell us about rhetorics of transformation more broadly? And, how does transformative psychedelic rhetoric circulate, and to what end? In thinking through the concept of psychedelic rhetoric, I have in mind both discourse related to psychedelics, as well as the ways in which psychedelics are themselves positioned as agents of rhetorical transformation.

The following pages will build toward a constitutive theory of transformative psychedelic rhetoric that has two major contributions for rhetorical studies. In an examination of how the unique features of psychedelic phenomenology force inherently paradoxical psychedelic discourse, I assert that these paradoxes work constitutively with rhetorical ecologies of "set and setting" to construct psychedelic subjectivity, and that resulting psychedelic rhetorics also perpetuate the formation of psychedelic subjectivity removed from the phenomenological experience via circulation. I argue that this constitution of psychedelic subjectivity is a mode of identity transformation that relies on re-constituting subjects' relationships to epistemology and ontology in a way that is not inherently benevolent—and in fact reliant on sets and settings. This theory has implications for rhetorical new materialisms (RNM), in arguing that rhetoric can be similarly thought of as a non-specific (i.e., not inherently positive) amplifier of rhetorical ecologies of set and setting. This dissertation also meaningfully contributes to the rhetoric of health and medicine (RHM) concept of wellness discourse as perpetuated by a rhetorical circuit (Derkatch, 2018), by showing how transformative psychedelic rhetoric amplifies and accelerates hype in the neoliberal contexts of culture, biomedicine, and industry—I argue that this rhetorical hype circuit constitutes the rhetorical ecology of set and setting in which psychedelics are mobilized in neoliberalism.

Throughout my dissertation, I zoom in on how the mechanics of transformative psychedelic rhetoric are connected to the perpetuation of harm in culture, biomedicine, and industry; while also offering nuance to illustrate the way that these themes are intertwined across contexts. To that end, I include two twin case studies focused on "QAnon Shaman"[3] Jacob Chansley and holistic psychiatrist and disinformation superspreader Kelly Brogan, M.D. to develop the theory of transformative psychedelic rhetoric in the context of "conspirituality" culture, and to outline implications for health literacy sponsorship. A third case study illustrates the way psychedelic patents constitute rhetorical value, focusing on the commodification of psychedelics in industry and outlining the public humanities methodology of patent activism via applied rhetorical historiography seen through the non-profit psychedelic prior art library Porta Sophia's intervention in the world of overly broad claims to psychedelic innovation. Throughout, I also include four interchapters that contain excerpts from interviews with past participants in psychedelic clinical trials to illustrate the stakes of transformative psychedelic rhetoric in the context of biomedicine, and to weave together broader themes. I use a variety of qualitative methods in this study; I employ rhetorical analysis of contemporary artifacts, include interview transcripts, and offer a methodology for patent activism as developed for a public humanities project to build theory. In arguing for a shift from transformative panacea rhetorics to the ethical cultivation of rhetorical ecologies of set and setting, this dissertation ultimately has implications for the importance of worldbuilding in psychedelic and otherwise transformative contexts.

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[3] Chansley gave an interview from prison—posted as a "January 6 Special" YouTube segment of *Channel 5 with Andrew Callaghan* in 2022 (presumably paying tribute to the events on January 6, 2021 that led to Chansley's imprisonment)—during which Chansley attributes the "QAnon Shaman" moniker to Alex Jones. Chansley said that the name was given to him during a January 8th, 2021 interview with Jones (Callaghan et al., 2022)—a conspiracy theorist and former host of *Infowars* who recently made headlines for being ordered to pay $965 million in damages to the families of the mass shooting at Sandy Hook, whom Jones had claimed were actors (D. Collins, 2022).

In the remainder of this introduction, I first discuss key exigencies for studying psychedelics rhetorically, before delving into an explanation of how I am extending key rhetorical frameworks related to constitutive rhetoric and RNM to inform the constitutive theory of transformative psychedelic rhetoric developed here. From there, I continue to explicate the constitutive theory of transformative psychedelic rhetoric via a description of two rhetorical paradoxes emergent from psychedelic phenomenology. I review key literature related to psychedelic rhetoric to illustrate the traces of these paradoxes in extant scholarship and reflexively underscore this project's exigence. Finally, I close with a description of my dissertation's methodology and a brief overview of each chapter.

Psychedelic Rhetoric: Its Stakes and Precedent

The stakes are high for studying psychedelic rhetorics in contemporary times. As we in the U.S. find ourselves very much steeped in the realities of late liberalism (e.g., ever-present affronts to BIPOC survival, pandemic fatigue, and biodiversity collapse) we experience the corollary impacts of this setting on our collective mental health (Povinelli, 2016; Zeira, 2022). Just as scholars of rhetoric have responded to these complex problems in the development and application of rhetorical theories, transformative psychedelic rhetorics make claims to the ability of psychedelics to not only transform individual mental health, but also culture, environment, and worlds—and as seen in the conversation between Williamson and Doblin, these claims often emerge from scientific research on psychedelics.[4] For instance, more and more psychedelic studies are re-emerging[5] to claim psychedelics' therapeutic potential to intervene with

[4] Chapter Two goes into more depth into the psychedelic rhetoric that makes claims of world-transformation.

[5] The first wave of Western psychedelic research began in the post-war era and flourished until being driven underground in 1970 with the scheduling of LSD and psilocybin in category 1 (high potential for abuse and no therapeutic value) via Nixon's Controlled Substances Act (Carhart-Harris & Goodwin, 2017).

notoriously intractable mental health indications (e.g., treatment resistant depression, alcoholism and addiction, post-traumatic stress disorder, and end-of-life anxiety). Promises of transforming mental healthcare have propelled both psilocybin (the active ingredient in "magic mushrooms") and MDMA-assisted therapy into FDA breakthrough therapy designation for Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) and PTSD respectively, forging a path to expedite the development of psychedelic treatments.

This process of biomedicalization is one of four "socio-psychedelic imaginaries" for building legal psychedelic worlds in the U.S. that Claudia Schwarz-Plaschg lays out as a framework for understanding psychedelics' mainstream reemergence from an era of criminalization (2022b). Schwarz-Plaschg also details how legal worlds are envisioned and built via decriminalization (e.g., the work of non-profit Decriminalize Nature), legalization (e.g., the November 2020 passage of Oregon's Ballot Measure 109, the Psilocybin Mushroom Services Program Initiative), and sacramental (e.g., the Native American church and other non-Indigenous communities appeals to the 1993 Religious Freedom Restoration Act to enable psychedelic use as part of organized religion) imaginaries. Bolstered by an outpouring of bipartisan, public, and private philanthropy, preclinical research and clinical trials aimed at gaining FDA approval for biomedicalizing psychedelics have long been a major validating mechanism behind mainstreaming on all fronts (Noorani, 2020a). The promise of psychedelics as transformative "wonder-drugs" has also led to their commodification, a phenomenon glimpsed via an explosion of entities filing patent applications for an enormous range of psychedelic "innovations" (Jacobs, 2022). The fact that psychedelics are now fully imbricated in the very neoliberal capitalist systems that perpetuate mental health problems compounds speculation regarding hype narratives and their ability to meaningfully act as agents of change.

In addition, because these compounds elicit intense psychoactive experiences that are context-dependent and often framed as mystical or otherwise transformative, psychedelics are incredibly attractive points of inquiry for rhetoricians. Indeed, despite the ongoing quest to pinpoint discrete mechanisms of action in the brain (e.g., classical serotonergic psychedelics are understood as 5-HT_{2A} receptor agonists) and even develop non-psychoactive psychedelics, psychedelic studies and the discourse surrounding them cannot avoid questions related to the intense subjective experiences.[6] Though originally emerging in the context of the postwar psychopharmacological revolution (i.e., the advent of developing and using medications to treat mental disorders that served to displace what was referred to as the "unscientific" paradigm of psychoanalysis), psychedelics have historically remained very much at the crossroads of these two paradigms of care (Dyck, 2008; Healy, 2002). On top of the framing of psychedelics as themselves agents of rhetorical transformation, psychedelic science is centrally preoccupied in the realm of the rhetorical to the degree that research and discourse consistently extends beyond the pharmacological and into extra-pharmacological variables (i.e., "set and setting") at play in therapeutic outcomes (Dupuis, 2022; Hartogsohn, 2016; Roseman et al., 2022; Winkelman, 2021).

Solidifying this rhetorical wedding of psychopharmacological agent and context, MDMA-assisted therapy stands to be the first drug-therapy combination to make its way through the FDA regulatory approval processes. However, because the FDA is not in the business of

[6] See, for example, the active grant-funded study at UW-Madison, whose protocol involves administering midazolam to induce amnesia alongside psilocybin (*Recall of Experience and Conscious Awareness in Psilocybin Treatment of Depression (RECAP)*, n.d.); and commentary on the implications of the study for the development of non-psychoactive psychedelics (Love, 2019b). Conversely, leading psychedelic scientists have argued that "the subjective effects of psychedelics are necessary for their enduring beneficial effects and that these subjective effects account for the majority of their benefit" (Yaden & Griffiths, 2021).

regulating safe and effective therapeutic frameworks, pundits have referred to the therapeutic arm of psychedelic biomedicalization as operating within an essentially "the wild west" paradigm, where any treatment modality goes regardless of its legitimacy or effectiveness. Recent calls for focusing attention to the extra-pharmacological harms associated with psychedelic science underscore the importance of critical attention to the rhetorical context of psychedelic experience that this dissertation forwards. For example, former clinical trial participants who have been abused by MAPS therapists recently shared their perspectives in a *JAMA Psychiatry* Viewpoint (McNamee et al., 2023); and an interdisciplinary team of scholars' analysis of smoking-cessation clinical trial materials points to a troubling conflation of therapy and identity-shift in psychedelic science (Devenot, Seale-Feldman, et al., 2022). The real or perceived need for therapeutic or otherwise guide-like accompaniment to psychedelic experiences across socio-psychedelic imaginaries, combined with the absence of widespread regulation or accreditation standards for facilitators of psychedelic experiences has indeed led to an explosion of psychedelic facilitator trainings with widely varying curricula and rhetorical standards. Because the facilitator of psychedelic experience has such significant impact in therapeutic outcomes and/or otherwise reducing harm for psychedelic subjects, the theory developed here frames facilitators as rhetorical worldbuilders and literacy sponsors (à la Brandt, 2001), and facilitation as an important touchpoint in understanding transformative psychedelic experiences as non-specific amplifiers of rhetorical ecologies of set and setting.

Adding further nuance to rhetorical inquiries surrounding psychedelic experience and its facilitation, much ink has been spilled in thinking through the intersection of psychedelics and spirituality.[7] Indigenous contexts of psychedelic use spurred a Western fascination in the mode

[7] It is also worth noting that the origins of the term psychopharmacology itself are intertwined with the concepts of spirituality and religion; earliest reference to the term was in 1548 when German Protestant

of biopiracy (see, e.g., Kahan et al., 2016; Press, 2022). In part due to this association, foundational studies to psychedelic science in both the sixties and in the present wave of research were in fact aimed at mapping the relationships between psychedelic compounds, mystical experience, personal meaning, and spiritual significance—including Doblin's own entry into the psychedelic field (Apud, 2016; Doblin, 1991; R. Griffiths et al., 2008; R. R. Griffiths et al., 2006; Pahnke, 1963). Harvard's Divinity School has been a significant site of research and inquiry related to psychedelics and spirituality; Emory University describes their recently founded Center for Psychedelics and Spirituality as "the world's first center to fully integrate clinical and research-based expertise in psychiatry and spiritual health." Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, research coming out of the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS)—a leader in credentialing facilitators via their Psychedelic Therapy Training Certificate program—calls for incorporating nondual philosophy and otherwise mystical literacy into the training of psychedelic facilitators (McCarroll, 2022). However, the fact that spirituality and religion lends itself to guru-ism (Remski, 2019) has presented significant problems in the context of psychedelic science (M. W. Johnson, 2021). Further, as evidenced by the documented abuse surrounding CIIS's underground psychedelic therapy scene, it becomes clear that the power asymmetry inherent to patient-therapist relationships is amplified when psychedelic subjects are under the influence of powerful psychoactive substances, and that this results in an amplified potential for harm and abuse in psychedelic contexts (New York Magazine & Psymposia, n.d.).

On Transformative Psychedelic Rhetoric

Theologian, philosopher, and professor Reinhard Lorichius published the prayer book *Psychopharmakon, hoc est Medicina Animae*, which framed the "*psychopharmakon*" as spiritual medicine with capacity to alleviate human suffering (Haddad et al., 2020). The first mention of psychopharmacology in a scientific context appeared in a 1920 bulletin written by Harvard pharmacologist David Macht, who went on to publish numerous articles that sought to scientifically prove the accuracy of biblical treatments.

A central concern of rhetoric is how to change beliefs, minds, and habits—or put another way, how rhetorical transformation occurs. Similarly, rhetorics related to psychedelics, as framed in the discourse of technical and popular reports alike, often hinges on their transformative potential.[8] The range of names used to refer to these substances mirror their capacity to transformatively reorient relationships to one's mind and environment: "psychedelic" comes from Greek roots meaning "mind/soul manifesting," and "ecodelic" signifies the manifestation of environmental consciousness.[9] Their rhetorical agency and capacity to serve as a source of knowledge is likewise inferred with the names "plant allies" and "plant teachers." In some contexts, the pedagogical experience is also widely thought to be of a spiritual nature, as the term "entheogen," meaning "becoming divine within" suggests; a transformative healing capacity is denoted with the term "plant medicine." The theory of transformative psychedelic rhetoric laid out here builds from two main threads of inquiry that seek to shed light on the mechanisms at work in these sorts of rhetorical transformations: those focused on the ways in which rhetoric works to constitute identity, and those that highlight the broader ecologies that play into our rhetorical lives.

Constitutive Rhetoric

Constitutive rhetorical theories are based on the premise that rhetors are actively "[c]onstructing and providing [their] addressed audience with an identity," and that "audiences are called upon to materialize through their actions an identity ascribed to them" (Charland,

[8] In particular, Michael Pollan's best-selling book centers this frame in its long-winded title: *How to Change Your Mind: What the New Science of Psychedelics Teaches Us About Consciousness, Dying, Addiction, Depression, and Transcendence* (2018). Pollan has arguably been the most influential thought leader in legitimizing popular discussions of psychedelics in the contemporary moment, spurring what has been referred to as "the Pollan effect," (Brooker, 2022; Kent, 2022; Noorani, 2020b).

[9] Coined by rhetorician Richard Doyle and widely adopted in psychedelic studies and discourse (2011).

2006). In developing the concept of constitutive rhetoric, communications scholar Maurice Charland draws on rhetorician Kenneth Burke's concept of identification and philosopher Louis Althusser's insights on the production of ideology (Charland, 1987). Identification as a mechanism allows helpful insight into the ways in which rhetorical forces operate beyond the confines of logic; according to Charland, this view "renders possible a rhetorical account of conversion experiences that cannot be explained in terms of Aristotle's conception of persuasion" (2006). Though evolving from Sophist lines of thought,[10] Charland asserts that constitutive rhetoric is not at odds with Aristotelian models of logical persuasion, rather the constitutive rhetorical process precedes the logical one: "before audiences may be appealed to, their identity must be constituted" (2006). Althusser's account of interpellation, or hailing, centers the ideological dimensions of the constitutive rhetorical function; it "describes the process of inscribing subjects into ideology" (Charland, 1987, p. 138). Charland underscores the importance of narrative in this process, saying "narratives open *diagetic* spaces, story spaces, which are meaningful because they produce identification with a point of view," and thus the constitutive narrative becomes an important site of rhetorical analysis for the critic (2006).

Importantly, theories of constitutive rhetoric originated in relation to the rhetoric of constitutions and their role in the formation of national and citizen identities (Charland, 1987; Olson, 2014). Whereas scholars largely frame constitutive forces as "a means to collectivization, usually in the face of a threat that is itself presented as alien or other" (Charland, 2006),

[10] Though a full account of the ways in which transformative psychedelic rhetoric intersects with the Sophistic tradition is outside the scope of this dissertation, there is indeed a nuanced relationship between the Sophistic tradition (especially as re-historicized via classic rhetorical scholar Susan Jarratt), constitutive rhetoric, and by extension the theory of psychedelic rhetoric espoused here (1991). Classical rhetoric scholars Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg also frame the Sophistic epistemological perspective in a way that mirrors psychedelic rhetoric: as "exciting precisely because it celebrated human potential" (2001, p. 23).

rhetoricians of health and medicine Colleen Derkatch and Philippa Spoel's theorizations of constitutive rhetoric in the formation of the "self-governing" neoliberal health citizen extend this work to the realm of an individualized model of wellness (2017, 2020). Building from this work, this dissertation illustrates how transformative psychedelic rhetoric drives audiences to psychedelic subjectivity by advancing dominant ideals that "prime our values, attitudes, and actions" as psychedelic subjects (Derkatch & Spoel, 2020, p. 28). Just as constitutions work to rhetorically build national citizen identities, a constitutive framework of transformative psychedelic rhetoric allows for insight into the ways that psychedelics work rhetorically to build psychedelic citizen identities via the development of psychedelic subjectivity.

In sum, I find constitutive rhetoric a pertinent framework for understanding transformative psychedelic rhetoric for the following reasons: 1) its function as both mechanism of action and as a genre of discourse (Charland, 2006); 2) its focus on ineffable and extra-logical rhetorical processes that permeate psychedelic discourse; 3) its relationship to the inscription of ideology via narrative worldbuilding and the development of subjective ethos (Althusser, 1970; Black, 1970); 4) its explanatory power for amplified identification processes that occur in the context of cultural divisiveness (Burke, 1945); 5) its critical capacity for sensitizing to power dynamics resulting from the position of not taking identities for granted (Charland, 2006; McGee, 1975); 6) its framing of rhetoric as not only epistemic but also "fundamentally ontological, establishing the very foundations of the political life-world" (Charland, 2006); 7) its relationship to constituting value in legal scholarship (White, 1984) and 8) its application to the ways in which wellness rhetoric operates on hyper-individualized and collective scales (Derkatch & Spoel, 2017, 2020).

In the next section, I transition to a discussion of RNM and rhetorical ecology, a theoretical realm that connects to constitutive rhetoric via a shared attention to the greater context surrounding rhetorical acts. Whereas constitutive theories help us to understand the ways that rhetoric, in shaping identities, ontologically establishes "the very foundations of the political life-world" (Charland, 2006), RNM offers a lens to sensitize critics to the myriad contents of the world and the way those contents shape rhetorical forces. Further, because these theoretical frameworks both center rhetorical dynamics that very much push the boundaries of classical models of fixed logical persuasion, they also happen to be the area of rhetorical studies where transformative rhetoric has its hold more broadly.

Rhetorical New Materialism: Rhetoric and Psychedelics as Non-Specific Amplifiers of Rhetorical Ecologies of Set and Setting

An important premise of this dissertation is that in addition to psychedelic subjectivity being constituted via discursive rhetorical acts, a key aspect of this process is emergent from the phenomenological psychedelic experience itself—an experience that fundamentally hinges on the extra-pharmacological set and setting that psychedelic subjects are constituted within. This section follows from the last in building from RNM theories to posit that rhetorical ecologies of set and setting work as a constitutive element of the broader transformative forces that rhetorically construct psychedelic subjectivities.

However, in developing a constitutive theory of transformative psychedelic rhetoric, I have found value in not only building from RNM theories, but also simultaneously growing a distinct meta-awareness of how the rhetoric *of* RNM mirrors the rhetoric of psychedelics. Because the case studies I include in the three body chapters here illustrate what Joshua Hanan

might call negative "externalities" (2022, p. 188),[11] or what Jodie Nicotra might call "fruiting bodies" (2022, p. 158) of transformative psychedelic rhetoric—namely the perpetuation of conspirituality and the commodification of psychedelics—this project prompts questions related to possible negative externalities, fruiting bodies, or otherwise negative repercussions of transformative new materialist rhetorics. In iteratively making meta-observations about rhetorics of RNM as I build toward a constitutive theory of transformative psychedelic rhetoric, I seek to a productively question the nature and function of rhetoric itself; it is from this line of thought that the concept of rhetoric as itself a non-specific amplifier of rhetorical ecologies of set and setting emerges. I consider the rhetoric of RNM as just one example that serves to illustrate how a constitutive theory of transformative psychedelic rhetoric could be productively applied to trouble unquestioned assumptions about benevolence in theories that encourage transformational orientations to rhetorical scholarship.

As such, I make the connection here between rhetorical ecology and the psychedelic concept of set and setting, and point to the central contributions of this dissertation: 1) its framing of transformative psychedelic experiences as non-specific amplifiers of rhetorical ecologies of set and setting, and the corollary insight that rhetoric itself can be usefully thought of as non-specific amplifier of rhetorical ecologies of set and setting, and 2) its framing of a rhetorical circuit of wellness discourse as an essential aspect of the ecology that works to

[11] Hanan draws on Georges Bataille to "specify the matter of rhetorical production in terms of a thoroughly cosmic and ecological process that [he] call[s] *entangled entropic movement*" (2022, p. 184). He advocates for RNM to shift from biological vocabularies to those inspired by physics, nodding to Karen Barad and others (Hanan, 2022, p. 188); I explore the quantum rhetoric of new materialism and its relationship to transformative psychedelic rhetoric further in Chapter Two. Further, Hanan calls for rhetoricians to account for externalities in an ethical way, framing this orientation as a matter of life and death: "such an ethical orientation to rhetoric's general economy may soon be the only way for the human species to survive the Anthropocene" (2022, p. 189).

constitute subjectivity in neoliberal psychedelic contexts. The move to associate RNM with constitutive forces is not altogether novel; new materialist rhetorician Laurie Gries asserts that "new materialist rhetoric might be best understood as an experiential journey into the study of how rhetoric—as a highly affective-persuasive force with embodied, social, political, and ecological consequences—emerges from diverse human-nonhuman entanglements and comes to co-constitute collective life" (2020, p. 302). Likewise, the editors of *Tracing Rhetoric and Material Life* provide a genealogy of rhetorical ecology vis-à-vis constitutive rhetoric (Wells et al., 2018). Because transformative psychedelic rhetoric does hinge on a contextual understanding that takes into account psychedelic sets and settings, psychedelic scholars would do well to adopt an ecological understanding of the rhetorical forces that work to constitute psychedelic subjectivities via the shaping of identities, ideologies, epistemologies, ontologies, and worlds.

The premise of psychedelics as non-specific amplifiers of set and setting is borne out in the literature beginning with descriptions of Indigenous constructions of ritualistic contexts (De Rios, 2005; Winkelman, 2021). Contemporary western notions of set and setting began when early psychedelic scientists began to notice that the subjects of their psychedelic experiments did better outside of cold, clinical, hospital settings; the concept was popularized by Timothy Leary and his co-conspirators on the Harvard Psilocybin Project—Richard Alpert (now known as Ram Dass) and Ralph Metzner (see, e.g., Leary et al., 2017). Science and technology studies (STS) scholar Ido Hartogsohn has since written extensively on set and setting, indexing seven "microclimates" that produce characteristic psychedelic experiences and outcomes (2016, 2017, 2020, 2022),[12] and sociologist Logan Neitzke-Spruill has also laid important groundwork

[12] See also scientific studies aimed at predicting psychedelic outcomes via accounting to extra-pharmacological variables of set and setting, including identity (e.g., Haijen et al., 2018; *Psychedelic Outcomes*, n.d.; Studerus et al., 2012)

regarding the role of racial experience in set and setting (2019). Critical psychedelic studies scholars Brian Pace and Neşe Devenot build on this work to underscore the "political pluripotency" at the root of non-specific amplification: in essence, these authors assert that psychedelics do not inherently produce more liberal worldviews (2021). Rather, Pace and Devenot's account of "right-wing psychedelia" (2021) illustrates how psychedelics amplify sets and settings which may include extant ideologies of the psychedelic subject being constituted as well as any ideologies introduced during vulnerable states by facilitators; this amplification of course must be taken into account when considering the degree to which psychedelics have inherent capacity for positive transformation.

The concept of rhetorical ecology has emerged among contemporary scholars in rhetoric as an attractive way to bridge the continuum of logical persuasion and persuasion that occurs beyond logic, and to extend theories of social constructionism in light of the ontological turn. In Madison Jones' counter-history of rhetorical ecologies, he refers to ecology as "a threshold concept, offering a rhetorical framework which indexes the study of networked discourse, new materialism, and systems thinking" (2021). Not unlike theories related to optimizing psychedelic sets and settings, ecological theories emphasize the fact that our material environments as well as social factors do in fact play a significant role in the way we take in information and are otherwise rhetorically mobilized. In fact, in his foundational psychedelic rhetoric monograph, Richard Doyle calls for an ecological sensibility as paramount for reducing harm in the context of set and setting, saying "[i]f ecodelics can undoubtedly provoke the onset of an extra-ordinary state of mind, they do so only on the condition of an excessive response-ability, a responsiveness to rhetorical conditions—the sensory and symbolic framework in which they are assayed" (2011, p. 22).

Though Doyle's monograph does not engage with the contemporary tensions that emerge from biomedicalization as a prominent socio-psychedelic imaginary, we might consider forging inquiries at this intersection with help from Robin Jensen's mapping of the ecological turn in rhetoric of health scholarship (2015). Jensen identifies two central modes of rhetorical inquiry in this realm: models based on "flow or circulation" and "percolation" that attend to chronological and transhistorical temporalities respectively (2015, pp. 523–525). In illustrating the ways in which psychedelic rhetoric participates in and amplifies the rhetorical circuit of wellness discourse, while also situating psychedelics transhistorically throughout, this dissertation enacts both models. And though Jensen does not make the connection between the interrelated theoretical worlds of rhetorical ecology and RNM, I find it pertinent to engage with them together in the context of psychedelics to offer insight on rhetorical theory both within and outside of the bounds of RHM.

A tension that floats beneath the surface of the critique here has to do with theoretical origins: the roots of rhetorical ecology and RNM can be traced to a shared need to describe complex webs of problems. Jones' counter-history of rhetorical ecologies makes clear how ecology as a metaphor is fraught; in identifying the origin of ecosystems ecology in nuclear colonialism and Anthropocene violence, he argues that theories of rhetorical ecology have "inherited this conceptual history" (2021, p. 340). Likewise, Pace and Devenot connect ecological theory cited in psychedelic studies that measure the construct of "nature-relatedness" to a history of hierarchy-reinscribing and otherwise eco-fascist contexts, thus contesting the construct as somehow descriptive of an inherently liberatory outcome (2021, pp. 6–9). Moving away from overtures to "natural" systems, RNM have arguably emerged to account for the economic complexities that perpetuate negative environmental externalities in late-stage

capitalism—namely neoliberalism. RNM can describe neoliberalism to the degree that it adopts the boundlessness and pervasiveness of neoliberal circulation (Chaput, 2010; Greene, 1998). A question emerges regarding whether a theory that is descriptive of complex problems might be primed to enable the re-inscription of such problems, precisely due to its fitness for operating in the exact problematics it is descriptive of: in essence, might the ability for the rhetoric of a particular theory to be co-opted increase as its theoretical underpinnings become more complex in its aims at charting the ineffable? I would caution scholars trafficking in such theories to adopt an ethical orientation that takes for granted, for example, not only the pluriversal possibilities at the heart of RNM (Grant, 2022, p. 170), but also their political pluripotency—to be sensitized to the negative externalities of their rhetorics.

Not unlike popular exigencies for transformative psychedelic rhetoric, RNM theories are often framed as coming to matter to the degree that they help in grappling with the complex suffering that perpetuates in late liberalism. In setting up the exigence for "new materialist ontobiography" (NMO) as a "critical-creative approach for coping and caring in the Chthulecene," for example, Gries asserts that the most "pressing question" in our contemporary era is "how humans will cope in this age of ruination" (2020, p. 302). NMO's exigence references feminist STS scholar Donna Haraway's visionary concept of the Chthulecene, an epoch marked by a shift from "auto-poiesis" to "*sympoiesis*"—or from "self-making" to "making-with."[13] Gries proposes NMO as a methodology that leverages subjective

[13] Following Derkatch (2022), I engage with autopoiesis as a central mechanism undergirding the rhetoric of neoliberal wellness more in depth in Chapter Three, but suffice it to say here that wellness discourse is at odds with the ontological framing of the Chthulecene; auto-poiesis sustains rhetorical ecologies of wellness, and is thus amplified in transformative rhetorical contexts. According to Haraway, these concepts work ideally in tandem: "[a]s long as autopoiesis does not mean self-sufficient 'self making,' autopoiesis and sympoiesis, foregrounding and backgrounding different aspects of systemic complexity, are in generative friction, or generative enfolding, rather than opposition" (2016, p. 61). I assert that wellness rhetoric and transformative psychedelic rhetoric alike too often fall trap to self-sufficiency.

phenomenological experience to cope and care in response to ruination; she describes it as "an in situ, experiential practice that draws attention to our sensorial, embodied encounters with entities in our local environment… a qualitative research approach that aims to tap into rhetoricity in order to phenomenologically account for how affect and persuasion emerge through deep relationality" (2020, p. 302). This description has distinct resonances with the critical framework I develop at the end of this chapter, wherein I identify rhetorical paradoxes that are emergent from psychedelic phenomenology; both domains are marked by extreme intensification of subjective experience via heightened sensorium and embodiment.

Whereas constitutive rhetoric has long been associated with rhetoric's "dark side" vis-à-vis its origins in Sophistry, RNM and rhetorical ecology alike are often invoked in the mode of NMO: as liberatory modes of engagement. When framed in this way, the call to adopt a new materialist lens incites a transformation similar to the one that takes place in the development of psychedelic subjectivity: toward the primacy of subjective experience, the appreciation of subjective experiences as epistemologically valuable, the forging of phenomenological connections to the environment and the ecological systems that connect all things including rhetoric, to indeed open our eyes to the "ambient rhetoric" (Rickert, 2013) and energetic affects that surround us, to wildly reconsider worldviews in light of innumerable inherently valid ontologies, and to ascribe animacy and agency to the domain beyond the human to the realm we have traditionally overlooked because we cannot understand it. Simply put, it is important to recognize that while these perspective shifts can certainly call into being engaged work that is enacted in ethically oriented ways, this dissertation illustrates how these transformations are not inherently politically liberatory. I assert here that just as constitutive rhetoric can offer explanatory power for the mechanics of oppressive rhetorics, so too can RNM.

In the introduction to the recent *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* (*RSQ*) forum on RNM, Gries and Jennifer Clary-Lemon describe the forum's "main rhetorical goal" as "address[ing] the most vocal criticisms of new materialist inquiries… being launched in the field at the onset of… 2020" (2022, p. 138). The authors quote critical rhetoric scholar Iris Ruiz to encapsulate the predominant critique: "that current critical methods are embedded in traditions of Whiteness and Western oriented epistemologies" (Ruiz, 2021; qtd. in Gries, 2022, p. 138). Gries describes the resulting approach of the forum as follows:

> Rather than engage a vision of RNM that recounts unidirectional white worlding, then, we, instead, wish to forward possibilities grounded in both relationality—beholden to Indigenous ontologies—as well as refusal and skepticism—articulated by Indigenous and Black feminists (see King). As such, our intention with this forum was, and is, not to solidify or even model a new area of study for rhetorical studies. We aim instead to open up conversations, possibilities, potentialities about the work that RNM may be able to do both within and beyond the academy, especially if it faces the many critiques that challenge RNM to do, think, be otherwise. (2022, p. 138)

This dimension of the exigence for contemporary RNM scholarly conversations is also shared with transformative psychedelic rhetoric: namely, the tension that exists around western framings of transformational theory such as RNM as building from, in conversation with, and at times appropriative of Indigenous thought. This should not come as a surprise, necessarily, given that perspectives on things like embodied wisdom and multiple ontologies are realms of knowledge-making and being that have historically been championed by Indigenous and Black thinkers; Zoe Todd's Indigenous feminist critique of Bruno Latour on these grounds is summed up succinctly in her title: "Ontology is Just Another Word for Colonialism" (Todd, 2016). In discussing Todd's provocation and related pressing tensions for RNM with Kristin Arola in the *RSQ* forum, Thomas Rickert asserts that Indigenous scholars and evangelical Christians alike level arguments that "disput[e] aspects of scientific knowledge;" and this is representative of the "odd admixture

of Euro-modernist and antimodernist trajectories implicit in new materialism's ancestry" (Arola & Rickert, 2022, p. 195). The case studies here take up this tension centrally, in illustrating that transformative psychedelic rhetoric often relies on appropriating Indigenous thinking to not only dispute and reify aspects of scientific knowledge, but also to perpetuate harm across contexts.

Later in the *RSQ* forum, Caroline Gottschalk Druschke and Nathaniel Rivers "push RNM to consider its own cosmological beliefs, which seem too often unspoken or unconsidered," before rightly anticipating the inevitability of co-opting as an attractive solution to RNM's grapplings: "I do not want to suggest that non-Indigenous RNM scholars appropriate cosmological systems that are not their own" (2022, p. 151). The project here, then, follows from this call: to consider that perhaps RNM shares key cosmological aspects with transformative psychedelic rhetorics, and is therefore subject to a parallel rhetorical co-option. Druschke and Rivers' vision of rhetorical drift involves "opening yourself to be persuaded by… biotic and abiotic relations. To be carried along in the drift without knowing why or where it's taking you. But trusting relationality and constant rearticulation…" (2022, p. 151). In bridging Druschke's own rhetorical engagement with rivers and the watershed communities that surround them, the authors posit that "[t]he abiotic movement of a river pushes us even further toward rhetorics that exceed Enlightenment assumptions about rationality, intention, autonomy, and purpose…" (2022, p. 152). Toward the essay's close, they propose that "RNM does something *qualitative* rather than quantitative. Rhetoric here isn't getting bigger; *it's getting stranger and more intense*" (Druschke & Rivers, 2022, p. 154, emphasis in original).

Learning from the concept of non-specific amplification in psychedelics, I assert here that we cannot assume rhetorical drift to be inherently benevolent—to the degree that rhetoric operates via drift, it does so as a non-specific amplifier of the rhetorical ecology of set and

setting one is already enmeshed in. This dissertation illustrates the ways in which surrendering oneself to intense subjective experience in the context of psychedelics is a vulnerable act that can lead to harm. Further, this pluripotent reality underscores the fact that being "carried along in the drift"—or otherwise engaging in methodologies such as NMO that require sensory-heightening and experiential embodiment as a precursor to rhetorical understanding—assumes a certain degree of safety and security as precursor that is perhaps uniquely afforded to those who already embody privileged positionalities. Just as the project laid out here points to the need for ethical rhetorical worldbuilding due to the mechanism of non-specific amplification driving transformative psychedelic experiences, it also points to the urgent need for rhetorical scholars to account for and dwell on the unsavory contexts—on the other side of positive transformation—in which these concepts might be taken up.

In framing rhetorical ecologies as non-specific amplifiers, I'm both wedding the concept to constitutive rhetoric and underscoring rhetorical ecology as a mode that is descriptive of rhetoric's full range of functions—even those that are oppressive. In so doing, I seek here to push scholars working in this complete spectrum of rhetorical theories—including, but not limited to constitutive and RNM strands—to interrogate any assumptions of benevolence at the root of their theories. Additionally, I assert that the more transformative in nature a theory is, the more vulnerable it may well be to harmful co-option in oppressive contexts (see, e.g., Tate, 2005). While the transformative rhetorics of RNM certainly have their merits in reimagining the understanding of our field, our world, and our place in it; due to their challenges for rationality, these rhetorics may very well be primed and ready to be used in contexts antithetical to the transformative aims of this important realm of research.

Phenomenological Constitution of the Psychedelic Subject: Rhetorical Paradoxes Emergent from Mystical Experience

This section moves into an explication of two rhetorical paradoxes that emerge from psychedelic phenomenology, and that work constitutively with psychedelic sets and settings to construct psychedelic subjectivity.[14] These rhetorical paradoxes, in turn, lead to discursive transformational psychedelic rhetorics that operate via what Jodie Nicotra has referred to as "a rhetoric of contagion" (2008, p. 211) to spur the constitution of psychedelic subjectivity: by both inspiring audiences to embark on their own psychedelic experiences, and by reconstituting identities via the discursive questioning of audience's belief systems (e.g., ideologies, epistemological and ontological orientations) apart from psychedelic phenomenological experience. Given the fact that these instances of constituting psychedelic subjectivity occur within larger rhetorical ecologies of set and setting that include the rhetorical circuit of neoliberal wellness discourse and other oppressive ideologies, this section also points to a key dimension by which negative externalities of transformative psychedelic rhetorics are called into being.

Much of the research that has emerged related to psychedelics posits that it is the phenomenological experience which is ultimately most tied to therapeutic benefit—and especially so when a person reports what has been referred to as a mystical experience (Garcia-Romeu et al., 2016; R. R. Griffiths et al., 2006; Roseman et al., 2014). Though scholar of religion John Dunne, and others, helpfully problematize the primacy of mystical experience as the most consistent and relevant marker of therapeutic impact through a critical analysis of the underpinnings and history of the philosophy of mysticism (Breau, 2022; Dunne, 2021; Gillis-Smith, 2022; Noorani, 2019; Sanders & Zijlmans, 2021), the measures that scientists use to

[14] Because the case studies comprising this project are descriptive of transformative psychedelic rhetoric across neoliberal contexts in culture, biomedicine, and industry, the framework I lay out here to illuminate the constitution of psychedelic subjectivity is specific to the neoliberal use of psychedelics. Indigenous peoples have used psychedelic substances for thousands of years, and though I critique the appropriation of Indigenous thinking in neoliberal contexts throughout the project, the constitution of psychedelic subjectivity in Indigenous ritual contexts is outside the bounds of my scope.

determine mystical psychedelic experiences provide an important glimpse into key rhetorical paradoxes emergent from psychedelic experience.

For better or worse, many "mysticism scales" have been developed and statistically validated to measure these types of experiences, in order to ultimately illustrate the characteristics of psychedelic experience as well as to infer therapeutic impact.[15] To describe the rhetorical paradoxes at play within a constitutive framework of transformative psychedelic rhetoric, I focus here primarily on two characteristics of mystical experience that are included in a variety of these scales. According to the widely-used Hood Mysticism Scale, 1) *noetic quality* "[r]efers to the experience as a source of valid knowledge. Emphasis is on a nonrational, intuitive, insightful experience that is nevertheless recognized as not merely subjective," and 2) *ineffability* "[r]efers to the impossibility of expressing the experience in conventional language. The experience simply cannot be put into words due to the nature of the experience itself and not to the linguistic capacity of the subject" (1975). I primarily focus on the characteristics of ineffability and noetic quality because of the implications related to oppressive ideologies presented when paradoxes are juxtaposed with one another, the challenges these paradoxes pose for the underlying assumptions of benevolence present in mysticism scales, and the trace these characteristics have left in extant literature relevant to rhetorical studies. That said, there is significant potential to extend the rhetorical inquiry here in future scholarship to account for the full spectrum of mystical phenomenology.[16]

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[15] E.g., the Hood Mysticism Scale (Hood, Jr. et al., 2001; Spilka et al., 1992), The Spiritual Transcendence Scale (Piedmont & Leach, 2002), the Pahnke-Richards Mystical Experience Questionnaire (Barrett et al., 2015; Pahnke, 1969; Richards et al., 1977), and the Ego Dissolution Inventory (Nour et al., 2016).

[16] To give a broader sense of what a mystical experience—psychedelic or otherwise—might be like given the Hood schema, additional characteristics include, briefly: ego quality ("loss of sense of self"), unifying quality ("everything… perceived as 'One'"), inner subjective quality ("perception of an inner subjectivity

There have been notable scholarly engagements with the ineffable and mysticism related to psychedelics in STS. For instance, Michelle Corbin's 2012 discourse analysis of scientific articles about psychedelics lays out the impacts of legitimizing spiritual knowledge in the context of laboratory science. Corbin points to a variety of "tactics of legitimation" that have served as rhetorical wedges of sorts, by which notions of spirituality have been able to enter the scientific psychedelic laboratory (2012). She goes on to assert that "[t]hese efforts at scientific assimilation problematically reinscribe and reify other aspects of power and privilege constituted through the intersecting systems of race, class, gender, and nation, which are central to all knowledge production, including scientific knowledge" (2012, p. 1415). Focusing on tactics of legitimation as it relates to spirituality in psychedelic science opens the door for rhetorical theorizing about the role of experience and ethos in constructing scientific evidence, and how this process is significantly complicated and dictated by power structures.

In a 2018 article, Laura Stark and Nancy D. Campbell theorize ineffability in the context of mid-century brain sciences, picking up on the tradition of self-experiment that led to the normalization of LSD researchers first experiencing psychedelic substances themselves before administering experiments on others. The authors argue that this practice transcended beyond the general goal of brain science auto-experiments to "screen for toxicity and dosage" into a "distinct knowledge-generating activity" in the context of LSD (Stark & Campbell, 2018, p. 800). They assert that these "methods of ingression" allowed researchers to "generate authoritative evidence by climbing inside the experience of another being, rather than pulling the evidence out," as is the case in the dominant epistemic paradigm focused on "methods of extraction." In doing this,

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to all things"), temporal/spatial quality ("an experience that is both 'timeless' and 'spaceless'"), positive affect ("joy or blissful happiness"), and religious quality ("intrinsic sacredness of the experience").

Stark and Campbell provide a framework of "scientists' epistemic worlds" outside of the binary of objectivity-subjectivity (2018, p. 790). Though Stark and Campbell seek to move beyond questions of epistemic virtue in showing the complexity of scientific knowledge creation, my framework asks how blurring the boundaries of epistemic worlds leaves the door open to abuse in psychedelic contexts.

I contend that because psychedelic experiences are often characterized by both ineffable and noetic qualities, psychedelic rhetorics lend themselves to two central rhetorical paradoxes that are pervasive in psychedelic discourse. Further, because psychedelic subjectivity is constituted in the context of these paradoxes to reorient identities and belief systems at a fundamental level, identifying them is generally helpful in framing all sorts of inquiries around psychedelics and specifically necessary to critically analyze psychedelic rhetoric.

The paradox of *noetic ineffability* emerges when these qualities converge to result in an experience so profound that many feel compelled to attempt to communicate resulting revelations in order to integrate, make meaning, and otherwise find therapeutic benefits—despite the experience transcending description. In part as a result of this paradox, psychedelic subjects are often called to write *ad nauseam*[17] and are otherwise burdened with purpose to communicate about the profundity of psychedelic experiences. Because of this phenomena, Doyle frames psychedelics as "eloquence adjuncts," and psychedelic experience as a kairotic agent and driver of rhetorical action (2011, p. 103). As a result of the often-compulsory desire to make meaning

[17] Linguist Diana Reed Slattery identifies a related paradox, of "prolixity in the face of unspeakable or ineffable experiences" (2008, p. 283).

through symbolic communication, the genre of the "trip report" has emerged to refer to the transcription of personal narratives related to psychedelic experiences.[18]

The paradox of noetic ineffability leads to a second rhetorical paradox, of *psychedelic ethos*: in addition to the impossibility of accurately relaying what a psychedelic experience was like, one's credibility is inherently called into question both because of the altered state of consciousness induced by psychedelics and the often mystical nature of revelatory insight. In other words, when trying to communicate a newfound sense of knowledge emergent from a noetic and ineffable psychedelic experience, one is immediately at risk of being stigmatized and losing credibility on account of the fact that they took drugs—perhaps especially so if that insight is mystically-inflected. This presents a significant obstacle for the person who ingested psychedelics, but also to the scientist who attempts to make meaning from the participant's reports.

This paradox is of course further entangled by those that might argue for the primacy of subjective experience as epistemologically valuable to the extent that having a psychedelic experience becomes a necessary precursor to expertise and ethos in any number of rhetorical realms. More specifically, a significant site of tension related to this paradox is the ongoing question around best practices and ethical standards related to practitioners and facilitators having experienced the psychedelic compounds they are administering (Garcia-Romeu, 2016;

[18] This genre has served as a significant object of analysis for scholars in a wide range of disciplines who are interested in understanding the nature of psychedelic experience; and perhaps unsurprisingly, there is no shortage of artifacts here—sites like the Erowid Experience Vault have long operated as repositories for publicly sharing trip reports. At the time of writing this, Erowid boasts over 20,000 personal reports describing first-hand experiences related to a range of compounds. Nicolas Langlitz invokes the Erowid Experience Vault as operating in service of "pharmacovigilance," which he defines "as a set of practices aiming at the detection, understanding and assessment of risks related to the use of drugs in a population, and the prevention of consequential adverse effects" (2009, p. 395). Langlitz figures this as necessary in the absence of regulation as is the case in times of prohibition.

Kastrup & Kelly, 2018; Kious et al., 2023; Winkler & Csémy, 2014). These tensions play out via two main arguments: on one side, the assertion that because high doses of psychedelics produce such an intense paradigm of phenomenological experience that it is impossible to mentally prepare someone for ineffable and otherwise mystical components, it may be unethical to administer high doses of psychedelics without having first experienced the compounds themselves, to ensure proper empathy and care is taken on part of facilitators. On the other hand, the constitution of psychedelic subjectivity for a psychedelic scientist has significant implications for confirmation bias and misreporting in research (Kastrup & Kelly, 2018).

The paradoxes described above are further compounded because while scales measuring mystical psychedelic experience take for granted the subversion of the ego (per Hood, "loss of sense of self"), it becomes evident when applying this framework to critical contexts in psychedelic rhetoric that noetic experiences of exposure to "objective truths" can also tend to result in an inflated sense of ethos or credibility to *claim* privileged access to the true nature of reality.[19] In part because of these rhetorical paradoxes, the various genres of discourse emergent from mystical psychedelic experiences are—to varying degrees, with varying relative levels of credibility, and incurring various degrees of impact and harm—inherently invested in the enterprise of rhetoric of science. Often, this is reflected in a tendency to call the status quo of traditional materialist science into question,[20] a constitutive rhetorical move that works to amplify economies of contagion associated with transformational psychedelic rhetoric in eliciting parallel transformations of epistemology and ontology in audiences. Indeed, a

[19] Learning from cult studies, it is often the case that charismatic leaders tend to appeal to claims of access to a privileged doctrine of truth revealed via mystical experience in order to gain power and control over groups of vulnerable followers (Balch, 1995; Dawson, 2006).

[20] See Chapter Two on quantum ethos for examples of this phenomenon.

qualitative survey aimed at understanding how psychedelic use changes beliefs "concerning the nature of reality, consciousness, and free-will" showed "significant shifts from 'physicalist' or 'materialist' views, and towards panpsychism and fatalism" (Timmermann et al., 2021), and additional studies have likewise associated psychedelic use with non-physicalist belief changes and the attribution of consciousness to living and non-living entities (Nayak et al., 2023; Nayak & Griffiths, 2022).

Because of this reorientation away from traditional authority structures, the complex ways in which the rhetorical paradoxes of noetic ineffability and psychedelic ethos work together to constitute the psychedelic subject have significant ethical stakes for genres of psychedelic rhetoric. While rhetoric of science genres that subvert positivistic notions of scientific evidence can certainly represent an activist mode of engagement when adopting an intersectional lens (P. H. Collins, 2002; Crenshaw, 1991; Harding, 1991), the current pandemic has made clear that when notions of scientific truth become blurred to the point that widespread trust in science becomes eroded, harm often follows for those most vulnerable.[21] In sum, these two paradoxes work together to constitute a psychedelic subjectivity that is primed for an engagement with science that includes but is not limited to the questioning of its very existence.

Psychedelic Rhetoric Scholarship to Date

In this section, I build on extant scholarship related to psychedelic rhetoric to further elucidate the paradoxes of noetic ineffability and psychedelic ethos, and the broader constitutive rhetorical framework described here. Psychedelic rhetorical scholarship to date has placed significant focus on variously construed genres of "trip reports," tracing the relationship between

[21] The notion of evidence has always been a foundational commonplace of engagement in rhetoric—and although many would argue that the "post-truth" era we're living in is not historically novel, questions of evidence and truth are perhaps becoming especially important to consider given these stakes of science-denial and conspiracy theories in the context of COVID-19 (Biesecker, 2018; Jasanoff & Simmet, 2017).

language and psychedelics through attention to the ineffability of the psychedelic experience, and drawing implications for science. While offering important insights on the pedagogical capacity of psychedelics, psychedelic science, and psychedelic discourse, the constitutive theory of transformative psychedelic rhetoric laid out here represents a departure from extant scholarship in its sensitizing to critical contexts of psychedelic rhetorics: their association with the appropriation of Indigenous thinking and practice, neoliberal wellness rhetorics, the ethically contentious legacy of psychedelic research, and broader cultures of harm.

For instance, In an engagement with William James' psychedelic self-experiments, Jodie Nicotra describes how in the early history of psychedelic science, an "alternative rhetorical economy for scientific experiment[s]" emerged from in essence, what I describe here as the paradoxes of psychedelic rhetoric (2008, p. 199). Nicotra defines the economy through which "reliable" scientific knowledge had historically circulated as "judged by traditional scientific standards of reproducibility and replicability," whereas the psychedelic rhetorical economy James took part in constructing was "characterized by the ineffability or rhetorical failure of the actual experiment" (2008, pp. 208–210). She describes James's writings as working by stimulating enough curiosity that others were persuaded to repeat experiments, through a "rhetoric of contagion" (2008, p. 211). I assert here that a constitutive understanding of psychedelic rhetorical frameworks illustrates the stakes of contagion: because descriptions of ineffable and noetic experiences refer to a mystical paradigm of phenomenology that exists so far outside of the frame of reference for those who have only ever experienced "normal" states of consciousness, and because the only way to seemingly cross that bridge of understanding is to personally undergo the psychedelic experience and the transformation of identity that comes along with the construction of psychedelic subjectivity, readers can be easily compelled to do so.

This of course places significant power in the hands of the psychedelic evangelist, and as such leaves potential psychedelic subjects in vulnerable positions.

Analyzing Carlos Castenada's 1960s ethnographies related to Yaqui Indian don Juan—which have been widely discredited in the anthropological world[22] as completely fabricated—Abram Anders argues for a shift from asking whether psychedelic discourse is true, to asking what it does (2008). Anders refers to Castenada's writings as "a recipe for becoming sorcerer" which is characteristic of a larger genre of "ecstatic pedagogy." To clarify the extent to which Castenada was invested in the gambit of questioning authority structures via the paradoxes at the heart of the transformative theory of constitutive psychedelic rhetoric described here, Anders quotes a 1974 interview, wherein Castenada asserts that "Don Juan's teaching is that psychotropics are used to stop the flow of ordinary interpretations... to shatter certainty. But drugs alone do not allow you to stop the world. That is why don Juan had to teach me sorcery" (Keen; qtd. in Anders 2008, p. 249). Further illustrating the stakes of psychedelic teacher (or facilitator) power differentials here, this quote figures drugs as prerequisites to disrupting ordinary notions of truth, but the teacher-student relationship as the site of fully constituting the psychedelic subject—in this case to "stop the world" as a sorcerer. One can imagine how psychedelics might thus be perceived as a powerful agent for teachers or facilitators alike who recognize the drug-induced state as a fertile opportunity for further transformation—whether it be therapeutic or harmful in nature.

Whereas Nicotra and Anders define constitutive elements of psychedelic discourse in terms of a "rhetoric of contagion" and "ecstatic pedagogy" respectively, Doyle similarly

[22] Castenada contributes to a legacy of perpetuating the cultural appropriation and fetishization of Indigenous psychedelic cultures that persists today.

theorizes the trip report as algorithmic instructions for future psychonauts[23] in his psychedelic rhetoric monograph, *Darwin's Pharmacy: Sex, Plants, and the Evolution of the Noösphere* (2011). My work follows from Doyle's identification of ineffable experience and psychedelic ethos alongside the scientific need for communication as posing a difficult obstacle for psychedelic science (2002). Doyle uses these insights as a vehicle to characterize the genre of the trip report, championing the lone psychonaut as scientific autoethnographer performing self-experiments to contribute to understandings of psychedelic phenomenology. Whereas the framework proposed here forces questions around how psychedelic phenomenology produces rhetorical worlds vulnerable to abuses of power and development of oppressive ideologies, Doyle's ethical stakes lie in arguments against wars on consciousness, for cognitive liberty, and for the potential of psychedelic experience to respond to "a transhuman, transpersonal, or post-human condition" (2011, p. 19). Notably, the evidence structures in Doyle's writing on psychedelics also tend to embody the paradoxes described here: he begins his monograph with a trip report that establishes his own psychedelic ethos, and he builds his ideas about psychedelic rhetoric in part via reference to thinkers who offer non-materialist scientific explanations for mystical truths at the boundaries of conspirituality. For example, Doyle cites Amit Goswami (2011, pp. 76–89, 160) and Matthew Fox (2011, p. 45), proponents of "quantum consciousness" and "creation spirituality" respectively, despite their reputations for perpetuating pseudoscience for personal profit.

[23] According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*), a psychonaut is "a person who takes psychedelic drugs, esp. for the purpose of investigating the effects." The *OED* cites the most recent relevant use of this term in a 2002 Wired article, to refer to "a small group of scientifically sophisticated young explorers who post chemical syntheses, experimental results, and 'Train Wrecks and Trip Disasters' at Erowid.org" (*Psychonaut, n*, 2020). The term was coined by Ernst Jünger, and inspired by the methodology of pharmacologist Arthur Heffter, who famously identified mescaline as the active ingredient in peyote and published his findings in 1897.

Not unlike Anders' engagement with don Juan, Antonio Ceraso focuses on another case of psychedelic rhetoric that has had catastrophic consequences for Indigenous psychedelic cultures directly correlative to raising western awareness about the existence of psychedelic mushrooms: that of R. Gordon and Pavlovina Wasson, who are infamous for "discovering" psilocybin mushrooms among the Mazatec, and promptly coining the term "magic mushroom" in a 1957 *LIFE* photo essay (2008). Ceraso argues that the Wassons' rhetoric "invests the sciences with a mysterious or spiritual dimension" because of the way it embodies both openness—through incorporating "deinstitutionalized knowledge" in their exhaustive citational networks, and secrecy—in following the tradition of ancient mystery cults (2008, p. 219). In addition, Ceraso describes how the Wassons credit interdisciplinarity and their status as non-expert amateurs as able to construct an epistemology conducive to the important "ethno-mycological discovery" of psilocybin mushrooms in mesoamerica. The Wassons claimed that anthropology or mycology alone were not sufficiently epistemologically-flexible enough to do so, and they likewise argued that the rigidity of ancient literature and botany alone prevented the identification of Soma; Ceraso asserts that the Wassons' call to move both between specialist disciplines and literacies while also stepping outside of them required a fundamental transformation of methodology (2008, pp. 225–226). Here as well, we see the central occupation with transcending disciplines in order to transform notions of science, and the use of noetic insight as valuable fodder for the development of alternative arguments.

Moving out of rhetorical studies proper, Diana Reed Slattery's scholarship in linguistics is also important in embodying and describing rhetorical paradoxes emergent from the psychedelic experience: she weaves her own trip reports into theorizing what she calls one dimension of the problematic of psychedelic discourse: "paradox of prolixity in the face of

unspeakable or ineffable experiences" (2008, p. 283). Slattery analyzes the discourse of "psychedelic outlaws" (Terence McKenna, Philip K. Dick, Timothy Leary, and John Lilly)—men who continued to generate trip reports and psychedelic discourse despite the prohibition of psychedelics—in order to call for new languages to communicate psychedelic experience.

This overall focus on a group of influential psychedelic thought leaders that also happen to be white men is not at all uncommon—indeed, Erika Dyck's historical scholarship covers the ways in which women have been left out of dominant historical narratives in psychedelic discourse (2018). The literary criticism of Lana Cook works to correct this focus in an analysis of the oft-overlooked trip reports of two women in the early 1960s: Constance Newland and Jane Dunlap (2014). Cook identifies the rhetorical strategies of recognition and estrangement, saying the women "develop readers' empathy as a reformist tool to challenge standard narratives of literature and science and carve out new representational space for alternative states of consciousness" (2014, p. 79). Here again, we see how trip reports are used to characterize science as rhetorical, with psychedelic experience leading to attempts to fundamentally shift its boundaries.

Overall, the scope of rhetorical engagements on psychedelia are primarily focused on analyzing historical subjects, and do not extend to the host of ethical issues presented by the contemporary medicalization and mainstreaming of psychedelics, nor the imbrication of psychedelic rhetoric within the world of conspirituality, which the first two case studies will take on. In identifying the paradoxes of psychedelic phenomenology, I seek to push psychedelic rhetorical inquiry past the impulse to analyze phenomenological experiences of psychedelic thought leaders in service of mapping the experiential terrain of psychedelic consciousness for future psychonauts. Rather, this dissertation makes a critical argument that the paradoxes

emergent from psychedelic phenomenology work constitutively to amplify larger rhetorical ecologies of set and setting; in contemporary non-Indigenous contexts,[24] psychedelic subjects are constituted within cultural and biomedical structures inextricable from neoliberal rhetorical circuits that perpetuate psychedelic hype while allowing oppressive ideologies and literacies to go unchecked.

Methodology

I use a variety of qualitative methods in this study to arrive at the constitutive theory of transformative psychedelic rhetoric proposed here. In the first two chapters, I analyze contemporary rhetorical artifacts in transformative psychedelic rhetoric. Like Derkatch, I view rhetorical analysis as an important tool that "illuminates how we are induced, through symbolic and discursive means, toward certain beliefs and actions and away from others" (2016, p. 6). Rhetorical analysis of these artifacts includes sensitizing to constitutive identity formation via narrative worldbuilding and otherwise transformational overtures; I scrutinize radical calls to reorient relationships to epistemology, ontology, and ideology at individualized and communal scales. I also identify the traces of the rhetorical paradoxes within artifacts—noetic ineffability and psychedelic ethos. And following from these points of analysis, I track engagement with Indigenous thought and quantum science. To attend to rhetorical ecologies of set and setting,

[24] The case studies in Chapters Two and Three are focused on transformative psychedelic rhetoric that works to constitute psychedelic subjectivity in non-Indigenous contexts by figures who appropriate Indigenous thinking to perpetuate conspirituality. It is worth noting, however, that Indigenous scholars have pointed to the spreading of conspiracy theories in Indigenous communities. See, e.g., Tyson Yunkaporta on "Indigenous Online Radicalisation" (2022) and Tina Ngata on "The Rise of Māori MAGA" (2020); In explaining the phenomenon, Yunkaporta says "[i]t doesn't help that Indigenous communities are still reeling from an unresolved history of actual conspiracies around attempted genocides, unethical medical/scientific experimentation and systemic state-sponsored child abuse, which is continually covered up and denied" (2022). I discuss the existence of real conspiracies as providing fodder for conspiracy theories more fully in Chapter Two.

these first two chapters frame respective case studies within the context of conspirituality and neoliberal wellness cultures.

Four interchapters include data related to psychedelic biomedicine and therapy to contextualize the stakes of transformative psychedelic rhetoric developed through the body chapters, and to underscore the importance of ethical rhetorical worldbuilding across psychedelic contexts. In each, I include excerpts from semi-structured interviews with past participants in psychedelic clinical trials alongside training materials for facilitators of psychedelic experiences to offer context on how important rhetorical ecologies of set and settings wherein psychedelic subjectivity is clinically developed, despite these ecologies not being scrutinized in research studies. Semi-structured interviews took place as a small pilot study of four participants, and I do not include full analyses of the data included here; instead, I include glimpses of these interviews to provide readers a glimpse into the world of psychedelic clinical trials, the subjective experiences of the real people who volunteer for them, and the transformative psychedelic rhetoric that emerges in discussing them. In juxtaposing body chapters' critical analyses of transformative psychedelic rhetoric in culture and industry alongside these glimpses into psychedelic clinical trials, the stakes of rhetorical worldbuilding in the biomedical context come into high relief. Focusing on the clinical context is pertinent in light of recent abuses, and because the biomedical imaginary is a significant driver in the perpetuation of transformative psychedelic rhetoric hype culturally and in the commodification of psychedelics.

Each interview focused on three main areas of questions: participant background and any relevant information related to their decision to enroll in a psychedelic clinical trial; experience within the clinical trial; and perceptions on psychedelic science. Follow-up questions were focused on learning more about transformational "shifts in consciousness," the relationship

between psychedelic experiences and development of health ideologies, the various literacy practices used to sustain health ideologies, and communication about ineffable and noetic experiences. To protect confidentiality, I do not identify the sponsoring institution of each clinical trial, nor do I include identifying information about the participants. However, three of the participants took part in the same psilocybin clinical trial aimed at studying safety in "healthy normals," and one participant took part in a clinical trial studying the treatment of eating disorders with psilocybin. To visually distinguish the participants' voices from my own, I italicize these interchapters' transcript excerpts.

The third body chapter does something different methodologically. The chapter is split into two parts: a preamble that serves to connect the chapter to the rest of the dissertation and theoretically frame the commodification of psychedelics via patenting as part of the rhetorical circuit of transformational psychedelic rhetoric, and a case study. The case study of this chapter is co-authored and reports on my collaborative work with the non-profit psychedelic prior art library Porta Sophia; it describes a methodology for patent activism that we have developed as part of our work flow to prevent overly broad psychedelic patents. This chapter represents a disruptive intervention in the rhetorical circuit of transformational psychedelic rhetoric; at the same time, it offers a methodology for a rhetorical historiography counter-genre that can be employed in technical communication classrooms as an engaged project to protect the public domain in a wide range of intellectual property contexts outside of psychedelics.

Chapter Overview

Interchapter One includes excerpts from a past participant in a pharmacokinetic psilocybin clinical trial who had developed psychedelic subjectivity in her youth; the interview excerpts included illustrate her grappling to square the meaningful psychedelic experiences of her early life with the clinical trial experience.

Chapter One offers a case study of Jacob Chansley, a psychedelic rhetor who has been colloquially dubbed the "QAnon Shaman" for his role in storming the United States capital on January 6, 2021. Chansley serves as a logical limit case of sorts to illustrate the ways in which the development of psychedelic subjectivity leads to a reconstitution of identity that led to oppressive ideology guised as liberatory. I analyze his three self-published books as artifacts of psychedelic rhetoric, wherein he discloses his own psychedelic experiences in the context of his own spiritual journey to alleviate suffering, and explicitly connects them to his awakening to QAnon conspiracy theories. To frame this chapter, I include a literature review related to psychedelics and conspirituality—bringing together literature on psychedelics, the New Age, and conspiracies. Thematic focuses of this chapter also include psychedelic rhetoric focused on transforming the world, and the appropriation of Indigenous thought and quantum science to establish psychedelic *megethos*.

Interchapter two includes excerpts from a past participant in a pharmacokinetic psilocybin clinical trial that illustrates how the trial experience transformed the participant's life in seemingly all areas, including her modes of information-seeking.

Chapter Three offers a case study of the "holistic psychiatrist" Kelly Brogan, M.D. as psychedelic rhetor. Brogan, as a Center for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH)-termed "Disinformation Dozen" member, has had an insidious role in perpetuating harm as a social media influencer. For this case study, I analyze an e-book about psychedelics and mystical healing that Brogan self-published to illustrate how transformative psychedelic rhetoric is wielded in the context of her larger influencer platform geared at recruiting members into her exclusive self-help group meant to demonize psychiatric pharmaceuticals. To frame this chapter, I include a literature review that historically situates conspirituality in the context of the broader

antipsychiatry movement and rhetorics of neoliberal wellness. Thematic focuses of this chapter also include ableist dimensions of conspirituality, the appropriation of Indigenous thought, and the establishment of psychedelic ethos via a clinical distancing from psychedelic experience alongside simultaneous appeals to medical expertise and the denouncing of pharmaceutical science.

Interchapter Three includes excerpts from a past participant in a pharmacokinetic psilocybin clinical trial wherein the participant shares the way his phenomenological experience was imbued with meaning by virtue of his role as a science volunteer.

Chapter Four focuses on transformative psychedelic rhetoric in industry as seen in the world of psychedelic patenting and is broken into two parts as described above: a single-authored preamble and a co-authored case study. The preamble connects the chapter to the broader dissertation as a key constitutive element of the rhetorical circuit of transformational psychedelic rhetoric that creates neoliberal value and amplifies hype while also commodifying the use of psychedelics. The case study is focused on my collaborative work with the non-profit psychedelic prior art library Porta Sophia and lays out the work flow we have developed for building our library and directly intervening with overly broad patent applications. We include an overview of our process, basic stats from our patent database, and one example of direct intervention and impact related to a notorious patent application filed by the psychedelic corporation COMPASS Pathways. In explicating our work flow and process for direct intervention, this case study provides a methodology for technical communication counter-genre through applied rhetorical historiography that can be used to combat overly broad patents in any number of domains.

Interchapter Four includes excerpts from a past participant in a psilocybin clinical trial for treating eating disorders that illustrate the value of the experience for the participant.

Chapter Five serves as this dissertation's conclusion. In it, I offer final thoughts to synthesize the project's main contributions, ongoing questions, and future directions. Here, I discuss the prospect of critical information literacy and emphasize the importance of ethical rhetorical worldbuilding in transformative spaces—psychedelic and not.

Interchapter 1. Spirituality and Science

The first times that I used psychedelics was when I was in high school; I would say early high school. And they were actually some of the first psychoactive substances that I ever took. I used acid before I smoked pot. Tasted alcohol before, but I'm not sure that I was ever drunk on alcohol before. So, yeah, LSD was my first was my first psychedelic experience. And I had a wonderful group of friends in high school who were into philosophy—we're into existentialism, we're into fractals, we're into hacking, we're in, we're in the rave scene, and there were four, six of us that would trip together on weekends, or two of us would go in and get driven around by, you know, the third or fourth and it was really, it was really lovely. And it was all fed by the kind of those growing years of thinking about philosophy and thinking about what your worldview is.

And we're all weirdos… and so really into the idea of combining ideas and finding our ground through exploring, through seeking on our own. And it was really positive, to be able to read Huxley and be like, oh, what does that mean? And then have these experiences that he was describing? And either say, Oh, wow, that's what it means. Or to say, Oh, wow. He's got no idea what he's talking about, you know, forty years later. Yeah, so that was and that was really the bulk of my my experience before the study. We did that. And it was very positive. And even when it was challenging, you know, like even if it got scary or if it got weird.

What I really felt was that in those, like when we were in those expanded states, we were protected in some way from the at least potential psychological harm. You know, there's, I mean, there's also certain bodily floppiness, you know, so you fall down a flight of stairs, you're just you're fine. And you're not exactly sure why, except that you're on drugs. And so that's fine. And, you know, and I mean, again, kind of in, in who we were, who we were, and who we were hanging out with, there were also in our friend groups, people who were meeting the mental health issues of their lifetime there, you know. I certainly remember experiencing depression, and conversing with that while I was on acid as a teenager, and beginning to taste the ways that expanded consciousness or altered states of consciousness live in our bodies, even without those drugs, you know, just as mental health things. And there were certainly ways in which I remember both being confused and having revelations about, you know, the friend of ours who was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia, and how it looked when he was unwell, compared to how it looked when he was well, and how it looked when he was medicated with prescription pharmaceuticals, compared with how it looked when he was self-medicating with marijuana and LSD and how, you know, the, the wellness that we saw on him, at least for those teenage years, left and didn't really come back in the same shape, but that he was happier and looser and more engaged when he was self-medicating. And when he was on lithium or Haldol he was just heavy and slow and stuck. And, and so to begin to see those kinds of differences in mental health I remember I remember seeing them and kind of kind of noting them… I think that those were really the first the first kinds of connections that I saw around mental health.

I remember that first, that first session being particularly sweet because like the entire crew is there, like twelve people in this in this little room, and we all sat together and breathed and you know, had a little a little a little moment together. It was kind of strange to me. Having a meditative practice, having a ceremonial practice, having a magical practice that's part of my spirituality and part of my religion it felt weird to me the places that the facilitation team would use the language of ceremony. I insisted on calling them facilitators; they call themselves guides, and at first I just thought it was sort of a dissonance of language. But it eventually had to be a

thing that I had to actually acknowledge and talk about with them a little bit. And it was part of the only dissonant part of that experience was in kind of understanding the roles because there was really a strange distinction between the people that I was working with as individuals who are interested in expansion and interested in healing. And the individuals that I was working with who were academics and researchers. And it made for some for some kind of awkward stuff.

So then we'd get together at six in the morning we'd sit together and orient a little bit of you know, state intentions, and kind of get ready. And then they would, give me the dose and they did so kind of in what I understand now to be the the classic form where they handed me a, you know, a little bowl with the pill and a chalice of water, again, using that ceremonial language or ceremonial trappings.

And it seemed like that first session, they were people were up and down a little bit more, you know, still working out the protocols, or I don't really know what was going on, but, you know, it was kind of disorienting, more than anything else. And then, after the session was done, then someone would walk me over, oh, I suppose, like, two thirds, three quarters of the way through. They would have me sit up, take off the eyeshades like, you know, be around in the room, how's everything going? And then those traditional gifts of the the mirror and the and the rose, which, like, again, another kind of ceremonial piece that wasn't given a whole lot of context. Like we were just told, like this is like our traditional offerings at this point, like, here's a snack, here's a hand mirror, here's a rose, like, play as you need.

The dynamic that I had with my facilitators wasn't super comfortable. And I've spent a lot of time trying to figure out why exactly this was, I think part of it was, was that language piece, right? Part of it was them being both clinicians and me not being in therapy with them. You know, like, they weren't my, they weren't my counselors. They weren't my priests, you know, so like, guiding me into the ceremony that didn't feel right. They were about the same age as me. So they weren't, like completely. Like, they weren't mentors. And there were specific things that they wouldn't disclose with me, like their own experiences with drugs. And so I didn't, I just didn't quite feel like what footing we were on. And there, you know, like, because this was a kind of pharmacokinetic study, it wasn't about it wasn't about our, like the actual subjective experience. So they weren't asking questions, we weren't talking about any of the issues, you know, and in retrospect, I'm sure they were really curious about what's going on because they're curious people and you know, counselors like they're into that but that wasn't the point of why we were there. And so their kind of message was, we're here for you if you need us. You know, like call us in if you need anything, let us know. We're here to talk if you want. And I don't know if it was just me feeling a little uncomfortable with like going into this very vulnerable place in the face of these two people that I didn't know.

The second dose was quite a bit was quite a bit stronger, and probably on par with the strongest psychedelic experiences that I had had in the wild before that. And it was pretty challenging. I had some hallucinations about the felt connections between my depression; I spent a lot of time thinking about my depression, because now we were getting into the heart of winter. And my seasonal affective stuff was on my mind. So really feeling into that felt connection between depression that I experience and addiction that so many people in my family experience and trauma response that many of my friends who are either in recovery or recovering from abuse have experienced. And it was really challenging. And I remember like that, that challenge, also with the just feeling kind of overwhelmed by the by the drug. Having a moment in in the experience where I was looping. And I didn't know how to how to get out. And it didn't occur to me that I could ask for help. Like I was kind of, I was kind of stuck, and I didn't know what to do

with it. And yeah, and, and so I didn't ask for help. I didn't; I didn't know what to do about it. And, and afterwards, like the next day when we when we reconnected I admitted that and they you know, both of my facilitators were like "yeah, we saw that you were really struggling, and we didn't know what to do." And, and there was this moment, I was like, okay, but like, like, I'm on drugs, and you're like the boss of the room? Like, could you maybe have just said, how are you doing? Like something? And so we had a conversation then sort of setting up some different check in things. And that was also where I had to have this conversation about like, hey, you know, like, I can't, I'm not comfortable with calling you my guides, like I don't know, it's just not sitting well with me.

You know, it was weird to recognize that there were some there was that tension going on there. Because all the people that I that I met, from the administrators to the phlebotomist, like, everyone was so lovely and committed personally, like everyone had excellent intention and excellent energy. And then they would go into the role that they were there for and it was like a veil would kind of come down between their humanity and mind. And in those moments, were especially I think, because we weren't there for a reason. You know, that was subjective. It felt separating, and it felt kind of distancing.

One really cool question was answered somewhere between that first and second dose for me. I had this question as someone who had had a lot of wild experience, as someone who was an herbalist and as someone who is fairly interested in committed to not just the questions of how expanded experience heals us, but also like where it sits in the world. I was really skeptical about Western medicine like taking this this medicine, I was really skeptical of the, like the isolated psilocybin versus psilocybin in a mushroom.

But I was really skeptical and really and unsure if I was on board with having that experience try and fit into this little academic room. And, and in both of those first two experiences, as you know, as interesting as they were and as challenging as the second one was there was never any doubt in my mind, that all I was exploring was my own psychology. I never felt like I was exploring the cosmos. I never felt like I was exploring Earth consciousness. I never felt like I was connecting to something bigger, except as an aspect of my own perception. And Yeah. So in that way, the experience was, was kind of finite in both of those first two experiences. And it also really answered my question… from my experiences as a teenager with psychedelics, can that happen? Can that be stolen by Western medicine? And for me, that answer is no. Like it can't it can't fit there. It can't, it doesn't do that. You're still on a psychologist's couch like you're still in a clinical setting something different is happening. And I find that tremendously comforting.

So the third experience was the highest dose and was far beyond anything that I had, that I had ever taken in the wild. And I don't know how to calculate it to grams, but I've been assured that it is too high. So I remember feeling that like there were a lot of people around at least when we got started and my body was jumping so much. And then that seemed to settle down. And mostly, I don't remember much of that third session. And it may be the only time that I had experienced in psychedelics like genuinely going away. I remember a sense of movement, a sense of depth, a sense of time and space. Its really hard to imagine not having words, it's really hard to imagine not having a perceptual high, but I don't I don't remember experiencing that. I remember waking up to that later on and feeling things kind of falling into place, and the incredible sense of wellbeing on the other side of that was really powerful.

The ideas I had around family history and the addiction and depression living inside my family… settled is not exactly the right thing, but came around to a different place. And

reordered themselves in a way that resolves them. And they have not been worries you know. Throughout so much of my life, my family dealt with addiction and sort of always said like, "well, you got these genes." And I felt like I reconciled with that and came to a realization of how that actually expresses.

I'm not concerned about becoming an addict right now. Like, I feel like I know my body in a different kind of way. It was also the session where I realized… I'm not sure if that's exactly the right word… it wasn't like a discovery, it wasn't a decision… it was an emergent certainty that my depression will not lead to suicide in this lifetime. That's not how that's gonna go. And that has been the single strongest thing that has stayed with me from that whole session. That was where the mirror was really a powerful tool for me to actually look at my human face and to see, like to recognize the connections to other human faces that are of my physical bloodline. But also to like, to see how my face looks like any human skull, any human that was young and getting older. And in the sense again there that those things weren't new ideas that I was discovering, that those were just existing truths that I was waking up to or remembering…

Chapter 2. Jacob Angeli and the Power and Peril of Constituting Psychedelic Subjectivity

On March 29, 2018, just shy of two years before gaining worldwide notoriety as the bizarrely-adorned "Q-Shaman" who stormed the U.S. capitol building in Viking horns, Jacob Angeli[25] posted an essay to his Wix website, the *Star Seed Academy Blog Site*, titled "Neo-Shamanism: A New Way of Seeing the World," which touted the transformative benefits of "psychoactive shamanic plants" (2018). The day after the insurrection, the critical psychedelic media outlet *Psymposia* reporter Brian Pace outlined the ways in which Angeli's worldview was influenced by his identity as a "psychedelic guru," citing the 2018 essay to illustrate psychedelics' "centrality to his theory of change:"

> Only through a reintegration into nature and the consumption of plants that dissolve cultural programming, can we return to a symbiotic relationship with nature and the plants we consume. If we do not then we will most certainly destroy ourselves, the planet and all the life on it that we claim is so precious. (Angeli, 2018; qtd. in Pace, 2021a)

Angeli's sentiment that psychedelics just might be the answer to save the planet is, as Pace puts it, "boilerplate within psychedelic discourse" (2021a). Indeed, a cursory google search query on "psychedelics change the world?" returns no shortage of headlines optimistically pondering this very question in a variety of popular sources (e.g., Gray, 2022; Hoke, 2018; Love, 2019a; Peck, 2020; Rhead, 2019; Sethi, 2022; Sidhu, 2019; Thoricatha, 2018). A major driver of psychedelic discourse has long been psychedelic science, and these headlines tend to crop up in in response to scientific studies aimed at pinning down psychedelics' transformative capacity: studies have variously claimed that psychedelic experience leads to openness (MacLean et al., 2011; Nour et

[25] Also known variously as Jacob Anthony Chansley, Loan Wolf, and Yellowstone Wolf; I refer to him as Jacob Angeli here as this is the name most often cited in related analyses of his role in psychedelic and conspirituality culture; it is also the pen name he chose for the book he published immediately preceding the events of January 6, 2021 (this and two other books are analyzed in this chapter's case study).

al., 2017), connectedness (R. Watts et al., 2017), prosocial behaviors (De Gregorio et al., 2021), pro-environmental behaviors (Forstmann & Sagioglou, 2017; Paterniti et al., 2022), connection to nature (Kettner et al., 2019; Lyons & Carhart-Harris, 2018; Nour et al., 2017), and even more liberal worldviews (Lyons & Carhart-Harris, 2018; Nour et al., 2017). As we would expect, attempts to translate psychedelic science in popular articles tend to fall in line with the features of "accommodated science;" namely inflated claims and shifts from forensic to epideictic genres (Fahnestock, 1986). However, I assert that the accommodation of psychedelic-scientific insights holds disproportionate rhetorical impact because of the unique ways these claims are centered on personal, cultural, environmental, and universal magnitudes of transformation.

This chapter builds on *Psymposia*'s journalism and the many additional journalists and scientists alike that have not only underscored the stakes of accommodating psychedelic science in a panacea framework, but also placed a critical eye on the studies themselves, in an attempt to stave off hype narratives and thereby reduce harm[26] (e.g., M. W. Johnson & Yaden, 2020; Love, 2021g). Further, there is a growing body of corollary research by scholars in psychedelic studies that theorizes what has been variously referred to as "acid fascism" and "psychedelic authoritarianism" to show how psychedelics are very much compatible with fascist, eco-fascist, anti-trans, hierarchical, and otherwise oppressive worldviews (Evans, 2020; Felton, 1972; Pace, 2020, 2021b; Pace & Devenot, 2021; Piper, 2015). These authors illustrate that there is no inherent morality emergent from psychedelic experiences; psychedelics can and have been used in all sorts of harmful contexts and by all sorts of notorious figures (see also, e.g., Kinzer, 2019

[26] David Nickles, for instance, has called attention to the implications of framing psychedelics as wonder-drugs for the expectations of those with especially retractable mental health disorders, especially when they inevitably don't work for some.

on MK-Ultra; New York Magazine & Psymposia, n.d. for insight into the history of abuse in therapeutic psychedelic contexts).

In light of this understanding, a critical frame for the concept of psychedelic set and setting[27] is imperative. This rhetorical frame underscores the fact that while psychedelics have been framed as increasing neuroplasticity (Calder & Hasler, 2023; Vargas et al., 2023), the outcome of the resulting vulnerable and impressionable state is dependent on one's mindset ("set") going into a psychedelic experience as well as the setting itself (Carhart-Harris et al., 2015; Duerler et al., 2020). Expanding the doctrine of set and setting to account for not just the physical environment, but also ideological and political mindsets of the psychedelic subject and any facilitators of the experience is essential to understanding transformative psychedelic rhetoric and the constitution of the psychedelic subject. In particular, Pace and Devenot provide significant evidence that "the historical record supports the concept of psychedelics as 'politically pluripotent'" (2021). This term situates psychedelics as "non-specific amplifiers" of the political set and setting (Hartogsohn, 2020; Lonergan, 2021), elucidating a fundamental tension regarding the cultural and political implications of psychedelic neuroplasticity, and spurring investigations of the "morality of ego dissolution" and calls for a "moral psychopharmacology of psychedelics" to further center inquiries around these moral questions (Gearin & Devenot, 2021; Langlitz et al., 2021). Building from this work, a constitutive theory of transformative psychedelic rhetoric takes for granted that rhetorical ecologies of set and setting are amplified during the development of psychedelic subjectivity.

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[27] The cultivation of mindsets and environments for sacramental use of psychedelics has been a key part of ceremony in Indigenous contexts long pre-dating the Western pre-occupation with psychedelics; Alfred Hubbard and Timothy Leary are widely credited for developing the concept of optimal "set and setting" to account for non-pharmacological factors related to psychedelic use in Western clinical contexts (Hartogsohn, 2017).

Importantly, Angeli is cited as an exemplar of the embodiment of anti-democratic values that can result from dismissal of "consensus reality" associated with psychedelic experience (Schwarz-Plaschg, 2022a). As a QAnon conspiracist and capitol-sieger who is public about his forays in plant medicine, he has brought these unsavory dynamics of transformative psychedelic rhetoric into public consciousness for the first time in recent memory. With such context and literature in mind, Angeli becomes an apt case study for critically understanding psychedelic rhetoric, and by extension for the theorization of transformative psychedelic rhetoric and the constitution of psychedelic subjectivity developed here.

In this chapter, I offer a representative case study of Angeli's transformative psychedelic rhetoric that illustrates the constitution of psychedelic subjectivity as intertwined in the world of conspirituality. To that end, I first include a literature review to situate Angeli's role as psychedelic rhetor within the context of conspirituality culture. I argue that this case and context set a precedent for critically analyzing rhetorics that uncritically amplify positive benefits associated with the transformative potential of intense embodied experience, and for the foregrounding of ethical rhetorical worldbuilding when cultivating sets and settings across transformative contexts. For rhetorical studies more broadly, this essay builds on Helen Tate's work on ideological effects of failed constitutive rhetorics to illustrate the ways in which transformative rhetorics are vulnerable to co-option in unsavory contexts that hold significant rhetorical power (2005). In short, the critical framework for analyzing psychedelic rhetoric presented here serves as a much-needed counterbalance to the preponderance of panacea rhetoric implying that the personal and cultural changes that emerge from psychedelic experience are inherently of the benevolent variety.

The Set and Setting for Constitutive Psychedelic Rhetoric: The Rhetorical Ecology of Conspirituality

Though there have been several notable rhetorical engagements with psychedelics to date which I reviewed in Chapter One, the inquiry here diverges from previously published scholarship in that it develops a critical framework of psychedelic rhetoric as entangled with a cultural phenomenon that Angeli represents. In particular, I seek to identify the role of transformative psychedelic rhetoric in what sociologists of religion Charlotte Ward and David Voas have coined as the "politico-spiritual philosophy" of an emergent web movement called "conspirituality" (2011, p. 104). The basic definition of conspirituality I find most useful for psychedelic rhetoric builds from the "Conspirituality" podcast: it is essentially a cultural and, I argue, rhetorical phenomenon at the intersection of right-wing conspiracy theories and faux-rogressive "natural wellness" utopianism (Beres et al., n.d.-f). And in fact the Conspirituality podcast emerged in May 2020 in response to the increasing prevalence of right wing conspiracy theories such as QAnon overlapping with the yoga and wellness world during the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since, Conspirituality podcasters Matthew Remski, Derek Beres, and Julian Walker have comprehensively illustrated the ways in which a variety of conspiritualist influencers seize the opportunity presented by the pandemic to boost their "alt. health" platforms with "disaster spirituality"[28] approaches to anti-vax and otherwise COVID-denialist content (Beres et al., n.d.-g). In addition to *Psymposia*'s reporting on Angeli as inhabiting the intersection of QAnon and psychedelia, the Conspirituality podcast and others have zeroed in on Angeli as an important figure to illuminate public understandings of conspirituality (Evans, 2021; Triptika Studios, 2021)**.**

[28] Via continual theorization on the Conspirituality podcast (see, e.g., episode 11 from 6 August 2020: "Cults and Disaster Spirituality"), Matthew Remski coined the term "disaster spirituality" as an extension of Naomi Klein's concept of "disaster capitalism" to refer to the cycle of exploitation and privatization that historically occurs in the wake of crisis (Klein, 2008).

To underscore the increasing relevance of conspirituality to mainstream culture and politics, Marianne Williamson represents just one of two figures to announce that they are running for the 2024 democratic presidential nomination who have been covered extensively by the Conspirituality podcast. Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.—a figure who has gained notoriety for managing a platform of anti-vaccination "activism" that targets Black communities and spreads enough disinformation to land him on the CCDH's disinformation dozen list (alongside Kelly Brogan, the subject of Chapter Three)—is also making a presidential bid (Beres et al., n.d.-a, n.d.-e).

In initially developing the concept of conspirituality, Ward and Voas make the connection between characteristics of conspiracy theories—as defined by political scientist Michael Barkun—and New Age thought. Namely, the guiding conspiracy theory principles are that "a) nothing happens by accident, b) nothing is as it seems, [and] c) everything is connected" (Barkun, 2003; Ward & Voas, 2011, p. 104). Those versed in New Age discourse generally and transformational psychedelic rhetoric specifically will find these characteristics eerily familiar. The first assumption is a popular aphorism that has been widely linked to toxic positivity and spiritual bypassing as a way of avoiding difficult conversations—"everything happens for a reason" often manifests as displacement of blame for systemic oppression (see, e.g., Cherry, 2023). In transformational psychedelic rhetoric, one can clearly see the resonance with these assumptions—ineffable and noetic psychedelic experiences provide glimpses of the world beyond what it seems to be on the surface, and the rhetoric of psychedelic science consistently points to psychedelics as therapeutically breaking us out of rumination by enabling new neural pathways to make connections clear. The below figure, published by leading psychedelic scientists in an article on functional brain networks, has been widely repurposed in psychedelic

conference presentations to illustrate this neurological transformation toward connectedness since it was published in 2014; a pre-print of the article earned it a feature as "Science Graphic of the Week" in *Wired* magazine (Keim, 2014).[29]

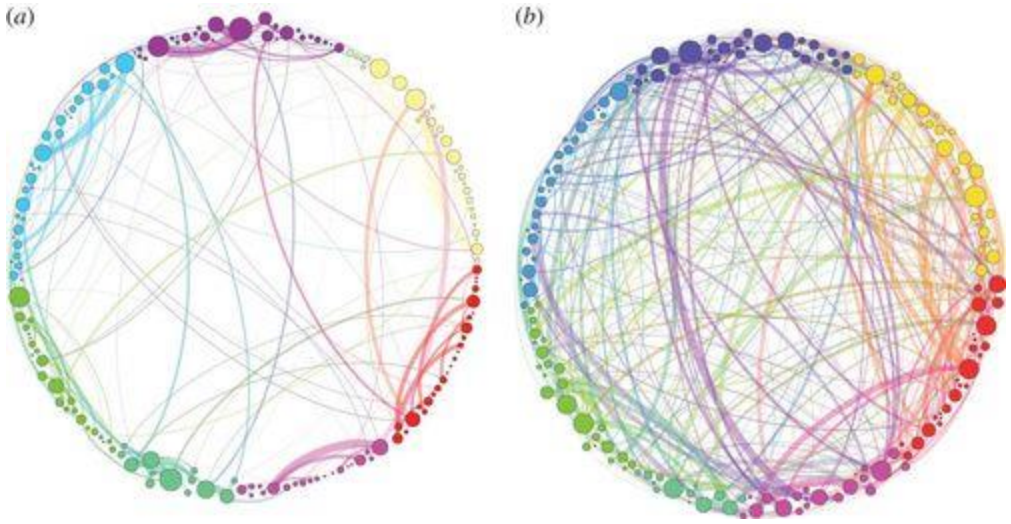

Figure 1. Widely circulated image used to illustrate increased brain connectivity between placebo and psilocybin groups. From "Homological Scaffolds of Brain Functional Networks" (Petri et al., 2014)

Ward and Voas also identify several other markers of conspirituality and its constituent components of New Age and conspiracy thinking that have resonances with transformational psychedelic rhetoric. For example, the authors detail how the New Age is defined by transformation at the individual level, and a shifting from materialism to energy-based realities: "mystical individual transformation; an awareness of new, non-material realities; 'the imposition of (a) personal vision onto society'; and belief in universally invisible but pervasive forms of energy" (Barkun's characterization of the New Age, via Melton; qtd. in Ward & Voas, 2011, p. 105). These characteristics echo the rhetorical paradoxes emergent from psychedelic

[29] Though outside the scope of this dissertation, there is much to be said about visual rhetorics of psychedelic neuroimaging as they intersect with the subfield of neurorhetorics (see, e.g., Gruber, 2016; D. Johnson, 2008).

phenomenology outlined in Chapter One; the New Age shift in consciousness is marked by an ineffable subjective experience of awakening, requiring internal change as a precursor for changing the world, and a revelation of "truth" (Ward & Voas, 2011, pp. 106, 112). Also building from Barkun and scholarship on "the cultic milieu," Ward and Voas discuss "five varieties of 'stigmatized knowledge' (forgotten, superseded, ignored, rejected, suppressed)" that render conspiracy theories appealing (2011, p. 116). Indeed, noetic content of psychedelic experiences is often framed in terms of stigmatized knowledge. For example, 1960s-era Harvard researcher Ralph Metzner referred to MDMA as "permitting a kind of re-connecting, a re-membering of the totality of our experience, an access to forgotten truths" (Metzner, 1985; qtd. in Richert, 2019, p. 144). And on a darker note, charismatic underground psychedelic practitioner Octavio Rettig has been exposed as perpetuating a false narrative of "forgotten" ancestral use of toad-derived 5-MeO-DMT (5-methoxy-N,N-dimethyltryptamine) among the Seri tribe; he exploited the tribe and wielded their stamp of approval to fuel an abusive torrent of neo-shamanism(de Greef, 2022; Ortiz, 2022).

Ward and Voas also identify converging strains of "cultural pessimism" and "political disillusionment" as key factors of the conspirituality milieu, drawing from conspiritualist David Icke's commentary[30] to posit that "[c]onspirituality appears to be a means by which political cynicism is tempered with spiritual optimism" (2011, pp. 108, 113). Journalist Jules Evans similarly describes two characteristic phases of the slide into conspiracism in New Age

[30] David Icke is a notable conspiritualist emblematic of the first-generation—defined by Ward and Voas as pre-2001. The Icke quote referenced here discusses the ways in which spirituality provides a positive coping mechanism for responding to conspiracy theories, as opposed to non-spiritual people who only see the pessimistic side and are "full of paranoia, full of fear" (Icke, 1999; qtd. in Ward & Voas, 2011, p. 108). To the spiritual, a conspiracy theory represents a chance to enact spirituality. For what it's worth, Icke has publicly detailed his own psychedelic awakening on his website, while like Angeli, also fixating on the government conspiracy of MK-Ultra (see Icke, 2021, 2022).

spirituality: first a mood of "ecstatic optimism" that "[h]umanity is about to evolve into a new species or a new Age of Love, a new rapture," which is then tempered when that age ultimately doesn't dawn with "paranoid pessimism" (2022). As illustrated in the below case study, Angeli's development of psychedelic subjectivity maps on very closely to this trajectory.

The authors conclude their seminal article by pointing to the importance of language in creating shared common ground:

> By virtue of the vocabulary they use, a teenage rap musician interested in spirituality shares common ground with someone who believes that 9/11 was an inside job. The multiple meanings of these terms provide practical benefits: flexibility of definition confers inclusiveness. For example, the terms 'shift' and 'waking up' can refer to psycho-spiritual or socio-political processes, relative or objective. (Ward & Voas, 2011, p. 116)

It is this polysemous nature of transformative language that enables widespread rhetorical constitution of conspiritualist identity. Because noetic experiences are often described as a "waking up" to forbidden knowledges and capital T "Truths," phrases that nod to revelatory transformations—such as those pervasive in the context of conspirituality rhetoric—are more likely to appeal to those who have had such experiences.

Echoing broader conversations about the "post-truth" era, religious studies scholars Egil Asprem and Asbjørn Dyrendal contest Ward and Voas's claims, saying that given the historical precedent of "Western esotericism," the confluence of conspirituality is not novel for the web era, nor is its recent emergence surprising (2015, p. 367). Though there has been a steady stream of published research since the Conspirituality podcast began in 2020 in response to the pandemic-era uptick in conspiritualists, conspirituality as a topic of academic inquiry is decidedly still in its infancy. Notably, the *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion* recently came out with a recent special issue themed "(Con)spirituality, Science and COVID-19" (Halafoff, Weng, et al., 2022), including studies of anti-vaccination movements in Australia

(Aechtner & Farr, 2022; Halafoff, Marriott, et al., 2022) and Spain (Griera et al., 2022), as well as scholarship on "the body as evidence of truth" in spiritual healing (Roginski & Rocha, 2022) and the Roman Catholic Church culture of conspiracy (Doherty, 2022). Inquiries into conspirituality have largely remained in the realm of religious studies; for example Giovanna Parmigiani writes of conspirituality as "an expression of dissensus" by a community that seeks being "fully acknowledged, recognized, and legitimized in their 'participatory'—or 'magical'—way of inhabiting the world" (2021, p. 506). And though I discuss several additional conspirituality-related sources to contextualize the Kelly Brogan case study in Chapter Three, this dissertation project represents an initial foray into rhetorical scholarship around this cultural milieu—as seen through the lens of transformative psychedelic rhetoric.

Because extant counter-hegemonic, alternative medicine and otherwise New Age spiritual communities are already seeking holistic health interventions at the boundaries of biomedicine (Derkatch, 2016) and otherwise rejecting treatments dictated by "big pharma," there is a natural predisposition for these communities to look favorably upon psychedelics as a utopian approach to integrating healing of mind, body, and spirit. I discuss the intersection of conspirituality and the rhetoric of health and wellness more in depth in Chapter Three, but it is worth discussing here how this New Age milieu often results in the appropriation of Indigenous "plant medicine" as part of a neoliberal model of wellness that increasingly relies on notions of "health" as an individual achievement, as opposed to considering it through an intersectional lens as the social reality that it really is. It is also worth noting that though the rhetorical paradoxes identified in Chapter One theoretically emerge from mystical psychedelic experience, because of how well they fit into a larger rhetorical circuit of neoliberal wellness discourse, one doesn't have to have had a psychedelic experience in order to fall trap to the patterns that emerge from

them, or to use their powerful paradigm-shifting tropes constitutively to inspire, transform, and/or grift.

I discuss in the following case studies how Angeli and Brogan appropriate Indigenous thinking in their transformative psychedelic rhetoric to perpetuate harm, but these two cases are by no means an isolated phenomenon. Jules Evans recently reported on the case of Kat Torres, a Brazilian model and wellness influencer who was arrested in November 2022 for "human trafficking and ayahuasca[31]-fueled 'spiritual-charlatanism,'" situating Torres in the larger context of "**over 200** new psychedelic churches in the US" (2023, emphasis in original). (Ward & Voas 105). The emergence of psychedelic churches first flourished in the 1960s, and have historically been intertwined with New Age movements (Lander, 2011). In describing the globalization of ayahuasca shamanism as parallel to the erasure of Indigenous shamanism, anthropologist Evgenia Fotiou proposes "a more holistic approach to ayahuasca shamanism that views indigenous peoples not living in a fictitious harmony with nature but as people embedded in larger struggles and facing important challenges not the least of which is the recent commercialization of indigenous spirituality" (2016). Certainly, Angeli and Brogan are clear examples of how Indigenous thought is stripped from the context of Indigenous struggle in the context of conspirituality-influenced transformative psychedelic rhetoric.

Conspiracies and Conspiracy Theories: Constructing Evidence with Subjective Experience and (Meg)Ethos at Quantum Scale

The present project was nearing completion at the same time as a decidedly historical event: on April 4, 2023, former U.S. president Donald Trump was charged with 34 felony

[31] Ayahuasca is a powerful plant-derived psychedelic substance that has historically been used in ritual contexts by Indigenous peoples in South America. It is a "pan-Amazonian botanical hallucinogenic decoction made from a mixture of the bark of the *Banisteriopsis caapi* plant, containing a monoamine oxidase inhibitor, and *Psychotria viridis (Rubiaceae)* or *Diplopterys cabrerana* shrubs containing a serotonergic 2A receptor agonist, N,N-dimethyltryptamine" (Goldin & Salani, 2021).

charges related to falsifying business records; prosecutors in New York allege that these charges amount to a "conspiracy to influence the 2016 presidential election" (Lowell et al., 2023). In engaging with conspirituality, it is important to recognize that actual conspiracies exist. In fact, it is a rhetorically interesting phenomenon by which conspiritualists in and outside of the sphere of transformative psychedelic rhetoric use actual conspiracies to bolster the existence of broader conspiracy theories. I explore this phenomenon more in the Angeli and Brogan case studies, but as a broader example, the Children's Health Defense non-profit—founded by aspiring U.S. President RFK, Jr.—perpetuates anti-vaccination rhetorics in Black populations in part via reference to the infamous Tuskegee experiments (Beres et al., n.d.-a; *Children's Health Defense*, n.d.). The non-profit gained coverage in the *New York Times* (*NYT)* for its role as superspreader of COVID-related "medical misinformation," ultimately resulting in their removal from the social media sites Facebook and Instagram (Frenkel, 2022). It perhaps goes without saying that situating life-saving vaccinations as just another instance in a long history of medical experimentation on marginalized populations is especially insidious, given the disproportionate impact of the present pandemic on those very populations.[32]

Putting a fine point on the ways in which conspiracy theories exploit actual conspiracies, Jenny Rice asserts in her book-length treatment of conspiracy theory rhetoric that "[a]lmost any conspiracy theory can be read as an allegory for the fears, desires, and oppressions that pervade the structures of everyday life" (2020, p. 14). A major focus of Rice's work is on theorizing the relationship between evidence and conspiracy theories; she makes clear that conspiracy theories are not perpetuated simply due to a dearth of evidence, but rather due to a fundamental re-framing of how evidence is experienced. In these contexts, Rice describes evidence as "acts,"

[32] Relatedly, see Kelly (2022) for a study on COVID-19 conspiracy rhetoric as "facilitat[ing] a disavowal of the structural legacy of white supremacy."

saying that evidence of conspiracy theories operates via the "rhetorical constellation of *something more* surrounding the evidence" that begins with an "affective jolt" and a "*What the fuck is going on?* shimmer" that essentially takes over the rhetorical process (2020, p. 12, emphases in original). Though Rice is largely working from the Aristotelian rhetorical tradition in her characterization of evidence, I would argue that the process she describes is a constitutive one: the affective jolt and shimmer elicited by the "awful archives" of conspiracy theories she engages with transformatively re-constitute the nature of evidence by drawing on and amplifying the rhetorical ecology of set and setting that makes up the broader rhetorical constellation. Because of the historical precedent of actual government conspiracies within our current world, conspiracy theories appeal to our mistrust in the institutions that have not always been entirely truthful.

It could be fairly stated that the phenomenological experience of taking psychedelic compounds boils down to such an "affective jolt" and corresponding shimmers, and the rhetorical paradoxes outlined in Chapter One are reflective of such a process—wherein an intensely subjective experience elicits a re-constitution of identity that leads to a re-conception of science itself. The resulting question of whether conspiracy theory proneness should be considered a risk of psychedelic therapy has been taken up by others in rhetorically interesting ways. Recently, psychology scholar Ed Prideaux argued that it is "wrong to pathologize conspiracy thinking," setting up his exigence as follows:

> A person becomes different following a psychedelic experience, they become immersed in an online and offline psychedelic culture soaked in conspirituality. Suddenly they don't trust anything the 'mainstream media' says, they distrust mainstream medicine, they think most political events are staged hoaxes, they insist a shadowy and possibly Satanic cabal enslaves humanity for its own diabolic purposes. (Prideaux, 2023)

Prideaux cites two main problems in attributing the above phenomenon as an adverse event in the context of psychedelic science (which, as he mentions, is currently being explored via a clinical study in Australia that seeks to identify epistemic harms associated with psilocybin use): "Firstly, you'd have to define what political beliefs classify as 'conspiracy-thinking' and therefore delusional and pathological. Secondly, you'd have to separate the effect of the drug from the effect of the wider psychedelic culture (or cultures)" (2023). In expounding on the former problem, Prideaux identifies anachronistic criteria in historically developed scales to measure conspiracy-thinking: the Peters Delusions Inventory associates delusional thinking with the statement that "electrical devices such as computers can influence the way you think." He also cites a review of psychometric scales that concluded they aren't useful generally due to the fact that they "may reflect rational beliefs about the current state of the world" (Swami et al., 2017, qtd. in Prideaux, 2023).

To address the latter problem, Prideaux is presumably referring to the context of conspirituality set up in the article's exigence, though he does not go into depth on the unique rhetorical challenges the cultural milieu presents. For instance, he calls for conspiracy theories "reliant on prejudice" to be rejected, but doesn't make the connection between conspirituality culture as a major breeding ground of QAnon ideology and/or other fundamentally racist conspiracy theories. Prideaux ultimately makes his case by alluding to the shifting boundaries around conspiracy theories that are later revealed to be actual conspiracies—he cites the COVID lab-leak theory, which was once labeled a "racist conspiracy theory;" and MK-Ultra, engaging with this psychedelic-steeped CIA conspiracy in a similar fashion as Angeli does in the below case. Where exactly borders are drawn between actual conspiracies and conspiracy theories does have a lot to do with power; the project here is less aimed at conclusively proving any particular

idea as conspiracy theory or not but is moreso focused on marking the velocity of transformative psychedelic rhetoric as amplifier of any idea. That said, the case of Angeli's rhetoric exists very much on the implausible end of the continuum of conspiracy theories, as seen below.

In any case, an understanding of transformative psychedelic rhetoric in the context of conspirituality brings value and nuance to this conversation. In navigating this question of who has credibility to declare something a conspiracy theory, rhetoric aimed at parsing real conspiracy from conspiracy theory—whether in Prideaux's essay or Angeli's books—often rides on the central components of logical persuasion: the construction of evidence and corresponding notions of ethos. Like Rice's treatment of evidence as act, I find it pertinent to figure subjective experience as an important part of the equation of constructing both evidence and ethos in the context of the transformative psychedelic experience. In Chapter Three, I discuss key literature in RHM related to the construction of evidence via subjective experience and ethos, but more relevant to the present case is the concept of ethos, and specifically the way that psychedelic ethos often operates via a scale of proportions resonant with the profound noetic content of psychedelic phenomenology: the quantum.

Because quantum physics represents a decided paradigm shift away from traditional materialist paradigms of science, learning about the field's insights—for example, that objects can exist as both wave and particle or can be in two places at once—can also result in affective jolts. This is an attractive realm for transformational rhetoric that has been taken up in New Age and otherwise mystical contexts generally and related to psychedelics specifically. For example, Gaia (self-described on their website as the "largest online resource of consciousness-expanding videos") produced *Quantum Revolution* in 2020, a television series hosted by Nassim Haramein that echoes conspirituality characteristics in alleging viewers will "[g]ain a new perspective of

how the universe works from the subatomic to the cosmological and how we are all connected to everything" (*Quantum Revolution*, 2020). Alluding to quantum physics, the show claims it "gives us the unified field theory to reconcile the biggest discrepancies in our scientific understanding and bridges ancient spirituality with cutting edge physics."

Likewise, journalist James Oroc's *Tryptamine Palace: 5-MeO-DMT and the Sonoran Desert Toad: A Journey from Burning Man to the Akashic Field* follows a parallel structure to enact a common trope of psychedelic literature: a weaving together of personal narrative "trip reports" about psychedelic experiences that provide noetic insight into the nature of science *itself* alongside a history of psychedelic science that ultimately leads him to "propose a new connection between the findings of modern physics and the knowledge held by shamans and religious sages for millenia" (2009). In both of these examples, the quantum paradigm both provides credibility to Indigenous knowledge via references to "ancient spirituality" and "knowledge held by shamans and religious sages for millenia" respectively, while also bringing Indigenous thinking into the conspirituality gambit. Quantum science and Indigenous thinking are rhetorically wielded to mutually instill both paradigms with *megethos*—and especially in the psychedelic context, this *megethos* emerges from the constitution of psychedelic subjectivity and the associated rhetorical paradoxes outlined in Chapter One.

I would argue that this trope is reflective of how feminist philosopher of science Karen Barad describes the use of quantum physics as a strategy to garner the authority of science to underwrite one's favorite view, and "as a result the public is primed to accept any old counterintuitive claim as speaking the truth about quantum theory" (2006, p. 6). Though Barad does not go into depth on the (mis)appropriation of quantum physics and Indigenous thinking in

contexts such as conspirituality,[33] I contend that such appeals to the quantum are an important aspect of Angeli's transformative psychedelic rhetoric.

In theorizing the sensation of magnitude elicited by conspiracy theory evidence, Rice draws on Aristotle's conception of *megethos* as a trademark tactic of epideictic genres that elicits an "epistemic aesthetic, where the aesthetic impact of magnitude may actually serve as part of epistemic claims… an aesthetic inflection of quantities that gives a sense of weightiness; a sense that sustains the epistemic without relying on epistemology to structure it" (Rice, 2020, p. 69). Extending work by Rice, as well others (Hawhee, 2020; Olson, 2021) who have suggested "magnitude illuminates the rhetorical work of sensation" (2019, p. 433), Stephanie Larson describes the feminist *megethos* of lists in the #MeToo era. Larson asserts that lists generated by #MeToo create an important affective disruption that takes on an activist function to puncture "pervasive yet normalized attitudes that constrain efforts for justice by instilling a bodily intensity in audiences" (2019, p. 434). On the other hand, Helen Tate provides a case of how feminist constitutive rhetorics fail (2005). Tate illustrates how rhetorics of second-wave feminism worked to constitutively link feminism to lesbian ideology, and how these rhetorics failed due to their subsequent co-option by anti-feminists who exploited the extant cultural homophobia, "never miss[ing] an opportunity to highlight the connection between feminism and lesbianism" (2005, p. 22). Parallel to what Tate describes, Angeli's enactment of quantum *megethos* appeals to extant affective jolts and shimmers resulting from psychedelic experience to reject ideological orientations that take the paradigm of materialist science for granted. More

[33] A full reading of quantum rhetoric (as it exists in Barad's work and beyond) as one brand of transformative psychedelic rhetoric is beyond the scope of this dissertation—but Barad has been explicitly been taken up in academic work related to psychedelics in ways that enact quantum ethos to elevate psychedelic perspectives (see, e.g., Akomolafe & Ladha, 2017; Apffel-Marglin, 2011; Toper, 2019).

broadly, I assert that conspirtuality rhetoric gains power on the grounds of its agile co-option of powerful activist ideographs[34] and otherwise transformational rhetorics. Considering Angeli's invocation of the quantum as a mode of enacting psychedelic ethos underscores how *megethos* as a rhetorical construct operates as non-specific amplifier—in the case of Angeli, working to constitutively accelerate the co-option of activist rhetorics and contagion of transformative psychedelic rhetoric in the conspiritualist milieu.

Not unlike aforementioned psychedelic debates around moral psychopharmacology, Barad situates a central tension within public understandings of a quantum paradigm shift as whether or not it is pertinent to translate the insights of quantum physics into the realm of morality—and if so, how. To illustrate this tension, they set up their project with an in-depth analysis of Michael Frayn's *Copenhagen*, a play based on quantum physics—of which the takeaway seemed to be: how can we judge others when there is so much inherent chaos in the world? Barad critiques this outcome, saying that quantum theory can lead us out of the "relativist morass," but only with a nuanced reading of physics, which they provide (2006, p. 18). Feminist theorist Sara Ahmed critiques Barad in part on the grounds that their work might "reify matter;" Ahmed suggests that "the new materialism reintroduces the binarism between materiality and culture that much work in science studies has helped to challenge" (2008, p. 35). I find that in different ways, both Angeli and Brogan simultaneously reject materialist aspects of science while also reifying matter through their reliance on generating *megethos* with overtures to Indigenous thinking and quantum paradigms of science. Thus, in considering rhetoric as non-specific amplifier of rhetorical ecologies of set and setting, the goal of this project is not to re-

[34] Delgado refers to "ideographs" as terms that work toward the constitutive mobilization of identities "to challenge a range of social, economic, and cultural relationships within the context of a complex social movement" (Delgado, 1995; qtd. in Tate, 2005, p. 7)

entrap us in the snares of relativism, but rather to combat the uncritical attribution of benevolence to psychedelic transformation[35] and by extension, the enactment of conspirituality-fueled *megethos*.

Just as Derkatch and Spoel use the methodology of constitutive rhetoric as a way of "analyz[ing] a selection of public health unit documents about local food to develop a textured account of the complex, multifaceted forms of health citizenship they constitute" (2017), I analyze Jacob Angeli's three self-published books in the following section to develop an understanding of the psychedelic subject he constitutes in readers, but also to gain insight into the way in which psychedelic experiences have been instrumental in constituting his own psychedelic subjectivity. Accordingly, I focus the case on those two levels: first, on the texts as a source of insight into his own constitution of psychedelic subjectivity; and second, on the ways in which his transformative psychedelic rhetoric constitutes his readers' values, attitudes, and actions as psychedelic subjects. In so doing, I attend to moments of narrative worldbuilding; overtures to transformation at individual and communal levels and especially as relates to shifts in epistemology, ontology, and ideology; and engagement with Indigenous thought and quantum science to establish *megethos.*

The Transformative Psychedelic Rhetoric of Jacob Angeli: A Glimpse into the Constitution of Psychedelic Subjectivity

The title of Angeli's third self-published book illustrates the key themes developed throughout this chapter in relation to transformative psychedelic rhetoric: *One Mind at a Time: A Deep State of Illusion* (2020). This title figures the mind as the site of transformation, perhaps

[35] As mentioned above, there is indeed a documented history of acid fascism; such as Charles Manson espoused "oneness" as justification for the morally-relativist move of collapsing good and evil (Felton, 1972, p. 58).

into an illusory state, or perhaps away from it, and to the degree it seems to follow from Michael Pollan's best-selling text—*How to Change Your Mind: What the New Science of Psychedelics Teaches Us About Consciousness, Dying, Addiction, Depression, and Transcendence* (2018)—one might infer that psychedelics are key to that change. The title also points to the role of the individual mind in making up a collective state—the route to collective constitution of identification with or away from illusion is via the hyper-individualized constitution of identity. Surely, reading this book offers considerable insight into Angeli's own mind, and his extremely networked understanding of the deep state conspiracy theories that presumably propelled him into a leading role at the storming of the U.S. capitol building on January 6, 2021.

In addition to the neo-shamanism blog post, Angeli published two books prior to *One Mind at a Time* that offer crucial insight into the progression of his path toward conspiracy. In *Will and Power: Inside the Living Library* (published under the pen name Loan Wolf) and *Divine Clockwork: Rewinding God's Watch by Rewiring Human Thought* (published under the pen name Yellowstone Wolf), Angeli's deep personal struggles and attempts to make meaning from the oppressive cultural and environmental conditions around him are clearly wrought (Loan Wolf, 2017; Yellowstone Wolf, 2018). All of these texts are excellent artifacts of transformative psychedelic rhetoric—psychedelic experiences are at the center of all three, and Angeli writes about his own psychedelic experiences within the second two. Importantly, *One Mind at a Time* explicitly connects those experiences with his transformative awakening to the conspiracy theories at the center of the book. In this way, readers are offered a direct glimpse into just how Angeli perceives the formation of his own psychedelic subjectivity in the context of what he is most notorious for: his imbrication with QAnon ideologies. Without question, Angeli embodies psychedelics' capacity to transgress the taboo of "questioning and challenging authority that

guards hierarchical power structures by prescribing norms and rules of conduct from 'above'" (Schwarz-Plaschg, 2022a, pp. 106–107).

In Angeli's strong articulation of the role psychedelics have played in enabling him to see beyond the "deep state of illusion," we see an endorsement of psychedelics that emerges because of the paradoxes of noetic ineffability and psychedelic ethos. Since first-hand psychedelic experience is framed as a precursor to fully understand the transformative vision of reality he poses, the draw to cross this threshold is compelling for psychedelic-novice readers amenable to entertaining Angeli's ideas as credible; his rhetoric participates in the psychedelic economy of contagion (Nicotra, 2008). Similarly, in the 2018 blog post on neo-shamanism referenced at the beginning of this chapter, Angeli's psychedelic ethos is evidenced by a distinct rhetorical style that doesn't just seek to benignly recount his mystical vision. He is seemingly so convinced about the ability of "plant medicine" to dissolve his own cultural programming and thus reveal the true reality of harmony with nature as salvation that he casts an urgent call for the masses to take psychedelics as our only hope at straying from the path of personal and planetary destruction. As such, in addition to providing a glimpse into his own mind, "*One Mind at a Time*," also becomes an apt metaphor for the transformation of his readers. Before returning to that text I focus first on his first two texts, beginning with *Will and Power*. The most substantial in Angeli's body of work, this text is unique due to a reliance on the constitution of a fictional narrative world, as opposed to the didactic mode of the other two books.

Will and Power: Inside the Living Library

The back of Angeli's first book offers the following synopsis:

> What if the life of the mystic were within your reach? What if the awesome power of spirit was something you could teach? What if the secrets of the Earth were put in your hands? What if you could control flames, winds, waters and sands? If you dare, I suggest you prepare, for within your mind, this book shall help you find,

> the secrets of spirituality and your own power to create reality! So with each page you turn, every mistake leaves something to learn. And for the heart so devoted, a message to decipher is encoded.

In this 310-page text, Angeli assumes a prophet voice and the genre of sacred text to deliver encoded messages via two distinct but interrelated characters' first person personal narratives. No time is wasted in constituting a world where nothing is as expected, and stigmatized knowledge becomes accessible via transformational experiences with presumably psychedelic substances.

The text begins with a character named Maria who lives in the "crystal sky city" and is troubled by conflicting rumors about her father. He promises to reveal the truth of his story on her twenty-eighth birthday, but at age sixteen unexpectedly brings her from the sky world to planet earth (via anti-gravity pods) for the first of many transformative trips to the Amazon jungle. During these trips, Maria and her father collect medicinal plants, and he teaches her everything she needs to know about how to live off the land. After her twenty-eighth birthday planetary alignment ceremony, Maria seeks out her father, who has since relocated from their "crystal tower" in the sky to live on earth (2017, p. 11). There, in his Sonoran Desert home, Maria's father reveals a crystal ball that, after chanting and smoking a pipe together, allows him to harness energy and create a "massive holographic sphere" that they begin watching (2017, p. 18).[36]

[36] This focus on father figures continues in the following section, and while I do not presume to have deciphered the book's coded messages, this component of narrative worldbuilding does seem to have autobiographical inspiration. Angeli has publicly stated that he's only met his biological father once (at age thirty), and that his step-father committed suicide (Callaghan et al., 2022). In the same interview, Angeli makes clear his longtime fixation on Native American cultures as prompting his own foray into shamanism; saying he recently learned of his own tribal roots from his paternal grandmother, who told him about Cheyenne in their bloodline, and that their Native American relative was "one of the few survivors on the Trail of Tears" (Callaghan et al., 2022). In this way, Angeli's journey into shamanism seems intimately linked with the forgotten lineage of his estranged father. Angeli also emphasized the role

The prose then shifts into the hologram's transmission—a narration of a recurring dream by a yet unnamed character that seems to mirror Angeli's physical appearance: "I am bald, with a full black beard, huge muscles, and I'm covered from head to toe in symbols and patterns resembling tribal tattoos" (2017, p. 20). In the dream, this character is barefoot atop a mountain in Sedona, Arizona, when he is transformed by a spirit entering his body. Here, Angeli makes his first reference to the quantum: "Upon realizing my body is a tool for perceiving the entire cosmic ocean, all the way down to the finest quantum wave, I begin to wonder if I can fly" (2017, p. 21). In a bizarre turn, the holographic and sensory-enhanced character is then intuitively called to save flooded San Francisco from a "colossal Kraken" before finding himself in the forest with red glowing eyes following him in the dark. He says the dream happens more frequently before and after milestones; and that once after having the dream three nights in a row, "everything in [his] life began to change more radically" (2017, pp. 23-4).

Beginning in the next section, titled "Painful Reality," we are granted access to that period of change; we learn that the first-person protagonist is Will, and he has overslept. Will realizes he is late for work as a cashier at a department store in the midst of a reverie on a recent breakup: "How could my athletic build, fierce green eyes, rounded nose, plump lips, well-kept bald head and trimmed beard; not be enough for Monique?" he wonders (2017, p. 25). Will gets fired from his job for not just lateness, but also being "extremely lazy," causing drama, and "mak[ing] people feel uncomfortable" (2017, pp. 32–33), but not before expressing his upset that his manager disregarded a therapy appointment in his schedule. At therapy, he reflects on his step father's suicide,[37] connecting the event to the downfall of his relationship with Monique, and

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of tattoos in his shamanic path, describing his most painful tattoos as coinciding with his step-father's suicide (Callaghan et al., 2022).

[37]Again, one can speculate about the ways in which Will's character in particular especially tracks with parallel points in Angeli's; for example, Will and Angeli are both veterans (Angeli reportedly left the

the therapist recommends “an intense focus on Self Improvement” as antidote for heartache (2017, p. 44). This resonates with Will, and through the bulk of the text, we bear witness to an intense transformation of Will’s individual identity via a psychedelic-fueled initiation into a mystical culture that lives in the woods.

Angeli chronicles Will’s self-improvement journey into the woods and the development of a spiritual relationship with a “Sasquatch” creature of the “Ularu” culture named E-Su, who emerges when Will is in crisis with a compound fracture in his leg to offer a medicinal drink and miraculously heal him. In concert with E-Su and Oma, the Ularu god, Will spends several months in the forest processing his breakup, and ultimately experiencing a spiritual rebirth upon gaining access to Oma’s “living library” of plant medicines. Soon after Will is rescued, E-Su recounts lessons from Ularu history and culture to guide Will’s path. Very much embodying the intersection of transformational psychedelic rhetoric and conspirituality in referencing stigmatized knowledge, E-su tells Will to “[w]ork with the plants of this planet; they will help you to remember the history that was stolen from you” (2017, p. 136). Shortly thereafter, E-Su describes the origins of “Shama” as emerging from “an intense examining of the truth, massive amounts of dream exploration, and asking for the help of Earth’s plants” that allowed the Ularu to reclaim true ancestral ways after generations of “being under the spell of dark lords” (2017, p. 138). Shama is described as a social structure that denies “fixed views of reality” to allow enough flexibility to “allow for growth of the individual’s Spirit as well as the collective whole;” E-Su describes how their ancestors transformed their culture to reflect this once-forgotten transcendent reality (2017, pp. 138-9).

Navy after refusing to be vaccinated), they have both been through breakups, been fired from jobs, and lost step-fathers by suicide (Callaghan et al., 2022; Clark, 2021).

Will's character does not initially adopt the concept of Shama as the wholesale solution to the world's problems; he levels the following skepticism at E-Su: "'So do you really think that Shama can save our whole species, E-Su? I mean how can it be that simple? I don't understand? Just because people eat fresh veggies and fruits, or eat some magic mushroom doesn't mean the problems of the world will get solved, even if everyone started doing that right now'" (2017, p. 148). To persuade Will, E-Su references their own teacher who declared that "the Ularu way of Shama will liberate [Will's] species from the dark lord's clutches" before further supporting his claims via references to Will's species' forgotten history: "it was not too long ago that tasks which used to be handled by the most compassionate and wise men—the medicine men—were handed over to the ruthless and selfish businessmen of the world" (2017, p. 148-9). E-Su contrasts medicine men with salesmen in white coats (doctors), and "paid men of business" acting as military leaders instead of "real warriors of Spirit;" they bemoan that instead of tribe majority determining leaders, humans have a "selection process made to look like an election, with puppet candidates acting as false leaders" and the prison system having replaced spiritual counseling. (2017, pp. 149-50). On this latter point, Angeli references the war on drugs, saying "[i]n many cases, people live in these cages for decades, just because they possessed a mind-altering plant that lifts the spells of the dark lords" (2017, p. 150). This presumably convinces Will to the point that he is led to an epiphany about the meaning of his recurring dream—he is meant to be "the first human to learn and walk the Ularu path of Shama" (2017, p. 153). Shama and "the medicine men" are obvious references to shamanism and Indigenous peoples; in this way Indigenous values are lifted up as in direct contrast with the dark lord, and reclaiming Indigenous ways is central to Will's reconstitution of identity in the remainder of the text.

As he embarks on his Shama training, Will is instructed to meditate and stretch as key to the path of daily growth; E-Su refers to "human yogis [as] us[ing] this same formula when they wake up" (2017, p. 156-7). There is a period of struggle, until these practices allow Will to "pierce the cocoon" of reality—he hallucinates a scene that allows him to process his relationships in society. Shortly thereafter, we see Will launched into spiritual trials—he emerges unscathed from an encounter with a witch and then weathers a trip to town to resupply before returning to E-Su more eager than ever. At this point, E-Su begins initiating him into psychedelic ritual, requiring Will to fast before revealing the secrets of the god Oma and her living library. Ularu refer to "Mother Nature" as the living library, and E-Su draws a line between plants and the Shama mode of understanding knowledge and existence: "[t]here are literally countless amounts of plant spirits on this planet with vast amounts of knowledge and information housed within their physical bodies" (2017, p. 195). E-Su teaches Will about the living library via a taxonomy of five categories of plants (Food, Healer, Death, Ordeal, and Elder plants) before facilitating his first encounter with a plant spirit.

After consuming a beige powder, E-Su begins to notice Will's increased breathing rate, and guides him to surrender to the noetic insights he would soon encounter "[a]llow the plant to cleanse you, allow the plant to teach you" (2017, pp. 200-2). Thus begins the first of several subsequent trip reports—Will's constitution of psychedelic subjectivity begins in earnest with a descent "into the heart of the planet," where he is met with a feeling of "becoming one with its enormity" accompanied by powerful visuals (2017, p. 202). He is met with a Minotaur, who helps him re-process a series of suppressed childhood traumas, but only after Will is able to convince him that his intentions are pure—to learn and be cleansed. The Minotaur emboldens Will to untangle "spiritual knots," saying that letting them go is essential to restoring his

"energetic flow," and that "in the bright bejeweled palace of the plants, you are free from fear-based illusions of death and blind chance" (2017, pp. 210-11). Putting a fine point on the value of noetic insight in the formation of psychedelic subjectivity, the Minotaur goes on: "[b]y consistently choosing to absorb the knowledge which the living library holds, you can keep your vessel free of cultural illusions, while retaining gnosis of gold" (2017, p. 211). As he emerges from the experience, Will's body is "an empty vessel as E-Su promised," saying to E-Su "'That was fucking trippy!'" and thanking them effusively for the revelatory experience (2017, p. 214). Underscoring the epistemological and ontological re-wiring at the heart of the transformative psychedelic experience, E-Su responds, saying that they had similar excitement after their "first plant spirit encounter" and reveling in Will's newfound insights: "[i]t's incredible when you see the truth for the first time isn't it?" Here, psychedelic experience is figured as a threshold to his own healing and greater perspectives on the world.

In Will's next experience with the transformative plants of the living library, he gains access to the concept of a "sacred spiral" as dictating every aspect of the universe: he witnesses a galactic birth with spiraling arms, before zooming down in scale to earth and all planetary life growing in a spiral fashion, and all the way down into the microscopic double helix of DNA.[38]

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[38] The connection between psychedelic experience and scientific understanding of DNA occupies an interesting point of scientific controversy. In 2004, MAPS posted an article to their Facebook and website that begins with the following claim: "Francis Crick the Nobel Prize-winning father of modern genetics, was under the influence of LSD when he first deduced the double-helix structure of DNA nearly 50 years ago" (Rees, 2004). This narrative caught on like wildfire, with Richard Doyle quoting this same opening line to theorize the relationship between LSD and DNA in a chapter of *Darwin's Pharmacy* titled "LSDNA: Creative Problem Solving, Consciousness Expansion, and the Emergence of Biotechnology" (2011, p. 194). However, in no uncertain terms, a 2005 article in *Psychedelic Press UK* Volume 2 claims there is no evidence of this:

> Prior to Crick's death in 2004 there had been no mention anywhere of him using LSD as part of the process of discovering the double helix. Until, just ten days after his death, that literary bastion of truth and moral fortitude the Daily Mail, published an article on 8 August 2004, headed 'Crick was high on LSD when he discovered the secret of life!' Written by journalist Alun Rees, using information based on an interview conducted with a friend of the chemist Richard Kemp (one of the two chemists who manufactured LSD

Will's understanding of science and the way that the world works is reconstituted through the lens of the sacred spiral; he refers to "[t]he plant spirit [as] showing [him] that the sacred spiral's pattern remained the same on the molecular level as well" (2017, p. 222). Will wakes up from this trip with an affective jolt of sorts, saying "my mind was completely shocked while my heart was filled with wonder" (2017, p. 224). It is only after these experiences, and a reconstituted understanding of healing, existence, and reality, that Will begins his spiritual rebirth.

In this third trip report, Will describes a spiritual trial that lasts what seems an eternity, ending with the recognition that rather than existing as a body in possession of a spirit, he is a spirit in possession of a body. This rebirth is both noetic and ineffable—Will's spirit witnesses an unfolding of "dimensions unknown to the human imagination… in patterns not comprehensible by any human mind" (2017, p. 247). Emerging from this rebirth, Will emphasizes his complete reconstitution of identity, saying "[m]y old views of reality were totally obliterated after my spiritual rebirth… I felt as if I had reached beyond the limits of physical reality itself and into an unknown dimension of mystery and spontaneous illumination" (2017, pp. 250-1). This comes at a cost, however—we soon see frantic signs of the paradox of noetic ineffability and its slide into psychedelic ethos. Will is so struck with newfound knowledge that his mind immediately races to the people he cares about in society: "[m]ore than anything, I wanted all of them to share in my incredible experiences. I wanted to tell them all how the world isn't what it seems on the surface in any way" (2017, p. 251).

Will has one final experiential foray into the living library; this time E-Su prepares him a potion to regain strength and "retain the memory of [his] spiritual rebirth" (2017, p. 260). It is during this experience that Will completes his initiation into Shama, with E-Su giving him the

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> for the 1970s British LSD manufacturing and distribution conspiracy known as Operation Julie), the article is a mishmash of wishful thinking and idle speculation. (Roberts, 2015)

Ularu name “Juh Kah Bu,” loosely translated to the book’s title, “Will and Power” (2017, p. 261). When Will, drawn by his compulsion to see loved ones, makes preparations to return to the city, E-Su offers advice to prepare him for re-entry: in order to avoid the “unhealthy, unnatural frequencies” constituting the “dark lord’s spells of oppression,” he must remain in a heightened state of awareness; he also must “only eat food which is poison free;” and continue seeking knowledge from a Yeti in the Himalayas (2017, pp. 271-3). E-Su and Will have one final encounter with the witch of the forest before Will makes a rocky return to society.

Unable to reveal the secrets bestowed upon him in the forest, and unable to stomach any of the “toxic” food he is given by his loved ones, Will decides soon after re-integrating that he needs to fly to the Himalayas. He can’t wait to leave, saying “I could feel the toxicity of the city, it was filled with chemicals and frequency spells of suppression and depression” (2017, p. 294). He describes a psyche harmed by negative energy that only rebounded after eating “some organic fruits and vegetables from [a] local farmer’s market” (2017, p. 294). The heightened perceptions of pervasive negative energies outside the forest are seemingly too much to bear. His section ends with his plane taking off for the Himalayas, where he will presumably continue the spiritual journey. Here, Angeli briefly shifts back into Maria’s narrative, ending the text with Maria and her father meeting E-Su, who telepathically tells Maria to follow them. Both protagonists in this text are constituted as psychedelic subjects, and at every step of the way, “back to nature” attitudes and transformative encounters centered on ingesting plants lead to greater knowledge about the nature of reality and by extension, relief from existential suffering. However, in Will’s case, his new found psychedelic subjectivity is incommensurable with the toxic society, and we are quite literally left with his blasting off into another spiritual quest.

Divine Clockwork: Rewinding God’s Watch by Rewiring Human Thought

In *Divine Clockwork,* Angeli shifts from prophetic fable into an explicitly didactic and pedagogical nonfiction mode. In this much thinner (and unfortunately, unpaginated) volume, we in a way, pick up where Will leaves off; though Will is not a character in the text, we see Angeli grappling with the wicked problems of late capitalism that left Will unable to integrate, while the lessons from Will's spiritual rebirth are remixed and applied throughout. Embodying the mood of "ecstatic optimism," he frantically proposes politico-spiritual solutions to things like climate change, "the earth polluting industry," and the overstimulation of human attention by the constant commodification and monetization of advertising as fast as he can describe them. In the opening pages, he describes the "quantum-cosmic current" as a key part of "waking up:" "those who 'go with the flow', by following their heart path (the path which calls to their heart) always meet up with the quantum-cosmic current of conscious energetic flow (which is the movement and flow of energy through out [*sic*] all of creation)" (2018). All along, Angeli uses the "psychoactive shamanic tribal lifestyle" and the "quantum-cosmic current" at the heart of our modern society's "tribal roots" as a foil for transcending the destruction of the earth that is manifest in everything from modern social gatherings to the toxicity of smoking cigarettes. Asserting *megethos* via this invocation of quantum and Indigenous thinking, he says that "[t]he native way is the way of life" and calls for more "spiritual warriors who understand, their heart path, and how to sail the quantum-cosmic current's conscious energetic flow and these ancient agricultural sciences which the natives call ceremonies." Angeli sees native ways as flying in the face of everything that is awry on our planet; he imagines a return to these "forgotten" ways as a first step toward returning to the symbiosis of earth before the white man came to the Americas.

Angeli sheds light on the energetic forces that would undergird such a return (or "rewinding of God's watch") throughout as well. In a section titled "Synchronicities," Angeli

asserts that what others might think of as coincidences (e.g., “always see[ing] the numbers 11:11,” “think[ing] of someone right before they call you”), suggests to him “a flow of energy that is on a level which we are barely beginning to discover.” He goes on to question science as we know it:

> Rationalist and materialist can not explain [*sic*] irrational occurrences or immaterial phenomenon. The only reason materialist science has its illusions so firmly ingrained in the psyche of humanity is because it has disregarded everything which destabilizes its mental model of reality, and neatly tucked it away in the drawer labeled ‘illegal.’

Angeli then lumps “psychedelic plants” in with “[t]hings like deep trance states, dreams, synchronicities… ghosts, [and] UFOs,” as “other worldly phenomenon [that] are not able to be explained by modern materialist science.” In this way, psychedelics are positioned as a door to understanding the paradigm of science beyond what is assumed to be true in mainstream society; an onto-epistemological paradigm that due to its quantum proportions, uniquely possesses the grandiosity to combat the complex and systemic forces we are up against. Since this alternative energetic paradigm is positioned as naturally occurring, Angeli figures a widespread realization that we must return to nature on the level of “collective consciousness” as a starting point from which we can begin to return to stasis:

> For example, if the masses of people started investing their money into different products and plants for their daily ritual usage, and if their daily rituals changed to a more conscious and life respecting approach to daily living, then whole economies could shift almost overnight. They would shift from an environment raping, death reaping, parasitic forms of economics, to a symbiotic economics where plants, people and products all work in harmony with one another to not only keep the earth at homeostasis, but also help the earth to thrive for millenia to come.

Ecstatic optimism shines brightly here; and we see again the centrality of the ritual use of plants in his prophetic vision as he re-imagines economics with plants at the center.[39] At the end of the text, Angeli describes the utopian society he imagines as emerging from this energetic shift, where "'[p]risons' will be changed to rehabilitation clinics, combining the use of psychoactive plants, shamanic techniques like sweat lodges." Psychedelics play a pivotal role in all aspects of this vision.

One Mind at A Time: A Deep State of Illusion

In *One Mind at a Time: A Deep State of Illusion,* Angeli maintains the didactic mode while shifting into the realm of paranoid pessimism, bringing readers on deep dive down the rabbit hole aimed at exposing a large swath of conspiracies (often emergent from QAnon) that connect dots and become places to lay blame for the challenges he has been struggling with in his prior two books (2020). He continues to grasp at straws to make sense of big, wicked problems facing the world, and to offer neat solutions gleaned from New Age spirituality and wield rhetorics of Indigenous thinking and quantum consciousness to bolster *megethos*. The sense of growing climate anxiety is distinct, and Angeli offers a glimpse into his literacy practices whereby he extrapolates from key sources to large spiritual truths for "healing and discovering ourselves."

For example, he invokes Dr. Masaru Emoto—whose discredited scientific theories (Kiesling, 2009) about the benefit that praying to water has on molecule aesthetics have been perpetuated via the documentary "The Secret of Water" on Gaia, and several bestselling books—as not only a key source of hope for "all the polluted water in the world" (Angeli, 2020, pp. 49–

[39] Ironically, the market of plant-based supplements has exploded well within the confines of neoliberal capitalism, many of which use the concept of "ritual" in marketing campaigns.

52). Angeli goes on to weave Emoto's theories throughout the gamut of interconnected conspiracy descriptions that form the basis of the text. For example, he speculates about the implications of water's crystalline structure for our bodies and minds, since our bodies are 70% water, coming full circle to an earlier passage about how "[a] Harvard study revealed that fluoride actually lowers people's IQs" in referencing the "the subtle drugging of the nations water supply" (2020, p. 50). Of note, though Angeli references studies and theories in this text, there is no recognizable citation style in Angeli's writings; in fact, he rarely provides enough information for someone to reliably find the referenced artifact.

About halfway through the text, Angeli also explicitly addresses the issue of information literacy, anticipating his readers will question the many theories he has laid out:

> You may look into all of this information on your own, and I certainly hope you do. Trust me when I say, if you go to snopes.com or you "Google it" you may find "information" which "debunks" many of the things entitled "fake news"... Conversely, I caution you to take heed in what you believe in every way! Do not trust a book, a website, corporate "news" sources or what you hear from your friends, believe what your heart tells you is truth. (2020, p. 65)

This call to re-shape previously held strategies of information-seeking and notions of credibility compounds and complements the onto-epistemological rewiring at the heart of the constitution of psychedelic subjectivity.

If his reader hasn't already been swept up in the economy of contagion to buy into the need for psychedelic experience in solidifying these reorientations, Angeli explicitly makes the connection toward the end of the text. He poses a crucial question to the reader: "What changed my opinions on all of these topics?" (2020, p. 108) Because of its significance both as a summative trip report, and in illustrating the role of psychedelic plants' capacity to dissolve "formerly held beliefs" in his personal radicalization process, I quote his response at length here:

The first thing was the long list of evidence I had been ignoring for the sake of "being right" in my opinions about the world and my place in it. The second thing that changed my opinions would be the several boundary dissolving experiences I had with psychedelic plants. Through the plant's intense disruption of my cognitive syntactical world, it was made clear to me that reality is not what it appeared to be on the surface; and this fact would have to be accepted or consequences would be dire.

The intensity and the profundity of the experiences were so extreme that eventually I had to succumb to their force and admit I knew nothing about my Self, the nature of the world or my place in it! However, once I did this, the plants gently showed me colors, patterns, shapes and scenarios which carried information within their constant movement and changing patterns…. The plants were able to organize all of the information that I had absorbed in my lifetime—some of which I had been ignoring my whole life—into a logically cohesive understanding of my Self, and the nature of the world as it pertained to me personally.

Astonished that this was happening in such a radical way so quickly, I stopped consuming the plants for over a year. Only, after a while I began to see how the perspective that the plants gave me was actually helping in more ways than they had made me slightly uncomfortable. So I ventured back into the psychic space of the plants and once again was flooded with information pertaining to my Self, the nature of the world and my place in it.

I eventually decided to continue my ceremonial consumption of the plants a few times a year. During my periods of sobriety I would investigate all of the topics and subjects that seemed interesting to me. In the process I uncovered so much intense and interesting data that I felt my mind was filled to the brim. Then when I ate the plants again this data was purified, concentrated and condensed into a much more intricately interrelated web of understanding which merged with the previous condensations of understanding I had during my experiences prior. My brain was exposed, malleable, and unshackled by conventional thought patterns which before subconsciously defined how I perceived everything. The plants forced me to have a new perspective on things, and they removed the subconscious artificial barriers that I'd constructed throughout my life which opened up new avenues to observing and cataloging information…

…It became quite clear after a while why psychedelic experiences were taboo… were illegal and forbidden by the government. The plants destroyed the government engineered mental world I had grown to accept and enjoy, by breaking it down syntactically and exposing its internal inconsistencies. This

> finally allowed me to escape the cage I had forgotten imprisoned my soul and I have been soaring in the clouds a free bird ever since!
>
> The plants did more to inform me about my Self, the nature of the world and my place in it in less than 24 hours, than the government schools, MSM and the TV had done in my entire life! (2020, pp. 109–111)

Though there is much to say about the broader ecology of set and setting that is being amplified and thus asserting rhetorical force in the re-shaping Angeli's orientation to reality, the explicit connection to the role of psychedelic experience in Angeli's development of deep state conspiracy ideologies and their associated values, attitudes, and actions could not be more clearly wrought in this passage.

Not unlike his references to the war on drugs and extermination of native tribes in his prior two books, it is worth noting that many of Angeli's deep state conspiracies have their roots in true events. Notably, he discusses CIA mind-control experiments, and the role of psychedelics within them, at length in this text (2020, pp. 53–60). Though fully acknowledging the potential of psychedelics to be used in abusive contexts, Angeli does not see the connection between his own reawakening to deep state ideologies via psychedelics as part of a legacy of harm. Instead, MK-Ultra is cited to give credibility to a discussion of ritual child abuse. Likewise, he cites radiation experiments and Tuskegee as "further proof of the governments [*sic*] malicious nature" (2020, p. 61).

Similar to *Divine Clockwork*, Angeli shifts back into ecstatic optimism at the close of this text. In a section titled "A Vision of a Better Tomorrow," psychedelics continue to be at the center of this rhetorical mode. Here, Angeli cites hyperbolic examples of extraordinary human capabilities that provide the hope necessary to transcend the extraordinary problems we are collectively faced with, namely two Indian men who were rumored to have lived to 250 years of age, and to have taken 915 micrograms (he makes sure to say "915 is a lot") of "pure and potent

LSD" with "no visible effects at all" (2020, pp. 118–119). Following this series of anecdotes to underline the vast scale of human potential, Angeli lays out a prophetic vision of utopic future that takes on new dimensions of unreality. He imagines a borderless planet with cities that float in the sky or drift in the ocean; this planet is absent of crime, scarcity, disease, and jobs, but inhabitants will have access to space travel. The calendar and communication as we know it will be completely overhauled to make way for telepathic communication, and perhaps unsurprisingly, psychedelics are a critical part of the equation:

> Human beings will practice a new form of shamanism whereby they venture into the psychic space to explore their own internal interconnected world of self and spirit. There will be buildings designed for the personal and spiritual growth of individuals… This building will have a room full of isolation tanks into which after ingesting a psychoactive plant hundreds of people will individually enter to share a collective hive mind trip for several hours. Each person will emerge from their isolation tank like a caterpillar from a cocoon completely transformed in every way! (Angeli, 2020, p. 122)

The value of personal growth via transformative psychedelic experience rings clear and strong as fundamental to Angeli's vision across all his writings. Angeli's psychedelic experiences are clearly tied to his literacy practices (both in terms of his "cognitive syntactical world" and his information seeking practices), and the development of his conspiratorial ideologies.

Conclusions

In a recent review article, historian of psychedelics Corey Dansereau describes how in 1971, Timothy Leary "called for the construction of airborne colonies, 'HOMEs' (high orbital mini-Earths), whose residents would 'initiate ways of living, experiments in sociology, psychology, ethics, and neurology, which cannot be performed in [Earth] societies'" from a California jail (2023, p. 175). While the baggage Leary carries is different from Angeli's, both figures are strong proponents of psychedelic substances, and Leary's Starseed vision is not all that different from the utopian society proposed by Angeli.

Tracking Angeli's radicalization process from a fairly benign New Age cultural milieu through an attachment to psychedelic-informed neo-shamanism and into the world of QAnon points to the emergence of conspirituality as a noteworthy paradigm. This case casts light on the ways in which New Age spirituality has become imbricated in the perpetuation of alt-right conspiracy theories, and underscores the importance of a transformative theory of constitutive psychedelic rhetoric. I contend here that because psychedelics have been shown to increase connections among disparate things, and because of the noetic and ineffable qualities of psychedelic phenomenology, construction of psychedelic ethos leaves one vulnerable to conspiracy. Psychedelic exceptionalism—the theory that psychedelics should be decriminalized before other drugs—also extends to logics about whether or not bad actors exist in psychedelic culture. As a result, the fact that psychedelic rhetoric is so readily appropriated for harmful ends is overlooked in favor of the rose-colored promise of transformation. Further, I contend that the constitution of the psychedelic subject holds extra weight in light of the contemporary wave of psychedelic science. In part, this is due to the longstanding legacy of abuse within both scientific and underground contexts of psychedelic therapy, as well as the pervasiveness of the myth of "psychedelic exceptionalism" that emerges from transformative/breakthrough "wonder-drug" discourse around psychedelic science that perpetuates irresponsible hype narratives, actively harms other drug users, and stands in sharp contrast to the long history of stigmatization and oppression resulting from the war on drugs.

In addition to underscoring the ethical stakes of rhetorical worldbuilding in psychedelic contexts, this essay also points to the significant challenge that comes along with psychedelic integration. In the constitution of psychedelic subjectivity, and the mystical insight that often comes with it, Angeli, and others, are forced to reckon with existence in a society that does not

reflect or validate noetic insights and values thereof. As evidenced by the pervasiveness of the trip report genre, writing has thus far proven to be a central tool in psychedelic integration processes. Future researchers in this area might do well to account for the desire of the psychedelic subject to feel validated as emergent from the paradox of noetic ineffability, the stakes of desire for interlocutors to aid in integration, and the practice of otherwise seeking out audiences for trip reports. The paradox of psychedelic ethos compounds this desire; psychedelic subjects have further incentive to intentionally participate in the economy of contagion and recruit potential psychedelic subjects as a method of opening up new avenues of relating.

Interchapter 2. Major Shifts

Their coaching was really good and I really felt like I bonded with the couple, especially the woman… so I just, I felt extremely safe going in and also my mantra was kind of just surrender to the experience. You know, I didn't really go in with any fear, but I'm not really very fear based anyway.

All of my dosings were like love and oneness and unity and just were all this extremely euphoric type of stuff. And it was like so clear, so when they talk about some of the ineffability, it's almost, it's just a knowingness and understanding of some of the things that these spiritual teachers talk about. Being so great, you know, and so just bursting full of love and gratitude for even the hard parts of life because it's all just part of the soup.

It was interesting because they played the same playlist every time and there was one song that I characterized as cleaners, so it felt like these little mechanical objects with these you know headlamps on and their brooms coming in and cleaning, like you know just cleaning out everything that was in you. And then there was another song, apparently it's a really dark apocalyptic movie but I remember, so they went to take blood out, and I was just kind of you know, laying there pretty out of it, but I remember that song making it sound like I felt like I was at my funeral, and like I was laying in the casket you know when they were taking the blood out, and I'm like everybody's so sad and they're walking through and I'm like wait no don't be sad, this is great! But I couldn't tell them… But I just you know you guys understand now, I'm okay. Almost an I wouldn't say like a near death experience, because I haven't had one, but just this you know blanket of love and oneness.

Because.of this, I made some major, major shifts. So I planned to retire and kind of hit the road, because life's too short and there's so much to see, and do. So I mean physically I feel like I'm in the best shape I've ever been in because I really am more mindful about what I put in my body, and I make this smoothie and it's like you know, whatever you feed yourself, so I don't watch the news.. I don't feel, you know, I just, I'm happier when I'm… because there's so much more going on, so I guess I'm much more mindful about what I physically put in my body and as much or more so, about what I mentally put in my body so.

So I think the integration wasn't… I mean it doesn't just happen the next day. It happens, months and years later, so, you know the world just opened up, and I would say my whole friend group since then is almost totally different than what it was before, because a lot of people didn't get me anymore. Especially my ex, but he likes to you know, try and keep things the same and small, and I was just dying in that life so I feel like I'm back to being who I was. I did a lot of adventurous stuff and then kind of got shut down for twenty years and so I'm back to being myself and I don't think, I don't know that I would have done it without the experiences of psychedelics because when you're just in it, you just you know you just, you just do it, but you're not happy, and your health isn't that good… I mean I used to take Excedrin PM to sleep at night or a glass of wine and then coffee to get going in the morning, just because you know my functioning wasn't there. I mean that was just getting through the day and I was numbing so I could get through the day where now, like I drink this dandelion blend, I don't need caffeine.

The other thing with psychedelics, I didn't, I couldn't meditate before, my mind was way too busy, and I was thinking about loans and all this, you know I just couldn't stop it, so the ability to actually have experienced your mind stopping and being 100% present really helps with meditation, and I have some of my favorite songs from the study that I listen to, so I guess I integrated a lot, now that we're talking about it… the ability to just kind of just be a lot more calm…But I also did retire so that helps as well.

I guess the other big thing, I was so in my head, and after going through this study in the psychedelic experiences I can feel now, I mean I feel like I listened to myself more… You know if there's something I used to just ignore all the time and, just get in my head, and I would just shut down my intuition. I'm getting better because, believe me, I was so heavy it was ridiculous. I used to joke at work, I had blinders on there, there could be a fire alarm going on outside and I wouldn't see it because I was just be so focused on whatever project I was doing. And now I'm like I see more I hear more of it now. I just feel morally, certainly more alive than just a robot, you know?

So I get this email, its called the good news network, it's just cute little like positive stories. And I also unsubscribed to like Netflix and all that, and I do have a subscription to Gaia TV… I mean they have you know, thousands of videos and movies and stuff like that. And then I guess for news, anything major I do have like BBC News… but I have, it's called journey to the heart, it's a daily devotional meditation that I start my day with it's just positive you know. And I meditate and I try and get exercise, walk, ride my bike versus sit in front of the TV. Yeah I mean I can go I find if there's not a TV even around, I do have my laptop, though. You know now since COVID started there's this group called humanity rising, and they do, this guy's done a daily little video you know my friends told me about that I've only watched a few, but I signed up for, stuff like that.

[Gaia has] really good presenters, so it's just this guy that has different people talk about different stuff about, you know it's like, how can you be healthy, in a sick society and you know I really want to instead of judging, I'm trying to be the change, like Gandhi said. It'd be a better example for my kids as well because, instead of telling them another background to me is that [in my family] there was a lot of this shaming and stuff, so dogma and stuff, and I'm just like done with all of that, because, like some of the rules we follow as a society if you sit back and you think about it, it sets you up to fail. Or to keep you, you know broken and small. So yeah, the news is, it's all negative and I can feel it if I, you know, get into that.

So I originally started getting, it used to be called spiritual cinema circle, where I get a DVD once a month, I got that in spirituality and health, a magazine, and so I think I have bought them. But I just loved, they had one feature film and then three shorts and that's what got me hooked into this way of thinking, and this is even before the study. But yeah I had seen them advertised in spirituality and health, though, so it was more about, it's just again more positive stuff. But so some of the really neat things, like finding Joe is one of their movies, it's about the story of Joseph Campbell and the hero's journey. I mean they're just inspiring. You feel good and then I like, there's one series on there on mystery teachings. And I like that lady Sandra, forgot her last name, but she has like a whole series, on reading tarot cards… There's a lot on the sciences and there's one called beyond belief. And I mean there's just so much we don't know and there they will talk about anything. And my whole thing is trying to have an open mind and to be more open to what's possible versus… there's so much. I mean, I could spend the rest of my life trying to watch some of that stuff... I mean, then, we have stuff on the sciences and probably health stuff too as well, I mean there's a lot of holistic things and yoga. I do a kundalini yoga class too as well. A couple times a week.

Chapter 3. Neoliberal Wellness Meets Alt. Health Influence: Kelly Brogan and the Role of Transformational Psychedelic Rhetoric in Conspirituality

This chapter builds on the last in illustrating the ways in which transformative psychedelic rhetoric provides a powerful mechanism for perpetuating conspirituality explicitly in the realm of neoliberal wellness. It illuminates how transformative rhetorics more broadly wielded within neoliberal wellness and self-help genres are primed for what has been termed the "wellness to far-right-conspiracy pipeline" (McGrath, 2021) via a reorienting of evidence structures—a radical valuing of subjective experience as a source of knowledge and the resulting reconstitutions of ethos/credibility. Because this conspirituality discourse upsets notions of what can be considered legitimate scientific evidence, it poses a significant challenge for information literacy. As such, we might usefully consider the purveyor of transformative psychedelic rhetoric as a distinctly powerful literacy sponsor (Brandt, 2001), constitutively influencing the formation and transformation of identities and literacies via a shaping of ideologies (i.e., values, attitudes, and actions). Further, this chapter's case illustrates the ways in which transformative psychedelic rhetoric perpetuates an undercurrent of ableism within conspirituality.

In the previous chapters, I elucidated a theory of transformative psychedelic rhetoric, based on two paradoxes emergent from psychedelic experience that work constitutively with rhetorical ecologies of set and setting to construct psychedelic subjectivity. The case study in Chapter Two provided an analysis of descriptions of transformational psychedelic experiences at the heart of Jacob Angeli's fictional and nonfictional writings to offer insight into his personal constitution of psychedelic subjectivity and its relationship to conspiratorial ideologies, while also pointing to the way his writings serve as transformational psychedelic rhetoric that constitute psychedelic subjectivity in audiences. This chapter will focus on the ways in which transformative psychedelic rhetoric is wielded apart from the explicit trip report; here, we shift to

focus on the ways in which the holistic psychiatrist Kelly Brogan, MD uses the transformative rhetoric of psychedelic science to bolster and amplify a larger platform dedicated to spreading disinformation, ableist orientations to psychopharmacology, and otherwise perpetuating conspirituality in the alt. health world. Whereas Angeli is associated with conspirituality in a fringe sense and has gained mainstream notoriety due to his overt association with QAnon and associated political actions on January 6, Brogan represents an iteration of conspirituality that operates much more above-board and mainstream.

Whereas Angeli self-published a blog and a series of books to disseminate his ideas, he was largely operating as part of an underground culture without a widespread or calculated influence on the larger mainstream culture. Brogan, however, as an influencer who operates a complex platform of social media accounts and employs a small staff, is figured here as a different tier of literacy sponsor who wields the mechanisms of transformative psychedelic rhetoric as part of her social media strategy focused on growing, and importantly, profiting from, her following. Additionally, Brogan is a useful case study in illustrating how she works as one node within a larger disinformation ecosystem that relies on algorithms to increase reach and message. In fact, as previously mentioned, Brogan achieved status in the upper echelon of disinformation influencers via her inclusion in the "Disinformation Dozen" report published by the Center for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH), which recognized her among eleven others who were collectively responsible for perpetuating over 65% of all COVID mis and disinformation during the vaccine rollout in 2020 (*The Disinformation Dozen: Why Platforms Must Act on Twelve Leading Online Anti-Vaxxers*, 2021). In framing and analyzing Kelly Brogan as an alt. health literacy sponsor, this chapter also seeks to deepen the understanding of the way that

conspirituality works in the RHM, and specifically at the intersection of psychiatry and neoliberal wellness.

In the remainder of this chapter, I first revisit the topic of constructing evidence through experience and ethos I began developing in Chapter Two, specifically as relevant to literatures in RHM; I then situate Brogan within literatures related to the rhetoric of neoliberal wellness and conspirituality before concluding with a case study that examines Brogan's transformational psychedelic rhetoric as seen via a self-published e-book about psychedelics within the larger context of her influencer platform.

Constructing Evidence through Experience and Ethos in RHM

Just as the roles of experience and ethos in constituting evidence has been an important concern in psychedelic studies and in discerning conspiracies from conspiracy theories, the way evidence is leveraged and taken up has been a defining feature of rhetoric of science scholarship generally and within RHM specifically. And, though RHM as a field has not yet taken up psychedelics, I contend that the present inquiries into transformative psychedelic rhetorics will offer an important extension of knowledge within this growing subfield. Psychedelic therapies are often positioned as mental health interventions within the biomedical imaginary, and mental health rhetoric research offers relevant perspectives on ethos and defining the terms of rhetorical credibility from the standpoint of those defined publicly (or personally) as mentally ill.

For example, RHM scholar Jenell Johnson elucidates the concept of "anti-ethos" as a mark of harmful stigma for those with mental illness in the context of Thomas Eagleton's public battle with depression (2010). More perversely, we see how mental illness stigma circulates with terms like "Trump Derangement Syndrome" (or "TDS"), which is used to discredit the ethos of

people who vehemently oppose Trump's policies.[40] On the positive side of mental illness ethos, Molloy theorizes "recuperative ethos" and "agile epistemologies" as central to mental illness ontology (2015), and Uthappa similarly explores constructions of ethos in speakers with mental disabilities through practices of "deep disclosure" and "agency through vulnerability" as a means of destigmatizing psychiatric diagnoses (2017). As a conspiritualist invested in anti-psychopharmacology, Brogan's case in particular illustrates an interesting tension around mental illness stigma—she uses transformative psychedelic rhetoric to stigmatize psychiatric medication while also constituting wellness for her followers on a hyper-individualized scale aimed at tuning into one's "personal truths" as ultimate source of bodily evidence, claiming this vulnerability will provide the agency to empower and liberate her followers from mental illness.

What *counts* as evidence has significant stakes in biomedicine, especially as it relates to the valuing of patient experiences. When considering the range of available interventions to support one's healing from various ailments, what is viewed as legitimate often depends on whether scientific evidence can support the healing practice, and therefore whether a given treatment will be accessible to those who need it. Illuminating the stakes of this contentious nature of evidence through an investigation of the "biomedical backstage" of evidence construction in cancer research, Christa Teston et al. interrogate the FDA approval process of the experimental cancer drug Avastin (2014). Despite testimony from those who claimed Avastin helped them, the authors show how statistical evidence derived from RCTs reigned supreme; pathos invoked from testimony did not hold up as constituting persuasive evidence. Similarly, S. Scott Graham et al. likewise confirmed that patient experiences are not adequately taken into account in FDA approval processes, and the results of their analysis of 163 FDA drug advisory

[40] This term is popularly invoked in social media discourse; for a more fleshed out treatment of its use see e.g., Colebatch (2018).

committee meetings "support[ed] the growing concern that attempts to include patient perspectives in health policy may actually further marginalize patient populations" (2018, p. 58). Science and technology scholars Fadhila Mazanderani et al. build on this, calling for the necessity of both "democratic and epistemic imperatives for including patient and service users in healthcare services and policymaking based on their experience" (2020, p. 270). Likewise, Lisa Melonçon calls for "performative phenomenology" as a key methodology to make good on what she describes as RHM's tacit agreement "to the supposition that we carry the responsibility of ensuring [people's] experiences are accurately represented" (2018, pp. 96–97).[41] Considering these calls, it is understandable how Brogan's strategy of constituting evidential worlds based in subjective experience and apart from biomedicine might be convincingly perceived as liberatory.

Elsewhere, Graham describes the rise of evidence-based medicine as being an artifact of the "empirical-discursive ontology" of pain, namely via the 1962 congressional amendment to the federal food, drug, and cosmetic act, requiring that "all pharmaceuticals marketed in the United States should demonstrate safety and efficacy through 'adequate & well-controlled investigations'" (2015, p. 58). So began the "gold standard" of evidence-based medicine (EBM), relying on the likes of randomized-controlled trials (RCTs) and statistics to drive medical practices. It is of note, however, that RCTs rely on singling out potentially active variables to test therapeutic applications; the logic of RCTs does not allow for the possibility to test the efficacy of interventions that operate via more than one variable. Holistic health interventions are therefore largely incommensurable with evidence-based medicine, given their inherent goal of addressing health and wellness on multiple fronts—holistic medicine is described as addressing

[41] Extending the theory from Chapter One, one might consider the connections between Gries' new materialist ontobiography (2020) and Melonçon's performative phenomenology (2018) as methodologies that work to center subjective experience, and are thus especially susceptible to co-option in contexts antithetical to their activist purposes.

"psychological, familial, societal, ethical and spiritual as well as biological dimensions of health and illness" (Gordon, 1982).[42] Though psychedelics are widely studied via RCTs in the biomedical imaginary, anthropologists Joseph Dumit and Emilia Sanabria figure these studies as "colonial technologies," drawing on ethnographic work to show how psychedelic RCTs "have been captured by the pharmaceutical industry in its quest to grow profits rather than reduce illness" (2022, p. 291). In addition, the fact that psychedelic substances have such acute subjective effects not only presents problems for blind controls, but also points to the greater questions explored throughout this dissertation (i.e. via the theorization of psychedelics as non-specific amplifiers of rhetorical ecologies of set and setting) regarding the many variables at play in any therapeutic effect.

Because holistic medicine often draws on ancient spiritual traditions to inform modern practice, Jenell Johnson's findings that neuroscientific studies are used to validate meditation techniques[43] in Buddhist popular publications also brings important nuance to inquiries around

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[42] Colleen Derkatch traces the rhetorical boundaries between "Complementary and Alternative Medicine" (CAM) and biomedicine (2016), and although she does not engage directly with psychedelic therapies, her boundary work is relevant here in that many of the obstacles presented when attempting to integrate CAM into the evidentiary frameworks of biomedicine also hold true for psychedelics. I contend that CAM and psychedelic science alike emerge from the holistic medicine culture, with both realms centrally taking up healing practices of spiritual origin.

[43] Despite the fact that in medicalized mindfulness, "the possibilities for developing spiritual, even mystical, states of consciousness are minimized" (Lewis, 2016, p. 401), mindfulness science has done immensely well in appropriating practices with spiritual origins into biomedicine, in large part due to the neuro-imaging described in Johnson's study. To illustrate the fundamental difference in worldviews between those enmeshed in a spiritual tradition of mindfulness and the science that aims to study it, Richie Davidson, director of UW-Madison's Center for Healthy Minds (CHM), often tells the story of Tibetan monks laughing when researchers placed sensors on their heads—because of course from their perspective, meditation is an action of the heart, not the brain. Following from Stamm and Corbin's work described in Chapter One, because the intense nature of psychedelic experience does not translate as neatly into data, it is much more difficult to sever "sticky" questions of spirituality when building scientific knowledge from psychedelic experience. Recognizing the rhetorical parallels between psychedelic therapies and the interventions studied at CHM, when I attended Davidson's lecture in March 2019, I asked for him to comment on the burgeoning psychedelic movement and whether or not it was relevant to the mission of CHM. Davidson cited a lack of sufficient evidence as a central reason why "the jury was still out" on the efficacy of psychedelics; he cited the focus on "self-reported, qualitative"

evidence and ethos in this realm (2014). Johnson's study underscores how this phenomenon of "fact finding"—or "using neuroscience to *answer* questions or settle disciplinary debates"—contributes to the reifying of "a mythic image of science as a singular explanatory Force" while further "exaggerating the certainty of primary research" already seen in popular sources, and ultimately implying that "Buddhist knowledge is not really knowledge at all" (2014, pp. 161–164, emphasis in original). Given that psychedelics were used in Indigenous contexts long before the socio-psychedelic biomedical imaginary existed, the tension between neuroscience and otherwise biomedical approaches to research and pre-existent knowledges plays out in the context of psychedelic science and throughout this dissertation. For example, Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers alike have called for the imperative of incorporating Indigenous knowledge into scientific studies and striving to identify ethical ways of doing so (e.g., Celidwen et al., 2023; Cornelius, 2023; Fotiou, 2019); many organizations offer regular trainings that work to bridge these two paradigms as well.[44] The present project does not seek to diminish the existence of multiple valid knowledges, but rather to illustrate how Brogan operates within the context of conspirituality to exploit the evidentiary precedent of holistic medicine.

In particular, Brogan's case is emblematic of what philosophy scholar C. Thi Nguyen frames as a fundamental problem relating to finding an expert for those seeking advice on

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evidence as insufficient proof of efficacy, clearly underscoring the value of the neuro-imaging based evidence in CHM science. Defending the ethos and legitimacy of mindfulness research which he has gone to great lengths to cultivate, Davidson referred to psychedelic therapy as a "shortcut," and has generally distanced himself from psychedelics. Illustrative of neoliberal logics of wellness described in the following section, in the midst of a pandemic that tragically lays bare the systemic failures of community care and support networks, the CHM continues to publish research findings purporting to teach mindfulness skills to achieve COVID-era well-being on individual level (see, e.g., Spoon, 2020).

[44] For example, a May 2, 2023 newsletter from the prominent Chacruna Institute for Plant Medicines advertised new courses on "Ayahuasca Healing, Science and Indigenous Knowledge," and "Roots of Psychedelic Therapy: Shamanism, Ritual and Traditional Uses of Sacred Plants" for $700 and $1,100 respectively.

unfamiliar topics (2020). Nguyen theorizes the "cognitive island" as those "domains for knowledge in which expertise is required to evaluate other experts;" "runaway echo chambers" are a corollary phenomenon whereby "inexpertise may lead us to pick out bad experts, which will simply reinforce our mistaken beliefs and sensibilities" (2020, p. 1) Because cognitive islands occur in realms where there is no test for expertise, this is a relevant concept in the context of psychedelic ethos; psychedelic subjects may feel compelled to assert and recognize expertise based on subjective experiences that are defined by noetic quality and ineffability and cannot be measured. In this context, knowledge is inextricably linked with trust; in scrutinizing the role of transformative psychedelic rhetorics within conspirituality culture, a goal of this project is to spawn greater awareness of abuses of trust in psychedelic ethos. Brogan preaches that her followers shouldn't outsource their truth, yet her entire brand exists on value capture and constituting followers' identities according to conspiritualist principles. As such, to further develop the concept of transformative psychedelic rhetoric, the next section takes up the neoliberal undercurrent of wellness rhetorics.

Psychedelics and the Rhetoric of Neoliberal Wellness

The value capture inherent to neoliberal models of wellness is a key driver of the rhetorical circuit of wellness discourse both generally and specifically related to psychedelics; this rhetorical circuit constitutes key contours within our rhetorical ecologies of set and setting and thus provides fodder for amplification in the construction of psychedelic subjectivity. Not unlike tropes within transformative psychedelic rhetoric, the well-being of humanity via hyper-individualized modes of creating value are key to economic geographer David Harvey's definition of neoliberalism as "a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills

within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade" (2005).

Echoing the rhetorics of psychedelic panacea, journalist Anand Giridharadas frames neoliberalism as an "ascendent ideology of how best to change the world," arguing that elite overtures toward world-changing are a charade aimed at disguising a concentration of wealth to the detriment of broader society (2018). Though forged by right-leaning political actors such as Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher to discourage big government, a key aspect of pulling off the neoliberal revolution came with support on the left, namely by leaders such as Bill Clinton (Giridharadas, 2018, p. 19). Underscoring the connection between wellness rhetorics and neoliberalism, philosophy scholar Roger Foster traces the "therapeutic ethos" from an association with the New Left, saying that "neoliberal forms of power" emerged as a result of the New Right's "sever[ing] the therapeutic ethos from its alignment with social democratization by imbuing it with an alternative set of meanings centered on the ideas of market freedom and the entrepreneur" (2016, p. 82). Foster asserts that this new neoliberal power "take[s] the form of the management of subjectivity," and points to two "major social pathologies of the neoliberal era:" a "contractualized notion of citizenship and the explosion of social inequality" (2016, p. 82). In this way, it becomes clear how the neoliberal political economy amplifies the constitutive mode of identity construction at hyper-individualized and collective scales.

Sociologists Luigi Esposito and Fernando M. Perez further describe how neoliberalism works to commodify mental health via an emphasis on the individual, specifically addressing how "an emphasis on medicalization, [and] particularly the use of psychotropic drugs, can be traced to the psychopharmacological revolution of the mid-twentieth century and its obsession with situating illness within the individual" (2014, p. 414). Elsewhere, scholars in sociology and

history have similarly framed psychoactive drugs as "modern technologies capable of remaking the self" (Rose, 2003; qtd. in Savelli & Dyck, 2019). And enriching our understanding of the connection between neoliberal economics and psychopharmacology as we know it, economist Edward Nik-Khah uses archival evidence to establish "a direct link between the Chicago School of Economics and the mobilization of the pharmaceutical industry in the 1970s" (2014, p. 489). Moving forward, I continue to discuss how neoliberalism works in concert with the conspirituality milieu's merging of the political left and right in the following section of this chapter; I take up the concept of neoliberal property rights and the commodification of mental health as key to the neoliberal wellness circuit more fully in Chapter Four's focus on psychedelic patents. First, I bring key scholarship relevant to neoliberalism and psychedelics to bear to extend insights from wellness-focused scholarship in RHM.

Because of the intensely subjective features of psychedelic phenomenology, neoliberal ideology flourishes in transformative psychedelic rhetoric. Critical psychedelic scholars Alex K. Gearin and Neşe Devenot describe how "psychedelic medicine is being constructed within neoliberalism as a means of furthering neoliberal priorities, in a manner that risks exacerbating the very problems that some claim it solves" (2021, p. 927). Describing how distress is framed as "a neurochemical and behavioral problem to be solved at the level of the individual" in neoliberal psychedelic medicine, the authors assert that this realm "functionally constrains interpretations of the field's preliminary data in terms of individualized solutions to complex social problems" (Gearin & Devenot, 2021, p. 927). The rhetorical paradoxes emergent from psychedelic phenomenology laid out in Chapter One alongside the case studies in this chapter and Chapter Two illustrate how the neoliberal model of change is especially compatible with

conspiritual ideologies and throw into high relief just how ill-advised we are to assume that individual psychedelic transformation is capable of addressing complex problems.

Indeed, since science upholds institutions and policies, and medicine has a long history of harming BIPOC,[45] experiences of health and science are laden with ethical concerns. It is worth stating plainly that the neoliberal concept of wellness is inherently flawed in the way it directs attention toward the individual bodily subject and places the onus for wellness on the self and figuring the idea of "health" as an individual achievement, as opposed to acknowledging the structural realities and social determinants by which it is actually constituted (Adler et al., 2016; Bambra et al., 2010; Marmot, 2005). Indigenous studies scholar Hi'ilei Julia Kawehipuaakahaopulani Hobart and STS scholar Tamara Kneese theorize "self-care" as an outgrowth of neoliberal wellness culture "both [as] a solution to and a symptom of the social deficits of late capitalism;" the authors point to the commodification of "specialized diets, therapies, gym memberships, and schedule management" as necessary explicitly because of burnout associated with the neoliberal obligation of hyperproductivity (2020, pp. 2–3). If not already clear, self-care is ill-equipped to address the systemic oppression that drives health inequities. Communication scholar Dana Cloud frames this disjuncture as having origins in "therapeutic rhetorical strategy:"

> Idealist (spiritual or text-centered) explanations for material (economic or physical) problems generate from therapeutic rhetorical strategy, which is often couched in the language of sickness and healing to code social 'ills.' The therapeutic approach, which demands not activism but self-transformation and not collective work but individual consumerism, appeals to upper-middle-class intellectual elites. (1998, p. 132)

[45] See, for example, medical ethicist Harriet A. Washington's *Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to the Present* (2007).

In her theorization of "rhetorical healing" among Black women, Tamika Carey analyzes healing discourses as emergent from the Oprah Winfrey Show. It is perhaps no surprise that a show so preoccupied with healing has achieved notoriety for platforming conspiritualists; in fact, the conspiritualist presidential hopeful Marianne Williamson at the center of this dissertation's opening anecdote was Oprah's longtime spiritual advisor. Defining rhetorical healing as "a set of persuasive discourses and performances writers wield to convince their readers that redressing or preventing a crisis requires them to follow the steps to ideological, communicative, or behavioral transformation the writer considers essential to wellness," Carey's study illustrates how "Black women's specific wellness efforts have become commodified and depoliticized in the name of commercialized instructional activism" (2016, p. 14).

RHM scholar Colleen Derkatch takes a different approach in working to outline the rhetorical mechanisms by which the neoliberal model of self-care and wellness operates. In an analysis of public arguments against supplement regulation, she finds that wellness is figured as "not simply as a bodily state to be enjoyed but one to be monitored vigilantly and defended actively through supplementation," leading to an orientation to one's body characterized by constant suspicion and surveillance (Derkatch, 2012, pp. 5–6). In a later article, Derkatch offers a rhetorical framework to understand how wellness discourses autopoietically "self-generate" to sustain themselves, via "seemingly opposed logics of restoration and enhancement" (2018, p. 132). Taken together, Derkatch argues that these seemingly contradictory logics produce an "essentially closed rhetorical circuit" in which wellness becomes a constantly moving target; this insatiable drive to achieve a wellness state that never arrives, compounded by the fact that wellness supplements do not have to be approved by the FDA, renders the wellness industry susceptible to intense commodification and profiteering. I contend that conspirituality culture

emerges as a direct result of this rhetorical circuit, as seen in the case studies on Brogan and Angeli. Further, this project's broader emphasis on neoliberal culture, biomedicine, and industry works to outline the rhetorical circuit of transformative psychedelic rhetoric, accelerated through an economy of contagion (Nicotra, 2008), as an extension of the closed circuit of wellness discourse. Though couched in wellness discourse, psychedelic experience rhetorically constitutes a realm of transformative healing that transcends the model of constantly moving wellness target.

Returning to critical psychedelic studies, Devenot writes with Trey Conner and Richard Doyle that "[b]y attributing an individual's failure to heal from psychedelics to insufficient ego death, institutions seek a 'spiritual bypass' on any need to reform working conditions or the workplace" (2022, p. 496). Devenot, Conner, and Doyle outline an algorithm for what they term "*Dark Side of the Shroom*," by which "ancient plant medicines curated by Indigenous and counterculture traditions" are granted technoscientific credibility and are ultimately integrated in "mental health therapies with little to no training" (2022, pp. 479–480). I argue that key to the circuit of transformative psychedelic rhetoric is a series of rhetorical moves that dictates the legitimation, appropriation, and commodification of all wellness interventions with spiritual origins; and that this neoliberal phenomenon ultimately works to reinscribe the conditions of suffering we seek respite from in the form of wellness interventions. Critiques of mindfulness discourse in particular have cast light on a variety of sites of neoliberal commodification, such as the corporate inclination to invest in mindfulness training to increase productivity rather than actually addressing systemic problems of an organization, often termed "McMindfulness" (Purser, 2019); management scholar James Reveley argues that "[w]hen institutionalized as a form of therapeutic education… mindfulness meditation is not ideologically neutral but rather morphs into a neoliberal self-technology" (2016, p. 497).

Connecting cultural histories of psychedelics with another wellness practice of ancient and spiritual origin, historians of pharmacy Lucas Richert and Michael DeCloedt situate the 1960s-era popularity of both yoga and psychedelics as fundamentally escapist (2018). The authors posit that the draw of both practices amounted to "'a responsible effort of young people to correct the soul-destroying course of industrial civilization'" (A. Watts, 1968; qtd. in Richert and DeCloedt, 2018). Figured in this way, psychedelic use, yoga, conspiracy theorizing (and, following from Chapter One, even rhetorical new materialisms!) all emerge from a similar 'responsible effort.' As seen in Chapter Two's case study on Angeli, conspiracy theories represent coping mechanisms; they tend to provide neat solutions for the extremely complicated problems that we are constantly faced with in late liberalism. And just as psychedelics work as nonspecific amplifiers, so too do broader techniques like yoga and mindfulness meditation that lead to mystical states. Not recognizing the dynamics of neoliberal wellness interventions as contributing to the reinscription of conditions of suffering, many turn to these techniques in good faith to relieve suffering. However, psychedelics and yoga alike have long been implicated in the perpetuation of class hierarchy, cult dynamics, and broader histories of the radical right; the emergence of conspirituality culture has only increased the visibility and prevalence of these oppressive ideologies (Pace & Devenot, 2021; Remski, 2021b). To be sure, as this chapter's case study shows, Kelly Brogan is far more public about her forays into yoga and self-help than she is about psychedelics; however, because her broader message is fundamentally about transforming the self via neoliberal wellness, her treatment of transformative psychedelic rhetoric provides important insight into the way she deploys rhetorical strategies across her platform.

Kelly Brogan, No. 9 on the Disinformation Dozen

As far as influencers go, wellness influencer and holistic psychiatrist Kelly Brogan, MD has a modest following of New Age, natural health enthusiasts. With 138,000 followers on Instagram, her grid offers a range of posts related to her "Vital Life Project" (VLP), aimed at providing "true informed consent around medication-based treatment, and empower[ing] individuals with tools for radical self-healing." At the time of initially drafting this, her Instagram story portrayed bright text proclaiming "After 7 years, my facebook page has been deactivated, and this one could be next! Follow me on telegram and my newsletter (links in bio)!", and you begin to understand why after a little scrolling reveals how this empowerment mission becomes manifest through a variety of anti-mask, COVID conspiracy content (for example, an August 24, 2020 post displays an image of a tractor trailer with the text "Wake Up! Take Off The Mask / QUESTIONINGCOVID.COM"). Revealing profit motives and underlying grifts is key to the conspirituality critique, and it doesn't take long of a scroll to reveal what Brogan is selling—for starters, the VLP is heralded as "The First and Only Online Toolkit to Heal Depression and Anxiety in 44 Days," for which members pay a $40 monthly subscription. Offering a salient glimpse into the neoliberal wellness and conspiritualist ideology Brogan constitutes among her followers, a January 7, 2021 Instagram post is dedicated to espousing the VLP's "Core Values:"

> We believe in bodily sovereignty, health freedom, radical healing, and feel that this can only be fully experienced beyond the framework of pharmaceutically driven medicine and associated mainstream media indoctrination. Together, we reclaim and cultivate the joy, vitality, and freedom that is our birthright through self-care, personal responsibility for health, emotional self-regulation, and embrace of the body's innate regenerative capacity. (Brogan, n.d.)[46]

[46] The post's caption grants a clearer picture of exactly what VLP entails, describing it as "a compendium of step-by-step personal healing tools and also a space for online connection - through weekly video calls, chat, and video shares. AND… a powerful way to find people who live where you live so that you can play, dance, eat, and share in person." Pushing this out during the early pandemic stages, Brogan emphasizes how paying her monthly subscription fee will connect followers with one another so that they can gather in communal rejection of public health recommendations for social distancing.

Though her profile hasn't infiltrated the broader American psyche quite like the image of the face-painted, horn-wearing QAnon shaman has, her comparatively lower profile has arguably had a larger impact on information literacy more broadly due to her occupation of the "Pastel Q" world of conspirituality as a wellness influencer. Likewise, though Brogan isn't a huge figure in psychedelics, this case study illustrates how she uses psychedelic rhetoric to fortify her disinformation platform. As such, this case underscores the stakes of a critical theory of transformative psychedelic rhetoric; I argue here that transformative psychedelic rhetoric fits within and amplifies the persuasive tactics central to Brogan's world and the world of conspirituality more broadly. This case also highlights unique dimensions of psychedelic ethos and the relevance of social media in accelerating the circulation of conspirituality content within larger disinformation ecosystems. The primary artifact of analysis in this case study is a self-published e-book titled *Psychedelics and Mental Health: Science Lights the Path to Mystical Healing* that Brogan provides "free" to her "Get Real. Get Well. Get Free." e-newsletter subscribers (Brogan, 2018). To illustrate the stakes of Brogan's use of psychedelic rhetoric to amplify her platform's broader messaging, I first engage with literature to illustrate Kelly Brogan as a representative pillar of the conspirituality movement and provide framing for this case study via Brogan's public social media and e-newsletter content.

Brogan's Platform: Anti-Psychopharmacology, COVID Denialism, & Dispelling the Illusion of External Authority

Brogan's influencer profile has been critiqued on the Conspirituality podcast as being representative of a movement that "at best… attacks public health efforts in times of crisis. At worst, it fronts and recruits for the fever-dream of QAnon" (Beres et al., n.d.-f). The podcasters assert that unsolicited advice about what to do with our bodies to stay healthy (such as the VLP Brogan is building her brand with) composes the bedrock of the wellness industry; and that in a

landscape devoid of accessible public healthcare infrastructure, this industry naturally emerges where we try to sell each other solutions to problems that we don't have trust in institutional structures to fix (n.d.-f). Brogan's audience is one that is looking for answers outside of "mainstream medicine," just as the majority of people who seek out psychedelics for therapeutic purposes are. As becomes evident in this analysis, there is an intentional slippage around Brogan's sowing mistrust in mainstream medicine to mistrust in mainstream sources of authority more broadly, and transformative psychedelic rhetoric provides her the tools to constitute a following of likeminded women.

In part owing to Brogan's tendency to consistently represent this archetypal dark underbelly of conspirituality grift, the Conspirituality podcast covers her platform extensively: from the initial video published the day the WHO declared the COVID pandemic in March 2020 titled "What is Going On" which prominently featured the soon to be memeified assertion that "the only virus is fear" (Beres et al., n.d.-h); her rhetorical tactics of "rail[ing] against 'mommy medicine' while installing herself as 'mommy shaman'" (Beres et al., n.d.-c); her bizarre review of a memoir disclosing institutional abuse within the Kundalini Yoga Community that focused entirely on promoting Brogan's own book via reflections around "victim consciousness" and featured seventeen hyperlinks to her own blog content but no references to the survivor's book ostensibly being reviewed (*Yogi Bhajan and the Kundalini Community - Kelly Brogan MD*, n.d.); and more recently "laying bare the emotional avoidance and cruelty that conspirituality attempts to sublimate" via a critique of identifying with a cancer diagnosis or mental illness, saying "victim consciousness is the only human pathology" on Aubrey Marcus's podcast in May 2022 (Beres et al., n.d.-d). Matthew Remski's essay, "Inside Kelly Brogan's Covid-Denying, Vax-Resistant Conspiracy Machine" describes how Brogan has especially gained notoriety for

screening practices that required patients to demonstrate in writing how their ideological values aligned with her own distaste for all pharmaceutical products; the harm she has caused patients by aggressively and negligently tapering them off medications; the "Community Ethos" statement used to silence "victim-perspective language" and "unprocessed fear" in her Facebook group; and a general bait and switch around her main source of cash inflow, the Vital Life Project (VLP), which uses marketing related to medication tapering tips to draw people in to what has become a dumping ground for COVID conspiracism (2020).

The strain of conspirituality that we see in Brogan's holistic psychiatry has gained traction in part via what theology scholar Marc-André Argentino has referred to as "Pastel QAnon" (2021). Argentino describes how, following social networks' cracking down on the spreading of QAnon content, a new wave of propaganda began via the hijacking of left-wing hashtags like #SavetheChildren—all within aesthetically pleasing Canva templates. He describes how this shift worked to recruit women who would never otherwise find themselves browsing the harsh and cruel online Chan ecosystem that QAnon emerged from; in Pastel Q, recruits are often unaware that the branded content they're reposting is associated with QAnon, or that QAnon is a conspiracy theory operating from fundamentally racist and anti-Semitic logics:

> The aesthetic and branding created by these influencers softens QAnon's propaganda grounded in Chan culture and imagery. The Pastel aesthetic is the polar opposite of the "raw" QAnon content that would be found on 8kun. In softening QAnon propaganda, the Pastel QAnon community creates new recruitment and radicalisation pipelines into female dominated ecosystems.

Ward and Voas' coining of the term "conspirituality" as a largely web-based movement pre-dated the emergence of the modern influencer culture; though the authors make reference to "Facebook, twitter, and other social networks," they were writing and publishing their landmark article during the same years that Instagram was emerging (2011, p. 111). The authors do,

however, track the growth of conspirituality as in line with the growth of the internet and the networked "blogosphere" (Ward & Voas, 2011, p. 111). Building from the groundwork laid in Chapter Two regarding conspirituality, I delve here into recent scholarship that serves to further theorize the web-based movement in the context of new (social) media since—specifically as relevant to Brogan's rhetorical ecology of online neoliberal wellness.

Including Brogan in an analysis of neoliberal wellness conspiracy theories, social scientist Melissa Ann McLaughlin found that at the start of the COVID pandemic, "the majority of [Brogan's] posts shift to debunking COVID and encouraging followers to find their own truth and dictate their own reality" (2021, p. 174). McLaughlin describes how Brogan capitalizes on deficiencies of the medical establishment "by providing [an] alternative method for healing that seems to incorporate insight from yogic traditions and shamanism as well as developing methods that treat the whole person rather than reducing them to their illness or symptoms" (2021, p. 177) Similarly, sociologist Stephanie Alice Baker includes Brogan in a study of "alt. health influencers" who weaponize wellness and web culture simultaneously to perpetuate COVID-era far-right extremism (2022). Baker describes how alt. health influencers operate as "lifestyle gurus" who use "micro-celebrity techniques to foster intimacy and connection with their followers… [and] to appear more trustworthy than public health authorities" (2022, p. 11). The following case study points to the central role of transformative psychedelic rhetoric in this micro-celebrity tactic of intimacy.

Making the connection clear between Brogan's brand of conspiritualist influencer and the rewiring of evidence structures that accompanies psychedelic ethos, Baker describes alt. health influencers as "commonly bound by a lack of trust in institutional authority," saying that in breeding distrust as it relates to health; both government and mainstream medicine "are

perceived to be domineering and compromised by vested interests – what Kelly Brogan commonly refers to as 'Mummy medical system' and 'Daddy government'" (2022, p. 11) Extending our understanding of the way Brogan reconstitutes evidence via a valuing of subjective experience as paramount to the legitimation of ethos, Baker also identifies how this "lack of institutional trust in mainstream politics, science and medicine extends towards a deep distrust of the mainstream media" and that "the majority of information [alt. health influencers] disseminate online draws on common sense knowledge, folk wisdom and lived experience… They espouse a back to basics approach which privileges the body and intuitive forms of knowledge," with Brogan in particular highlighting the importance of 'trusting our bodies'" (2022, pp. 11–13).

Information policy scholar Madelin Burt-Dagnillo also draws on Brogan as an exemplary figure in a study of conspiracy theories, COVID-19 misinformation, and wellness influencers; she describes an aesthetically-pleasing Fall 2020 Instagram post as "evoking the traditionally feminine values of caretaking and maternal wisdom, while also satirizing that trope to share information about vaccines" (2022, p. 15). Its caption is as follows:

> To make your home smell like fall, boil orange peels in a small pot of water on the stove with 1 tsp cinnamon, a dash of nutmeg and a few cloves. Everyone in my family loves it. Also vaccine reactions are real and can cause permanent disability. (Brogan; qtd. in Burt-D'Agnillo, 2022, p. 15)

Burt-D'Agnillo's study highlights the "gendered social media landscape" alongside "inadequate policies for managing misinformation online" as key components to Brogan's strand of conspirituality; she concludes that "COVID-19 illuminated a series of existing elements which converged to create an atmosphere whereby young women are exposed to misinformation about COVID-19 by engaging with wellness influencer content on Instagram" (2022, p. 12). Likewise, social anthropologist Marie Heřmanová interrogates gendered dimensions of "Pastel Q" via a

case study of Czech spiritual influencer Helena Houdová's "blending of spiritual, aspirational and conspiracy content," arguing that "specific aesthetics of Instagram conspiracies needs to be understood in the context of gendered, predominantly female 'third spaces' (Wright) in the male-coded global digital space" (2022, p. 2)

In a study of first-wave conspiritualist David Icke, religious studies scholars Dean Ballinger and Ann Hardy contest Ward and Voas's framing of conspirituality as operating principally in web-based contexts; they argue that "conspirituality operates through a synergistic model of media use, in which the web functions in a complementary fashion alongside other media such as books and lecture presentations" (2022, p. 515). Because Brogan's conspiritualist profile very much operates in a synergistic model, the below case study seeks to contextualize her transformative psychedelic rhetoric within her larger online platforms. And though there is no doubt that Brogan's best-selling books, with titles that drip of constitutive neoliberal wellness—*A Mind of Your Own* (Brogan & Loberg, 2016) and *Own Your Self* (Brogan & Marriott, 2019)[47]—are foundational to her overall rhetorical strategy, a full analysis of their contents is outside the scope of this chapter.

An important aspect of Brogan's synergistic model has to do with her ex-husband. Brogan has been named number nine COVID-era health information superspreader on the CCDH-termed "Disinformation Dozen," and though they divorced in 2022, she was married to Sayer Ji during the vaccine rollout, who happens to be listed as number eight on the Disinformation Dozen. Ji's role is significant because his website, GreenMedInfo, is a long-time

[47] The full title of this book is *Own Your Self: The Surprising Path Beyond Depression, Anxiety, and Fatigue to Reclaiming Your Authenticity, Vitality, and Freedom*, and it was published by Hay House. Louise Hay, "New Age guru" and founder of Hay House, is a controversial figure whose perpetuation of pseudeoscience around self-healing in the context of AIDS has been linked to the harm of "a generation of gay men" (see Beres et al., n.d.-b; Groff, 2017).

amplifier of pseudoscience, attracting "up to 1 million visitors per month" (Remski, 2020). Brogan and Ji work as two nodes within a larger, networked rhetorical ecology that operates to provide credibility for disinformation; Brogan's glossy social media pitches gain authority in part because she can rely on her followers searching for scientific articles to back up her claims within Ji's database of "credible" sources. GreenMedInfo forms a key aspect of the resulting closed loop of disinformation evidence structures to support Brogan's claims about psychedelics and psychiatric medicine.

To illustrate two additional cases of relevant content within Brogan's broader platform, I'll briefly analyze a recent video Brogan advertises via her e-newsletter and an Instagram post before moving to her psychedelic e-book. Emblematic of the ways in which situated knowledge (D. Haraway, 1988) and feminist standpoint theory more broadly (Bowell, n.d.) are aggressively co-opted in the conspirituality sphere to justify shifts toward the primacy of subjective experience as source of knowledge, Brogan's "short video roundup" themed e-newsletter on July 6, 2022 offers ironically phrased clickbait that champions embodied constructions of truth with the tagline "external authority is an illusion." Those compelled enough to click on the "watch here" link may be somewhat surprised to find that the associated YouTube video is titled "My Response to Roe v Wade," in the wake of the Supreme Court overturning the Constitutional protection and liberty to choose to have an abortion on June 24, 2022 (Brogan, 2022).

The video is textbook Brogan; she takes an event that represents widespread suffering as an opportunity to pitch her program centered on moving through a transformation she terms the "reclamation process" from "victim consciousness" to "sovereignty:"

> You can always get exactly what you need when you trust your navigational compass to get you there… I have found that essential aspects of sovereignty and the reclamation process are to recognize that you actually don't need anything from a system, from a relationship, from a dynamic that cannot meet your

> needs… that you cannot source yourself, and therefore that place, that system, that person, cannot punish you. They cannot. (2022)

She then employs a metaphor of the reclamation process via the constitution of a narrative world; she tells a fable of a woman living in her parents' basement who has been abused by her parents her adult life and simply needs to "reclaim sovereignty" because she is now an adult and can leave. In so doing, she underscores her authority and credibility as a women's reproductive psychiatrist who has written extensively about women's bodies and proclaims the value of surrounding oneself with like-minded women; before moving to suggest that we may just be in a "kink dynamic" with the "bad daddy government" and "bad mommy medicine," like Brogan has been in the past. Though she never utters the words "Roe v Wade" or even "abortion," she does seemingly critique activists who may be organizing in protest of the decision's overturning: "So if you're enjoying pleading with the prison guards or the rapists for proper treatment… be my guest... But me, and the women who share the values that I uphold, we recognize that we don't need to ask for anything that they don't wanna give us because we can source it on our own" (2022).

Though the meaning of these cryptic statements is decidedly unclear, one reasonable reading given the context might imply that she believes abortions can be sourced on our own/illegally. No matter the meaning Brogan intended, she shows a distinct lack of awareness regarding the privilege required to "source" one's own abortion, or significant dangers associated with a suspension of legal abortion care—especially those who are most marginalized and under resourced, and for whom "sourcing" care on their own is inaccessible at best. All of this conspiritualist rhetoric ties back to what she calls "the illusion of external authority;" it inherently breeds distrust in all external authority structures (most pointedly medicine/science and government), while simultaneously placing embodied experiences on a pedestal as the most

important building blocks for constructing evidence. This of course relies ironically on her own construction of ethos as someone who is so deeply tapped into her own "source" of embodied experience that her testimony thereof becomes an external authority source worth trusting.

Scrolling through Brogan's Instagram grid from the period during the early stages of the COVID pandemic leads to a greater understanding of the way she appropriates Indigenous thinking to instill a sense of conspiritualist *megethos* described in Chapter Two. A post from June 12, 2020 is composed of an image of an open door revealing an empty room cast in bright red light at the center of a dark room, alongside a quote attributed to "White Eagle, Hopi," presumably written after their 3/16/2020 vision quest:

> This moment humanity is going through can now be seen as a portal and as a hole. The decision to fall into the hole or go through the portal is up to you...
> ...You were prepared to go through this crisis. Take your toolbox and use all the tools available to you.
> Learn about resistance of the indigenous and African peoples: we have always been and continue to be exterminated. But we still haven't stopped singing, dancing, lighting a fire and having fun. Don't feel guilty about being happy during this difficult time...
> ...This is a resistance strategy. In shamanism, there is a rite of passage called the quest for vision. You spend a few days alone in the forest, without water, without food, without protection. When you cross this portal, you get a new vision of the world, because you have faced your fears, your difficulties ... (Brogan, n.d.)

Juxtaposed alongside posts that situate COVID as a hoax, Indigenous and African resistance is grossly misappropriated here to imply that vaccination efforts are extermination attempts—and to justify her continued drive to buck the recommendations of public health experts. Additionally, shamanistic ritual is misappropriated to further her brand's refrain of transformation as necessary for radical self-healing. The unfortunate reality is that when Kelly Brogan, and many other conspiritualists like her, post about COVID being a hoax, what they are actually doing is exploiting followers' deepest fears in a way that ultimately results in disproportionate harm to our most vulnerable and marginalized populations. The stakes of this

phenomenon are clear when considering the disconnect of Brogan using a “Hopi” quote that invokes indigenous and African resilience in the face of constant threats of extermination—completely out of context—to perpetuate the spread of misinformation that is actively harming those very populations.

Psychedelics and Mental Health: Science Lights the Path to Mystical Healing

I contend that claims about the transformative mechanisms of psychedelics, especially when those claims extend beyond the self and into the realm of agency to transform larger systems—culture, politics, climate change, the world—should be understood and analyzed within a critical framework. Framing psychedelics as rhetorical agents of change is too often an easy way to move audiences toward an oversimplified and solipsistic view of problems and away from an understanding of systems of oppression and the need for collective action in order to create change. In addition, this mechanism of psychedelic transformation becomes easily co-opted for other types of transformation.

As alluded to in the characterization of transformative psychedelic rhetoric developed in the previous chapters, it is very common for journalists, authors, and scholars alike to display psychedelic ethos through a juxtaposition of investigative reporting on psychedelics with narratives of their own psychedelic experiences, often with objective and subjective components braided together thematically, and/or with a psychonaut lens aimed at empirically testing and bolstering the claims unearthed in auto-ethnographic research. In this vein, Chapter Two’s case makes clear that Angeli has taken psychedelics himself and is thus entangled in the paradoxes of psychedelic rhetoric; he is both scrutiny to stigma by outsiders and he is also very clearly asserting psychedelic ethos to impart what he perceives as important wisdom directly gleaned from noetic and ineffable experiences. This chapter adds a different dimension to understanding

psychedelic ethos, in that Brogan does not disclose personal psychedelic use, and claims of transformation do not originate from appeals to her own personal psychedelic experiences—this distancing from the psychedelic experience represents an attempt to build psychedelic ethos while dodging its associated stigma. Brogan simultaneously enlists the authority of psychedelic science to amplify her own authority and medical credentials, all while breeding distrust in the authority of mainstream medicine. In this way, broad claims about transformational psychedelic mechanisms of action are rendered more digestible to skeptics and the mainstream population who may have unconsciously stigmatized psychedelics; and at the same time, psychedelic science is positioned as in line with Brogan's ideologies, well outside of the mainstream.

The title of Brogan's 16-page psychedelic "e-book" is in line with the larger tensions around psychedelic rhetoric's association with science and mysticism explored throughout this project so far: *Psychedelics and Mental Health: Science Lights the Path to Mystical Healing.* The self-published book has four pages of introduction, which begins by gesturing toward the nature of suffering as emergent from the "illusion of the separate self," and underscoring the importance of glimpsing oneness within the context of mystical experiences as a "portal to this greater perspective." Within the first page, Brogan reveals her hand as influencer engaged in constitutive identity transformation; she characterizes mystical experiences by virtue of their capacity to assist in "the dissolution of all of the formerly held beliefs, opinions, and habits." As mentioned in Chapter One, mystical psychedelic experiences are often characterized in these ways; trip reports are often full of attempts to show just how much psychedelic experiences made a person want to forget everything they thought they knew and open to greater or more profound ontological and epistemological understandings. Chapter Two describes how a similar constitutive process takes via the "affective jolts" (Rice, 2020) that radicalize people into

conspiratorial thinking, and how psychedelic experiences can lead to a propensity for developing conspiritual worldviews.

We continue to see how Brogan intentionally pounces on the vulnerable period of transformation and development of psychedelic subjectivity in a section titled "Subversive Power of Psychedelics." There, Brogan proclaims that "In order to successfully come off of or avoid psychiatric medication, an experience of conscious expansion is required," and then, "I watch for the window during which the ego breaks open" (2018). Going on, Brogan clinically distances herself and her patients from the use of psychedelics while also directly linking the transformation of psychedelics with the broader transformation that she seeks to elicit by tapering her patients off antidepressants; she frames both processes as not just a reconstitution of identity, but a complete rebirth, impacting every area of one's life:

> My patients don't take psychedelics during their tapering processes; however, they do meet with the dark night of the soul that can be visited through the experience of psychedelic journeys. This brink of consciousness—when traversed, embraced, and subsumed—can represent a kind of death of a former self and a rebirth into a new, expanded self-agency.
>
> The survival of this trial is highly disruptive. In fact, the cost of one's new life is their old life. And everything is subject to review, calibration, and reintegration. In a banned TED Talk, Graham Hancock discusses how plant medicines, and specifically a brew of South American plants called ayahuasca, significantly threaten the matrix of society. He goes on to say that in many ways, alcohol and prescription drugs keep people asleep and compliant with the agenda of the orthodoxy. Transformational substances like psilocybin, LSD, and ayahuasca blow the lid off of the small boxes we are stuffed into. (2018)

Not unlike Angeli's psychedelic rhetoric explored in Chapter Two, she is framing conscious expansion—such as the kind that can be achieved through psychedelic experience—as a transformation that serves as a prerequisite to awakening to the true nature of reality. These calls to look below the surface are the same logics by which Brogan casts seeds of doubt in her followers about the supposed truth of what is really behind COVID-19.

Then, through a very brief, glossy, and mystically injected review of scientific literature, Brogan asserts that on top of the fact that a variety of psychedelics are effective for treating depression and anxiety, psychedelics also lead to environmental-connectedness. Brogan asserts that "entheogens" (a commonly used term for psychedelics):

> …can foster a deep sense of connectedness to the web of life—to the natural world, to each other, to the cosmos. This connection makes it impossible to proceed with life as it is offered by the dominant paradigm, where nature is something to be managed and utilized, where production of goods and procurement of money matters, and where our bodies are machines prone to senseless malfunction. (2018)

In short, the message Brogan communicates about psychedelics follows the patterns of a familiar narrative for those following psychedelic discourse: that psychedelics are universally good and are a helpful tool for positive and necessary transformation of self and the world. And although Brogan doesn't write about her own psychedelic experiences here, it is clear how the characteristics of psychedelic discourse are central to her broader agenda. And while her psychedelic e-book does not explicitly link her own psychedelic experience as a contributing factor for the *megethos* Brogan projects as an alt. health wellness influencer, it is clear that psychedelic rhetoric fits squarely into her brand. Further, her e-book works to constitute psychedelic subjectivity among her target demographic of largely women followers; those who are brought to her content via "Pastel Q" social media algorithms may see this e-book and be compelled by contagion to undergo their own transformative experiences, bolstering their psychedelic subjectivity via the embodiment of the rhetorical paradoxes outlined in Chapter One, and further amplifying their ideological alignment with misinformation within Brogan's rabbit hole.

Conclusions

As a holistic psychiatrist, it is interesting to contextualize Brogan in the context of a broader history of how antipsychiatry movements have interacted with the New Age. In his history of radical psychiatry, Richert describes how the New Age human potential movement, as seen in Esalen and Rogerian methods flourished in large part because antipsychiatry radicals worked to create a decline in the popularity of psychoanalysis (2019, pp. 71–74). I contend that conspirituality in psychedelics similarly has grounds to flourish because of the backlash against "big pharma." While it is true that pharmaceutical companies are working within a greater neoliberal ideology that at worst has led to their accountability for the opioid epidemic (see, e.g., *THE ROLE OF PURDUE PHARMA AND THE SACKLER FAMILY IN THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC*, 2020), it is also true that the drive to empower a following of clinically depressed women to reject psychiatric medicine is incredibly ableist and opportunistic.

A generous read of those swallowed up by the conspirituality movement would go something like this: that Brogan's followers, for instance, have real, material sources of distress and a lack of faith in the ability of the state to act in their best interest; and that radically focusing in on oneself at the expense of shutting off trust in "mainstream science" is an effective and necessary means of coping with the existential and collective anxiety and grief that inevitably goes along with a pandemic upending your entire life and the lives of everyone they care about. Reflecting back on Angeli's failure to integrate psychedelic subjectivity from Chapter Two—as seen in his own life as well as the narrative world he builds around the character Will—it becomes clear how figures like Brogan exploit the unresolved existential tensions that result from attempts to integrate insights from noetic and ineffable experiences. The noetic ineffability paradox leads people to scramble for meaning, and Brogan is all to eager to expertly wield

transformative psychedelic rhetoric in such a way that provide meaning to characters like Will—albeit in the context of a grift that relies on misinformation and the perpetuation of harm.

I contend here that the individuals named as the disinformation dozen represent literacy sponsors who promote health ideologies and literacy practices that continue to prolong the pandemic, and that Brogan's model offers considerable insight into the role of transformative psychedelic rhetoric in this realm of literacy sponsorship (Brandt, 2001). In large part due to the ways in which the world of conspirituality has ripple effects in public health, I assert that conspirituality is an important arena to pay attention to for rhetoricians and public health officials alike who are trying to understand how disinformation circulates in neoliberal wellness circles, and that understanding psychedelic rhetoric provides a lens into important persuasive mechanisms that animate the arguments in this world.

Interchapter 3. For the Greater Good

I have an interest in just how does the mind work? What's the process behind thinking and understanding. Sort of tangential I was studying artificial intelligence. So I was doing a lot of other classes in linguistics, psychology and things and kind of getting off track a little bit, which is one of the reasons I ended up leaving graduate school because I wasn't focused.
And that was for computer science.

So a lot of that, that early interests led me probably in like, the mid to late 90s to doing a lot of reading and having a lot of interest in you know, how, how different chemicals or medicine can affect the mind. Started learning a little bit about psychedelics, and it's something that unlike a lot of people who've had experiences, I had never had an experience in the early, earlier formative years, the people who experiment with that high school and college and so forth. It wasn't until I was well into adulthood that I got into the interest. And there's a little bit of self experimentation. This probably would have been around the end of the century, beginning this new century around 2000. So a little bit of experiment with mescaline cactus, other mushrooms at the time. At the time, there was a lot of so-called research chemicals that were available and still legal to get access to, and so but I was really on my own a lot, with a little bit of integrative meditation.

There was a little bit of an aspect of, you know, is this kind of some kind of self therapy of some kind? Sure. At the time, I really wasn't as aware as I am today that a lot of research already had been done using these really therapeutically. Less people experimenting on their own with what you can do with them. So a lot of that knowledge really came later. Yeah, so. So I think I had some interest in, you know, what, what can you learn about yourself about this and can help you kind of process things. But without really having that background knowledge that people had been working on that for decades?

And I think you know, in the study that they were doing blood draws and everything. And early in the session we're getting very frequently blood draws. And then they kind of go out to longer lengths of time as time goes on. But those first few where they had to do things like, I don't know if it's fifteen minutes apart, twenty minutes apart or whatever, but the first dose is coming on. And it's time for them to do their next blood draw. And in the push to make it easier since they were doing multiple jobs, they had put in a port. And they couldn't get anything to come. And it's kind of this more and more feeling tension. It's like, you know, like you're supposed to be performing, and they could not get blood to come out through this, and tried and tried, they finally ended up saying, "well, we're, you know, maybe we'll have to remove it and just do a do a stick instead to get it." And by this time, it was coming on really strong. And I said, it's okay to poke me, I have to lean out. And so I was getting to a point where things were feeling very intense.

Up to that point, I had kind of been sitting there, waiting for it to come up. And all of a sudden, they came up really, really fast and really strong. And they're not saying so, but there's a little feeling of panic around me. And I was trying intensely to communicate with them. Just, it's okay with me. It's okay with me to poke me, go ahead and do it. And so they did it, they ended up in that first session, having to do pokes through the whole session to draw the blood each time. And as they went through that, things kind of felt like their attention eased as, okay, if we can do it this way, we'll get through this first session.

But it ended up being a really fascinating experience, because it turned into an important part of the experience for me, as I was in there… physically, something needed to be released. Finally, just relax into it. In that session, once I got to physically relax into it,

We had worked out beforehand, you know, they had asked each participant when it was time to do the blood draws. How do you want them to talk to you or how did you want them to communicate to you, and he just kind of tapped me on the shoulder and so they did that periodically. With all the blood draws in that first session, it became a very important part of the experience, it's like time for them to do it again! Each person who's doing the blood draws was just, had the most wonderful gift out of touch and was able to do it in a way that I was so blessed to have and I have this feeling like I had, I had the headphones on and everything and take these eye shades off and look, and it's gonna be just pure white light. Anything but she poked me. So it was it was quite interesting.

I don't want to be like armchair psychologizing. But I'm wondering, was it like, this is how I'm interpreting it… Like there was this tense moment you're feeling this like onslaught of like, rising like, culminating in like this feeling of bliss and like, the ability to say like, no, just, you know, poke me is like, dissolving that tension. And that's like a beautiful in a way. Does that make sense?

Oh, this is what somebody is capable of feeling like, there was those senses. Like, I have never felt anything that felt quite. Quite so and, and I see bliss, but I didn't really. At the time, I couldn't find any good word for it. And that's the closest thing I could come to for it. But yeah, it was mostly just this, this realization, like, oh, it's, it's possible for somebody to feel this, whatever, this is.

When I first started feeling it I came up and felt like I was floating and I had in the back of my head that the study was in the hopes of making this available to other people in the future. Legally and more easily attainable. And when I when I felt that rush I had the thought in my head, oh, people need this. So I didn't have that feeling. And and just really that, wow, this shouldn't be kept away from people, to be able to do and have that experience. And I've even joked with my sitters afterwards, during some of the debrief about, wow, that you know, you should be able to go kind of like have a spa weekend where you have all the support and get this and all and I think that actually came up in one of the conversations that one of those psychedelic society meetings about having a big thing like that… and then it gets into all about how do you make that accessible to people who aren't super privileged to be able to afford to do something like that? … there was that sense of people need this, but there there wasn't other personal insight other than wow, I can feel this and I hope I can come back here. Yeah. And I still hope, someday.

Chapter 4.1 Preamble on Transformative Psychedelic Rhetoric and Overly Broad Patents

This chapter is broken into two parts: this single-authored preamble; and a subsequent case study co-authored by my colleagues at Porta Sophia, a non-profit dedicated to preventing overly broad psychedelic patents. In this preamble, I work to situate psychedelic patents and the work of Porta Sophia within the broader theoretical tensions of this dissertation; I include personal narrative to situate my own positionality as it relates to these topics.

Unquestionably, psychedelic rhetoric has risen to the register of transformative in part because these compounds can offer real, and often transformative benefits to people. By way of example, Alexander "Sasha" Shulgin, organic chemist and prolific synthesizer of novel psychoactive compounds[48] known as "the godfather of ecstasy," reportedly first learned about MDMA from a student who had "claimed stridently that it had cured her stutter, forever altering her life for the better" (Richert, 2019, p. 141). Self-taught global mycology expert and psychedelic thought leader Paul Stamets has recounted a related origin story for his own career path, saying in an array of interviews and documentaries that he decided to dedicate his life to the study of mushrooms at age eighteen, when a harrowing first psilocybin trip that peaked with climbing a tree and weathering an intense thunderstorm resulted in his own stutter being cured (Bauer, 2018). Both Shulgin and Stamets bore witness to psychedelic-induced transformations in speech fluency, which then transformed their life's work to ultimately increase awareness about psychedelics.

As seen through recent filings of the Alexander Shulgin Research Institute and Turtlebear Holdings, Inc., Shulgin and Stamets also happen to share a connection to the topic of this

[48] Shulgin and his wife Ann are venerated among psychonauts for publishing two volumes that operate as "do-it-yourself" guides to synthesizing an exhaustive canon of illicit psychoactive research chemicals—heartwarmingly titled *PiHKAL* (short for *Phenethylamines I Have Known and Loved*)*: A Chemical Love Story* (Shulgin & Shulgin, 1991), and *TiHKAL* (short for *Tryptamines I Have Known and Loved*)*: The Continuation* (Shulgin & Shulgin, 1997) These volumes are especially interesting rhetorically due to the autoethnographic components preceding chemical synthesis instructions; the Shulgins provide detailed notes presumably from their auto-experiments that serve to map psychoactive phenomenological signatures.

chapter: the world of psychedelic patenting. Operating as public disclosures of transformative innovations, I argue here that psychedelic patents work to amplify the contagion of transformative psychedelic rhetoric. Returning to the themes developed in Chapter Two, in the following excerpt from Angeli's *One Mind at A Time*, we can see how Stamets' patents[49] serve to temper the frantic mode of paranoid pessimism with ecstatic optimism:

> Bee Colony Collapse Disorder is spreading fast in large part because of the Deformed Wing virus, deforestation, and… toxic manmade chemical compounds. However, there is hope, for Paul Stamets' mushroom patents can save bees by extending their lives and making them immune to the viruses which are killing them; and Stamets' mushroom patents can also be used to create safe forms of pesticides for crops instead of using toxic chemicals made by corporations like the deep state influencing Monsanto-Bayer! (Angeli, 2020, p. 114)

Though to Angeli patents are representative of hope, this chapter serves to illustrate how patents not only accelerate hype by amplifying contagion, but also how they work to constitute value as a mechanism of neoliberal commodification and exploitation in the context of psychedelics. To the degree that these compounds are actually potentially "breakthrough" therapies for difficult-to-treat disorders, their eventual access for those most in need seems to be in the hands of patent offices.

Cultural studies scholar Maxim Tvorun-Dunn's recent study on "Acid Liberalism" in Silicon Valley illustrates the connection between the constitution of psychedelic subjectivity and the development of neoliberal ideologies in the tech sector (2022). Finding that "psychedelics and their associated practices are given unconventional mystical meanings by some high-profile tech entrepreneurs, and that these meanings are integrated into belief systems and philosophies

[49] Though Angeli's example references Stamets' non-psychedelic mushroom patents, Turtlebear Holdings has filed numerous patent applications that Porta Sophia has determined to be overly broad, tier one claims; as of May 4, 2023, we have filed three direct interventions with the USPTO in response to their applications. See the case study in Chapter 4.2 for a description of Porta Sophia's vetting and direct intervention processes; see the "Third Party Submissions and Observations Summary Chart" posted on Porta Sophia's website for more details (Porta Sophia Psychedelic Prior Art Library, n.d.).

which are explicitly anti-democratic, individualist, and essentialist," Tvorun-Dunn ultimately argues that "the legalization of psychedelics will likely be operationalized to generate a near-monopoly on the market and promote further inequality in the United States that is reflective of both neoliberalism, and the essentialist beliefs of Silicon Valley Functionaries" (2022, p. 1). We go into more depth in the coming case study regarding patent law and surrounding issues as it relates to psychedelics, but it is important to note here that patents are a key avenue by which monopolies are formed; patents are essentially temporary monopolies, granted by governments in exchange for the disclosure of novel and nonobvious technical inventions. Investors in Silicon Valley and beyond are compelled to support patent-holding companies in large part because temporary monopolies represent an opportunity to bring products to market and begin profiting from them in the absence of market competition, thereby increasing odds of investment returns.

A common avenue by which psychedelic drug development companies solicit potential investors is through advertising patent activity—often in the form of public press releases that amplify rhetorical contagion by situating psychedelic technologies as innovative transformations. When Mindset Pharma issued a press release in this vein, announcing "positive test results" of "certain patent-pending compounds" (Mindset Pharma, Inc., 2020), and was soon after uncritically "parroted" in psychedelic media outlet *Lucid News* (Virdi, 2020), *Psymposia* author David Nickles took note. Arguing that "[w]hen the media amplifies public relations narratives about the alleged superiority of understudied, proprietary drugs with unknown safety profiles, it does a disservice to psychedelic communities and those interested in learning about these compounds" (2020b). Considering press releases are a public-facing genre, this phenomenon is an interesting case for understanding the accommodation of science; emblematic of contagion in transformative psychedelic rhetoric, already epideictic genre is uncritically translated for *Lucid*

News' even wider audience. Nickles' quote underscores a corollary issue of this rhetorical amplification; that property rights are decidedly separate from the regulation and biomedicalization processes novel compounds undergo to determine safety profiles. Patent applications can be prophetic, meaning no research has been done to justify the legitimacy of the technical innovation; patent applications can and are routinely filed with simply an idea and without supporting data that the idea works (see *Properly Presenting Prophetic and Working Examples in a Patent Application*, 2021). In other words, the *Lucid News* piece is unethical in part because by amplifying Mindset Pharma's transformative psychedelic rhetoric, they are sponsoring a constitution of psychedelic subjectivity whereby readers are likely to come away with an inflated sense of safety and trust in the patent-pending innovation, as it were.

In August of 2021, I began working as a consultant at the non-profit Porta Sophia. Because of an interest in archival research on psychedelics for my dissertation, I took on the role of Data Archivist, as part of a data team composed at the time of just myself and two other colleagues. Together, we developed a methodology and workflow to track and evaluate psychedelic patent documents, and to intervene indirectly and directly with overly broad applications. The following co-authored case study works to make our exigence and methodology transparent while outlining its utility outside of psychedelic contexts—and suggesting it can be usefully employed in the context of technical communication classrooms to spur broad forms of patent activism.

Recounting an exchange I participated in at a psychedelic conference, the below narrative sets the stakes for psychedelic patenting and further connects this topic to the issues around Indigenous appropriation developed throughout this dissertation. Before the narrative, I describe how scientists from Usona Institute worked to debunk the claims of an overly broad patent that

was granted to COMPASS Pathways. Though they are separate entities, Porta Sophia and the non-profit medical research organization Usona Institute were both founded by the same person, and both entities are invested in protecting the public domain as it relates to psychedelics in different ways. As a non-profit, Usona represents a somewhat unusual model of research and development around psychedelic compounds; their website asserts that they take "an approach that values scientific integrity and transparency for the benefit of society by striving to place our research results in the public domain" (FAQs, 2023).[50] Because of this open science ethos, Usona Institute is often framed as the antithesis to COMPASS Pathways' neoliberal patent-driven approach in media reporting about psychedelic property rights.

Indeed, the question of whether psychedelics can or should be patented has been the topic of many in depth articles, most notably covered by former *VICE* journalist Shayla Love. Love's extensive reporting on psychedelic patenting began in February 2021 in response to a COMPASS patent application that has since become notorious for a number of claims to innovation regarding the psychedelic set and setting; so for example, administering psilocybin therapy in a room with "soft furniture," and "decorated using muted colors" (2021a). In responding to this patent application, Love asks whether or not companies should be able to patent the basic components of psychedelic therapy, and delves into the myriad questions surrounding the dubious practice of patenting psychedelics within ten subsequent *VICE* articles in the following fifteen months, documenting the COMPASS saga and also offering broader

[50] In addition to debunking the COMPASS patent claims as described in the below narrative, Usona scientists have more recently received coverage for refuting another set of transformative psychedelic claims unrelated to the world of patenting, but rather within the sacramental psychedelic socio-imaginary. Nickles reports on this strange case for *Psymposia*, where Usona experimentally disproves claims leveled by the "Church of Psilomethoxin," namely that they had "developed a novel biosynthetic approach for producing [the church's] sacrament, allegedly by adding 5-MeO-DMT to the growing substrate of Psilocybe cubensis, which purportedly caused the fungus to convert the 5-MeO-DMT into psilomethoxin within the mushroom fruiting body" (2023).

pieces that speculate on whether there is such a thing as an ethical psychedelics company, and whether the patent system is broken (2021b, 2021c, 2021d, 2021e, 2021f, 2021g, 2021h, 2022a, 2022b, 2022c). Because COMPASS is so emblematic of the issues around psychedelic patenting, we continue to focus on their patent portfolio in this chapter's case study, providing an example of Porta Sophia's direct intervention on the overly broad "set and setting" patent application. This patent has significant stakes for ethical worldbuilding in psychedelic contexts due to its claims around "innovative" approaches to psychedelic set and setting.

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On December 15, 2021, the non-profit organization Freedom to Operate (FTO) filed an expensive post-grant review on a patent that had been recently granted to COMPASS Pathways for what was described as a novel polymorph of psilocybin: "Polymorph A." Cited in the post-grant review filing was a pre-print of an article that was published the following month in *Acta Crystallographica Section C* by a group of scientists led by Usona Institute's Alex Sherwood. In the spirit of commitment to open science and protection of the public domain, these scientists had performed a series of experiments to ultimately argue that the characteristics described as constituting an innovative polymorph in COMPASS' patent documents were actually found in a series of historical samples of psilocybin, demonstrating the presence of the so-called "novel" polymorph throughout time (Sherwood et al., 2022).

On December 5, 2021, as I attended the last day of the "Horizons: Perspectives on Psychedelics" conference in New York City, psychedelic patents were on my mind. Having only joined the Porta Sophia team four months prior, I was still fairly new to the world of psychedelic patenting—but I was aware of the COMPASS controversy's active unfolding. Though Shayla Love was still two months away from publishing her inaugural *VICE* article, I knew about the "set and setting" patent; I was also aware of the Usona group's ongoing work to intervene in the

granting of the polymorph patent, and the post-grant review coming from FTO. The theme of the day was “Psychedelics in the World,” and—decidedly at odds with the logics underpinning the enterprise of psychedelic patenting—a variety of speakers throughout the day engaged with critical questions around Indigenous issues in the context of psychedelics: Miriam Volat and Sutton King spoke about practicing allyship with Indigenous communities; Troy, “The Last Captive” spoke about “The Comanche Way,” and Juliana Mulligan’s talk was focused on Indigenous reciprocity in the context of ibogaine.

As former front man of the *VICE* docuseries “Hamilton’s Pharmacopeia” (which features worldwide travels to document the chemistry of various psychoactive compounds within their socio-historical contexts), Hamilton Morris might have been a natural fit for the day’s theme. However, his role as psychedelic thought leader shifted gears when, presumably sometime between being booked to speak on that day at Horizons and actually speaking at Horizons, Morris accepted a job as a full-time consultant at COMPASS. Though Morris’s talk on psychedelic supply chains seemed to go off without a hitch—he solicited lots of laughs when his first slide revealed the subtitle “How the Psychedelic Sausage Gets Made”—he did not engage with the question of how psychedelic patents might impact the psychedelic sausage, as it were. He was charismatic and awkwardly charming in the question-and-answer period after his talk, and, much to my chagrin, didn’t receive any questions about his relationship to COMPASS. Chacruna Institute for Plant Medicine co-founder and executive director Bia Labate moderated the final panel of the day, where Morris shared the stage with all the day’s speakers. By that point, the disjuncture between his connection to COMPASS and the topics of conversation throughout the day built to my asking what felt very much like an “elephant-in-the-room” question. Though the majority of the conference recordings are seemingly available to review in

perpetuity via the Horizons Vimeo archive (a 30-day rental of the entire conference proceedings is $50), this final panel is not included in the available offerings. However, I recorded the exchange, and include it in full here for good measure.

Pratt:

> I have a two-part question about the psilocybin Polymorph A that COMPASS has patented. From your perspective as an obviously very accomplished chemist, Hamilton, who has as I understand recently made a career transition to work with that company, I wonder first your thoughts on the legitimacy of that patent as a new innovation if you're able to speak to that, and second how you think that patent impacts the supply chain, particularly in the context of the issues of Indigenous reciprocity we've been talking about this afternoon.

[Audience clapping]

Morris:

> Yeah, I mean, I don't have anything to do with that research whatsoever. But I don't know if it will hold up, we'll see. Certainly I've heard somebody say, well, that the problem is that it's preventing competition. Well, that doesn't seem to be happening. Usona has a competing product… three companies are simultaneously competing right now to get approval on clinical trials and psilocybin products. And if anyone here knows anything about the way pharmaceutical industry works, people always find a way. Where there's a will there's a way, but some psilocin product, someone will come out with a different polymorph, someone else will play this game, I have no idea. I genuinely don't, again, have nothing to do with that part of the research. I'm aware that everyone is extremely critical of it. I have no involvement with it. I do work on multiple compounds.

Labate:

> Hamilton, may I suggest for the people that don't know the context of this larger question that you perhaps share… you have been doing very pioneering work on TV and studying this space. And you recently joined COMPASS and it raised a lot of questions, would you like to share with folks about your lines of reasoning. So people understand better? Not everybody knows.

Morris:

> Yeah, sure. Sure. Yeah. So I made a documentary series for many years, you might be familiar with it. When it wasn't doing that, I was working in a lab at University of the Sciences in Philadelphia, and the problem was that there was no funding for psychedelic research whatsoever. This is not a big university with a

lot of money. In fact, it's actually going out of business and being acquired by a different university right now as we speak. And so it was very difficult to do the research that I wanted to do. And then there was this massive proliferation of interest in psychedelics, which translated into an enormous amount of new funding to do psychedelic research. As far as I'm concerned. For me, that's been a dream come true. It's been really, really good. And I've done more new research in the last six months that I have in the preceding decade. It's been amazing. And I'm proud of the work that I've done. One of the chemists I work with in the lab is here this evening, Jason Wallach couldn't be here, but it's good work. Now, the broader questions. I don't know, I don't know how all this is going to pan out. I do think that as a stepping stone to broader drug policy reform, medicalization historically has not hurt, I agree with what other speakers have said that it's not the whole story, right. I don't think that this medical model encompasses the entirety of valid reasons to use psychedelics, but I think it has been beneficial in Canada in the cannabis industry, obviously, and I think it will be beneficial in this instance, as well. But not only is the work that I do completely unrelated to this psilocybin… it's pure, organic synthesis. So what do I think of it? I have nothing to do with it, but I'm very happy that all these resources are now available for research, because, you know, someone like Alexander Shulgin, who was selling his land to fund the research that he did, this is like, and this is important stuff, I mean I hope we can at least agree on that. If resources are dedicated to studying these things, enormous strides can be made. And I'm seeing it right now. Like I'm very excited by what's been happening in the last year. And can we meet again next year or the year after that, and people are going to be sharing a lot of amazing new research. Of course, it'll all be controversial, and everyone will argue about that. But overall, I'm more optimistic than I've been in a long time.

Labate:

I want to use my moderator powers to ask the sister here that made the question if she wants to make any, any follow up comment, considering that I think this is a strong concern the psychedelic community. And so perhaps, you can speak as a representative of this community.

Pratt:

I don't know if I can do that. But I will just say, do you have any comments on the reciprocity aspect? Like I recognize that you don't have anything to do with—

Morris [interrupting]:

Like going back to Mazatec people specifically?

Pratt:

Not specifically, no—

Morris:

Well what do you mean specifically?

Pratt:

—to Indigenous people, yeah.

Troy [interjecting from across the stage]:

Is COMPASS giving back?

Morris:

I don't know. I don't think so. But I don't know like all Indigenous people internationally, I just don't know how it would be distributed. For example, there's evidence of psilocybin containing mushrooms used in Congo, which is not talked about at all I don't think it's been mentioned even once at these conferences, are they part of this equation as well? I'm like, I just, this is, I'm not trying to be evasive. This is just genuinely not my thing. I would love to say yes, I would love to say, let's give it all to all of the Indigenous people in the world but that would be a dishonest answer on my part because I don't even know what that means.

Troy:

Well we want to ask you like we're asking all of them: to make yourself involved, to make yourself talk to them to stand up and use your voice, like you did on the molecules—

[Interrupted by audience clapping]

Morris:

I genuinely think that's a good idea. I just don't know exactly how that would play out. From my personal perspective. I'm not trying to give you a hard time I just, like, would that mean that some investor gives half of their money to people in Oaxaca? I don't know, it's like, it's a complicated thing. I think it would be great. And I just don't know, I'm just like some guy that makes drugs—

Troy:

Well you have a voice in this community. And we're giving you ways to give back to the communities. So we're saying will you be a spokesman, will you stand up? Will you do what they need for this?

Morris:

If somebody provides, like a solid plan, for how this could actually play, out of course I would support it. Yeah, I mean I don't want to speak for indigenous people, largely because I am not indigenous. So I don't want to say—

Audience member yells out:

You're looking at the planners!

Morris:

So yeah if you have good ideas. Let's talk about it.

King [interjecting from across the stage]:

I want to say something. Yeah. So the Indigenous Medicine Conservation Fund, which we just spoke about, for the audience, is a fund that is supporting five keystone biocultural medicines and Indigenous cultures globally. And so there are vehicles of reciprocity that we can be using to support the reciprocity. We're looking at access and benefit sharing, the Nayoga protocol, there are all different types of pathways that begin with having a dialogue and a seat at the table, you know, having a conversation about this. I mean, there are ways. You can't just shrug your shoulders and say, "I don't know." It's disrespectful. It's disrespectful to all of the Indigenous leaders that have put so much time and effort creating so many different pathways, whether it be the Nagoya Protocol, or free, prior and informed consent, or many different ways, it's just, you just have to have a seat at the table.

[Audience clapping]

Labate:

I should also mention, in terms of Compass having chosen aggressive IP tactics. I myself have been in dialogue with a contact at COMPASS, suggesting that this legal IP techniques be sorted out, and they just play the game in a way that is more fair to other people. So there's multiple levels to move the conversation forward. Obviously, we're not going to solve all the problems in the world right now. But this is being filmed. It's on camera, and we're planting the seeds of things that will flourish like our medicines, with time and with care and with intention… you wanna say more? *[gesturing to Volat]*

Volat:

Well, it's a little bit of a diversion from this, but I just feel like I wanted to share one of the things that's happened recently in our work with partners, which is supporting people to speak at WIPO. And I don't know if you know more about this, but WIPO is the World Intellectual Property Organization. And so one of the

> meetings that I attended, that was on Indigenous consultation about IP issues, what was happening, and what I was hearing was that the elders who were in the room who were consulting on this, and they were talking about things like mescaline, or psilocybin, we're talking about connecting the interest in these kinds of molecules and plant medicines, to the rights of nature. And so I think there's a whole conversation there about, you know, what do the rights of nature have to do with our IP process? Because what people were saying in the room that have this traditional wisdom is that actually nature is the holder of all of this knowledge; that it's a holder of IP. And then we're actually a little bit confused if we don't you know, structure how we think about IP based on that nature is actually the one that owns it.

Labate:

> Which gives me a chance to plug our Chacruna "Patenting the Sacred" series. We have been doing a series of webinars and I want to invite everyone to come and watch that, which is part of our focus as well…

Six months later, the U.S. Patent Trial and Appeal Board (PTAB) publicized their much-anticipated decision regarding the COMPASS patent's post-grant review: they did not overturn the patent. In a June 24, 2022 press release, however, FTO asserted that their filing still made an impact, saying: "the PTAB construed COMPASS' 'Polymorph A' claims narrowly, holding that they only cover psilocybin that has all of the x-ray powder diffraction (XRPD) peaks exactly as claimed" (Freedom to Operate, 2022). In other words, it would be unlikely that COMPASS could actually predictably synthesize their own product to the specs of the granted claims.

Nonetheless, when a patent is granted on a psychedelic technology that is widely used—as was asserted to be the case with the polymorph in the *Acta Crystallographica* paper—the patent assignee still potentially has recourse to file lawsuits on any future parties that happen to employ the psychedelic technology. This brief anecdote illustrates the stakes of psychedelic patenting. Not only does psychedelic patenting have real implications for future access to psychedelics both in cost-ballooning monopolies and in stifling research for fear of lawsuits, it

also impacts Indigenous people in threatening sovereignty over ancestral ways of knowing and being.

Chapter 4.2 Doorway to Wisdom: Porta Sophia and Tempering the Rhetorical Circuit via Patent Activism

This chapter is co-authored by Shahin Shams, Ph.D.;[1] Taylor Kurtzweil, M.S.;[1] Sisi Li, Ph.D.;[2] and Thomas Isenbarger, J.D., Ph.D[3]

[1] Data Curator, Porta Sophia; [2] Senior Data Architect Lead, Porta Sophia; [3] Patent Attorney and Shareholder, Casimir Jones S.C.

> London-based COMPASS Pathways has filed patents for longstanding components of set and setting, including the use of "a room with a high-resolution sound system," and "a bed or a couch" where "the therapist provides reassuring physical contact" (Psychedelic Times 2019; McDaniel 2021). If we follow due diligence, should not the poems of Mazatec curandera Maria Sabina be "prior art" on anything COMPASS might "discover" in their psychedelic focus groups at university research centers? (Devenot, Conner, et al., 2022, p. 479)

The above quote serves as an apt transition to the case study at hand, in its focus on a key aspect of the battleground around psychedelic patents: prior art. The modern patent system was developed in 1790 to incentivize inventors' disclosures of useful, non-obvious, novel—and thus truly innovative—technologies or practices. As mentioned in the preamble, in exchange for those disclosures, the government grants inventors temporary monopolies on their inventions so that no one else can directly compete as inventors' products are brought to market. However, in the last forty years, inventors have found all sorts of ways to extend the life of those monopolies, which in the field of medicines, effectively delays the development of any generic competitors in the marketplace (Marks & Cohen, 2022). According to the global access to medicines veteran organization I-MAK (Initiative for Medicines, Access, and Knowledge) "Overpatented, Overpriced" white paper, the twelve top-grossing drugs in the U.S. are associated with, on average, 125 filed patent applications and 71 granted patents, which has led to an over 68% price increase since 2012 (*Overpatented, Overpriced. Curbing Patent Abuse: Tackling the Root of the Drug Pricing Crisis*, 2022).

In the current iteration of U.S. patent law, patent examiners are tasked with making the decision on whether patent application claims should be granted. In addition to requirements related to proper description of the technology, examiners grant patents when claims are found to be useful, novel, and non-obvious; this is determined by assuring that no evidence, called prior art, exists that the claimed invention was publicly known, disclosed, or otherwise available to the public before a patent application was filed. Prior art can take the form of any reference, document, or artifact including published manuscripts, previous patents, archival documents, cultural artifacts, or even a post on a blog forum.

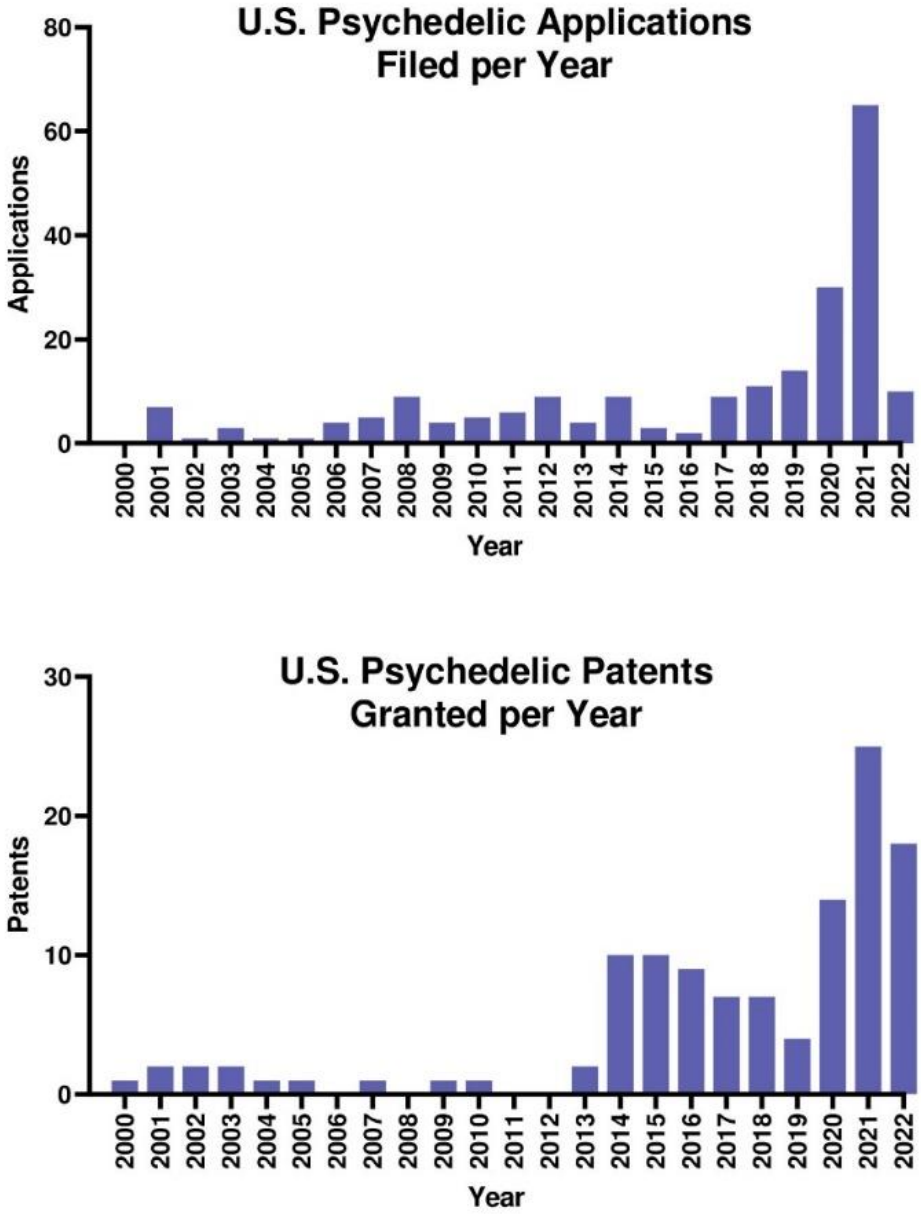
However, psychedelics have a unique history that makes finding relevant prior art difficult for patent examiners. Speculating about whether Sabina's poems should be considered prior art, Devenot and her co-authors quoted in the epigraph are referencing this difficulty; in COMPASS' case, "psychedelic innovations" around set and setting could be considered representations of biopiracy and otherwise appropriations of undocumented Indigenous knowledge (see Press, 2022). Indeed, much of the innovation in this space has taken place outside of the usual documented business contexts—in Indigenous and underground communities, and decades ago in the first wave of psychedelic science research before psychedelics were stigmatized and restrictively scheduled with the 1970 Controlled Substances Act effectively forcing any ongoing research underground. As a result, in recent years, as interest and investment in the present wave of psychedelic research has grown, a troubling number of patents have begun being granted on "innovations" relating to technologies that have been disclosed in the public domain for a very long time.

Recognizing that these overly broad patents were being granted because patent examiners were not finding relevant prior art in the typical places they search, the concept behind Porta

Sophia was born. Porta Sophia means “doorway to wisdom,” and as a psychedelic prior art library, its mission is to protect the public domain, stimulate innovation, and support good patents. As described below, we enact this mission via the development and maintenance of an internal psychedelic patent database and a corresponding online library of curated psychedelic prior art references—but also through direct interventions with patent offices. According to our database statistics, overly broad U.S. psychedelic patent applications have increased 622% over the last five years. Figures one and two below illustrate the scope of the problem via overly broad psychedelic patent document trends—both in terms of the number of overly broad psychedelic patent documents, and in breaking down the types of entities that are filing for these patents.

Figures 1a and 1b

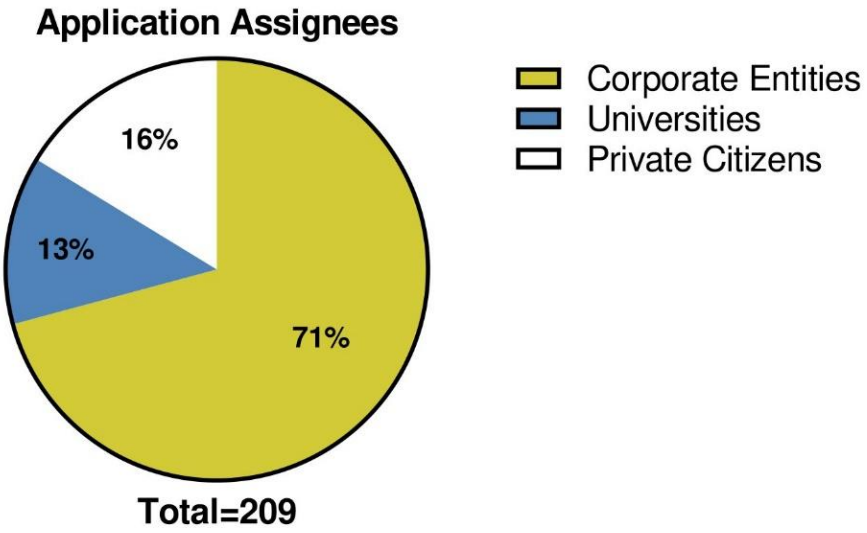
Number of U.S. Psychedelic Applications Filed and Granted per Year

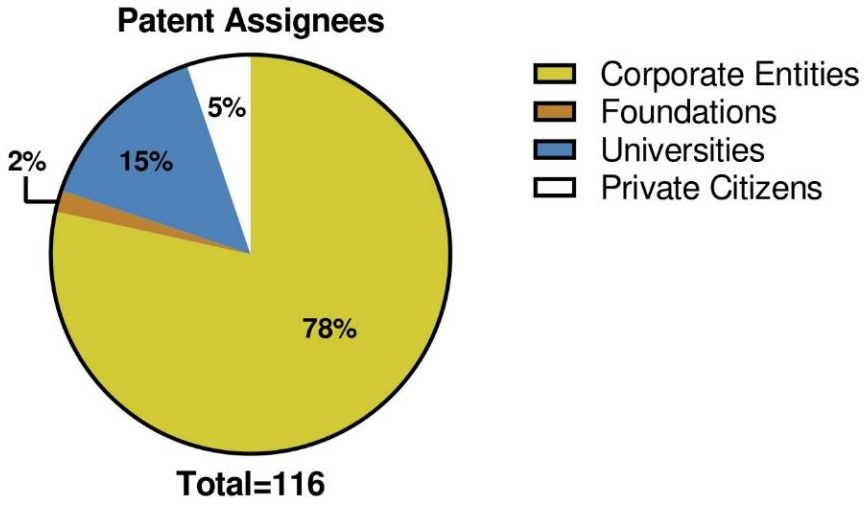


Note. The number of filed patent documents and granted patents by year that contain claims describing information currently in the public domain on LSD, psilocybin, DMT, 5-MeO-DMT, and mescaline. Data from Porta Sophia patent database as of 8/20/22**.**

Figures 2a and 2b

Breakdown of Assignee Categories on Psychedelic Patent Applications and Granted Psychedelic Patents





Note. The owners ("Assignees") of these overly broad patent documents related to LSD, psilocybin, DMT, 5-MeO-DMT, and mescaline. Data from Porta Sophia patent database as of 8/20/22.

Though the primary purpose of this case study is to provide a model of a public humanities methodology and technical communication counter-genre of patent activism through applied rhetorical historiography that could be used to combat overly-broad patents across any number of domains, and thus combat the exploitation of the public domain; this chapter generally connects to the larger dissertation in underscoring the ways in which transformative psychedelic rhetoric extends into broad claims to innovation within technical genres in attempts to commodify and generate profit. Reflexively, this chapter illustrates the role of neoliberal conceptions of intellectual property in perpetuating the psychedelic rhetoric hype machine.

In the remainder of this chapter, we situate the work of Porta Sophia within the context of technical communication and rhetorical scholarship focused on interrogating and rewriting histories, before moving to describe the methodology behind Porta Sophia's intervention strategy. We describe in particular a process of submitting prior art to the USPTO that takes advantage of a counter-genre to leverage applied psychedelic rhetorical history, present a brief discussion of Porta Sophia's recent direct intervention impacts—including as related to COMPASS' set and setting patent—and end with a call to action and invitation for others to engage in patent activism across diverse areas of innovation both inside and outside of the technical communication classroom.

Patents in Technical Communication

There have been several notable engagements in technical communication around patents broadly; Annette Vee has, for instance, persuasively asserts the significance of software patents for digital composition (2010). Katherine Durack (2006) claims that knowledge of patenting has become necessary for any cutting edge researcher, saying that granted patents play an important role in the production of scientific knowledge in part by enhancing researcher credibility. This

illustrates the ways in which patent law become a prism through which researchers are obligated to approach their work, and explains in part the not insignificant percentage of university-affiliated assignees in Porta Sophia's database seen in Figure 1b above—patents secure funding in university settings not simply for the sake of profit, but to enable a continued research agenda.

As we describe in the below section, Porta Sophia's methodology for making prior art accessible can be thought of as a form of rhetorical historiography, but we are not the first to think about the role of patents in writing history. R. John Brockmann in particular writes about the value of the publicly available archive of U.S. patent records as a valuable source of technical communication history (1988). Brockmann argues that, given the bias in literature toward writing about famous inventors like Franklin, Bacon, and Chaucer; studying the fastidiously catalogued records of U.S. patents directly would provide a more accurate picture of the average inventor throughout history, and therefore a more accurate view of technical productivity over time (1988, pp. 300–301). Charles Bazerman similarly associates a successful patent application—i.e., a patent that is granted—as a marker of unproblematically "passed perfection" and being "well made" (1997, p. 51).

Brockmannn does hedge a bit, pointing out how the impersonal-objective style of patents makes it difficult for researchers to discriminate between patents designed to be inclusionary and exclusionary, showing how that style suits both purposes equally well (1988). Historically, embodying this impersonal-objective style, then, has been a means of pushing through patents that are either exploitative and exclusionary, or overly broad/technically unpatentable. Through the following case study, you will see how the Porta Sophia team wields legal, historical, and scientific expertise to penetrate that impersonal-objective style to identify exclusionary patents, and of course how we use historical documents to push back against them. Certainly, our work

with Porta Sophia has shown that history as glimpsed through the world of psychedelic patent applications is highly rhetorical, often either highly speculative and/or not claiming true inventions.

Bazerman also describes the history of the U.S. patent system, highlighting in particular how the system has transformed in response to challenges that arose balancing the need for examination with the labor of vetting applications. In the original 1790 system, three cabinet members were responsible for managing the vetting of patents; at that time, the only application requirements were the inclusion of some kind of specification and a drawing. Bazerman refers to "rhetorical emphasis" of discrimination in this early era as being primarily on "the deserving character of the practitioner and the great economic value to befall the United States rather than specific technological improvements" (1997). In 1793, after the three cabinet members decided that the process was too burdensome, the U.S. pivoted back to a simple registration system that was originally seen in Europe and in the pre-1970 colonial era in the U.S. In the early 1800s, following a series of lawsuits disputing inventor identities and novelty of claims; a standardized, formulaic version of the patent application emerged to include the identification of the inventor and a clear layout of claims. By 1836, another law reintroduced the idea of examination and effectively established the current USPTO.

Of course, there have been lots of revisions to U.S. patent law since, including notable ones in 1870 and 1952. Especially relevant to Porta Sophia's work, the America Invents Act (AIA) of 2011 switched the patent system from a "first to invent" to a "first to file" system while also creating an avenue for third parties to intervene in the patent prosecution process; this inroad has become central to Porta Sophia's work and impact. Illustrating the landscape of patent examination in the present day, Shine Sean Tu published a study that underscores just how much

impact the arbitrary assignment of a patent examiner has on the pace at which a patent application is prosecuted. Tu reports that "high volume, average volume, and low volume examiners issued a patent in approximately 1.64 years, 3.07 years, and 5.85 years, respectively" (2020). These numbers show that low volume examiners are pushing patents through at approximately one third the rate of high, and half the rate of average; Tu further asserts that the majority of the reason for drawn out prosecution processes is due to prior art rejections.

We also see Porta Sophia's work as prescient in bringing together two contemporary calls for action within technical communication scholarship: 1) Calls for legal literacy in undergraduate business and technical communication (BTC) curriculum to underscore technical communicators as co-producers of law (Agboka, 2020; Hannah, 2010; Taylor, 1996) and 2) calls for explicit consideration of human dignity and human rights in technical communication (N. N. Jones et al., 2016; Walton, 2016). A technical communication project that uses Porta Sophia's methodology as described below would very much sponsor legal literacy related to the patent system and avenues of intervention; and depending on the context or topic that a student might be interested in, may also be working to make technologies more accessible to everyone, not just those who can pay for them. To quote I-MAK's co-founder Priti Krishtel, in the case of access to medicines, you're really coming up against the question of "who owns the right to heal?" (Krishtel, qtd. in Barnhart, 2022). Thought of with these stakes in mind, the methodology described below can help to reorient patent technical communication research and teaching toward activism.

Porta Sophia's Workflow as Methodology for Patent Activism

In this section, we describe the basic components of a methodology that could be used in technical communication courses, as seen through Porta Sophia's workflow. Students could

choose any corner of the patent landscape they desire and move through the following steps at whatever scale makes sense for a given class. Our hope is that by making transparent the process Porta Sophia goes through to intervene with the problem of overly broad psychedelic patents, anyone could use this as a model to undergo a similar process in their own field of expertise, but we recognize that this work is especially suited for rhetoricians. Furthermore, because patent applications are composed of a list of claims to innovation, we argue that they make great rhetorical artifacts to offer insight on exactly how rhetorical value is constituted across industries.

Porta Sophia's data team systematically curates prior art documents that together represent the diverse history of psychedelic innovation disclosures. Our goal is primarily to make prior art accessible to patent offices, but we have secondary audiences in potential innovators and psychedelic researchers of all kinds. We achieve this via a two-pronged approach: 1) we build our online library, and 2) to contest especially egregious patent applications, we file third party interventions directly with patent offices. However, to ensure that the prior art we're curating is relevant to the current patent landscape, and to prioritize the threat of emergent patent applications for our direct interventions, our process necessarily begins with the tracking and evaluation of psychedelic patent documents.

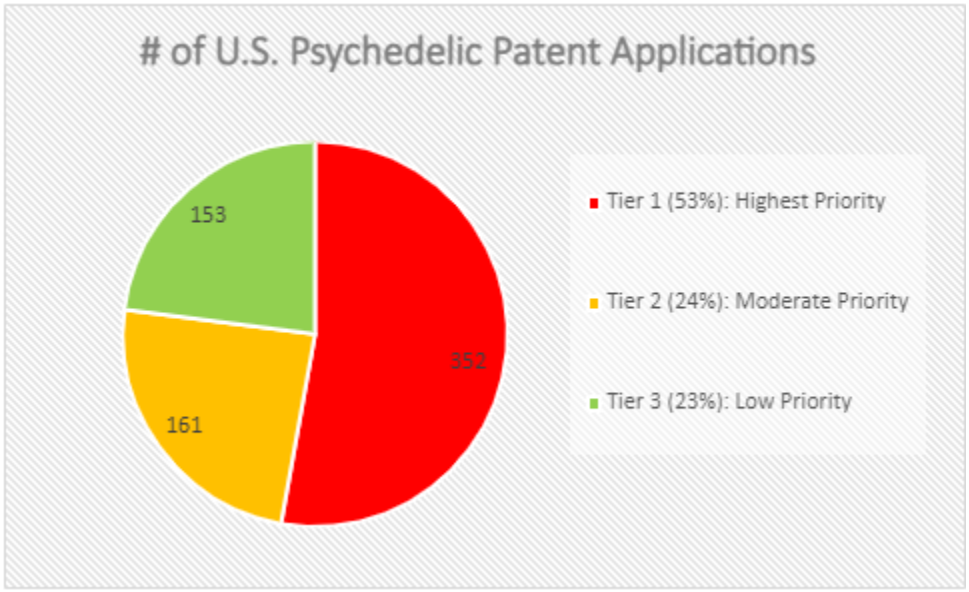
Though we originally began tracking just classical serotonergic psychedelics, as of May 2023, Porta Sophia's "shortlist" of compounds at risk of overly broad patent filings has ballooned to include thirty-one. We grow this list in consultation with scientists and through our own research. For each compound, we generate an "algorithm" of search terms that we use to query patent databases hosted by the USPTO and WIPO. Twice a week, our data curators

perform these extensive searches to stay up-to-date on patent filings: in the U.S., new patents are issued on Tuesdays, and new patent applications are published on Thursdays.

Faced with each week's fresh crop of patent documents, we then move to our evaluation process. For each document, we undergo a process of rhetorical analysis to determine their potential threat to the psychedelic space if granted, with the end goal of sorting documents into three main priority tiers—with tier one being most egregious. Our evaluation criteria include the following questions: 1) how broad are the claims? 2) does the application include data or is it prophetic? 3) is the claimed innovation clinically relevant? 4) how does the compound function in the patent? 5) do the claims have potential to block the field or otherwise limit access to psychedelics and psychedelic research if granted? and 6) for borderline cases, we assess assignees, asking if we have marked the patent applicant as a repeat offender or if they're otherwise likely to aggressively enforce patent rights. In evaluating logos, ethos, purpose, and strength of claims, this process maps onto rhetorical frameworks well. Rhetorical training is especially relevant when considering the expertise barriers and the rhetorical strategies patent lawyers use to obscure or make impenetrable overly broad claims that often make it difficult for outsiders to discern what is innovative. Figures four, five, and six below illustrate the tiered breakdown of psychedelic documents within the Porta Sophia database.

Figure 4

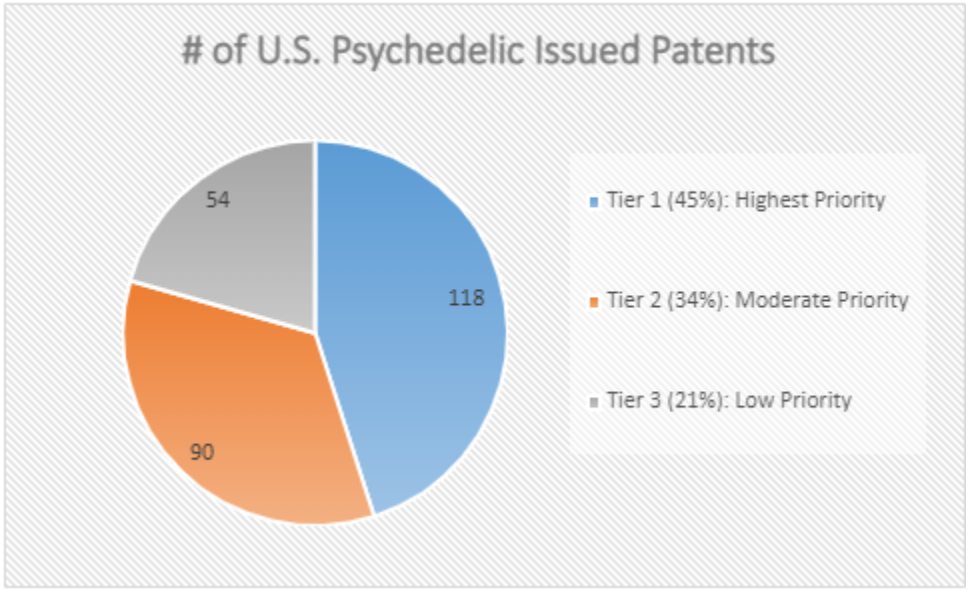
Number of U.S. Psychedelic Patent Applications by Priority Tier



Note. Data from Porta Sophia patent database as of 4/14/23

Figure 5

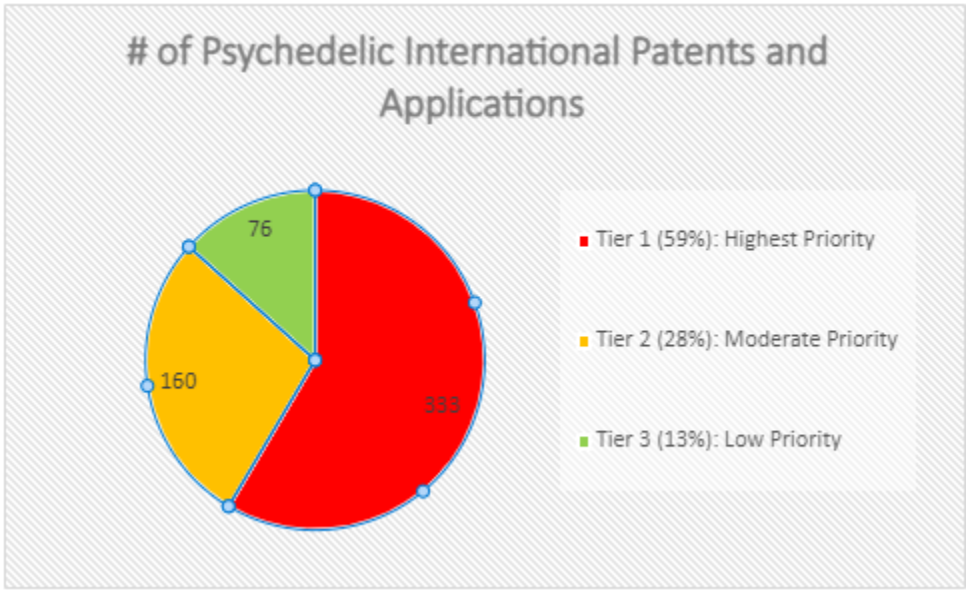
Number of U.S. Psychedelic Issued Patents by Priority Tier



Note: Data from Porta Sophia patent database as of 4/14/23

Figure 6

Number of Psychedelic International Patents and Applications by Priority Tier

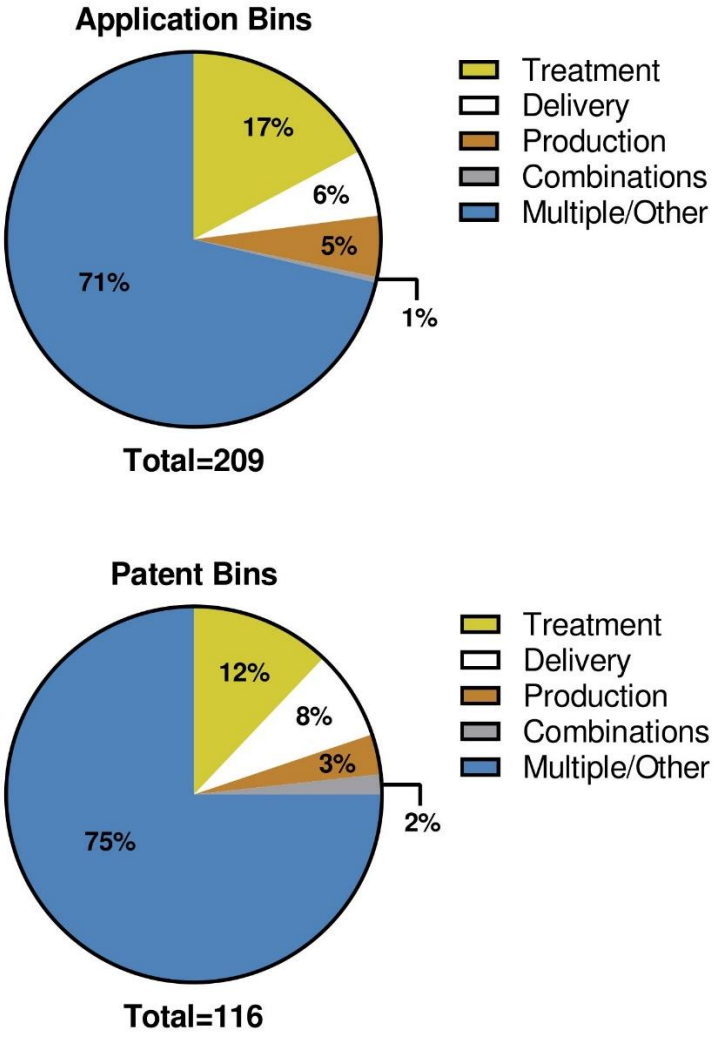


Note. Data from Porta Sophia patent database as of 4/14/23.

Alongside the process of patent evaluation, we are also curating metadata. We sort patent documents thematically into one or more of five patent bins: 1) Delivery/Formulation, 2) Derivative, 3) Drug Combinations, 4) Method of Manufacturing, and 5) Method of Treatment. Figure seven below illustrates the distribution of patent bins represented in our database. In addition to bin sorting, we also generate a list of key words that serve as targets for our next workflow stage: the prior art search.

Figure 7

Category Bins for Overly Broad Psychedelic Patent Applications and Granted Patents



Note. Overly broad psychedelic patent documents related to LSD, psilocybin, DMT, 5-MeO-DMT, and mescaline sorted into one or more categories, or "Bins." Data from Porta Sophia patent database as of 8/20/22**.**

Prioritizing tier one patents, we begin our prior art search internally—essentially researching patent claims to find relevant sources. Because Porta Sophia's library now has over 1,000 pieces of prior art, we often begin our searches right at home, expanding into broader

databases and unconventional sources like the Erowid experience vault—an online underground repository of psychedelic information. Targets for which we do not find prior art during our internal search process are transcribed into a target list that is distributed to the Archival Researcher Network, a global group of Porta Sophia prior art volunteers who crowdsource to make our library more inclusive of key archival and otherwise esoteric sources in the history of psychedelics.

Once we find prior art, we work to curate it for our library, undergoing a more extensive process of creating metadata that can be viewed in search results. Specifically, we write prior art summaries, descriptions, and pull quotes relevant to patent claims. Porta Sophia search results also include keywords, compound names, and patent bins (referred to on the website as "patent types"). Because our prior art searches flow directly from our patent tracking, our library's curations are directly relevant to the current patent landscape. Though our web team has developed an automatic upload tool that allows the data team to seamlessly upload prior art curations to our website, technical communication students could feasibly develop a Wiki page or blog to collate relevant prior art references on topics of their choice.

As mentioned above, the AIA of 2011 allows third parties to submit prior art and concise descriptions of their relevance to the USPTO to ensure that the documents submitted will be considered in the examination of that patent application. This act provides the exigence for our second prong of work: third party interventions (referenced herein as 3PX) in response to tier one patent applications we deem to be especially egregious. Our data curators maintain a constantly evolving queue of candidates for these interventions, and work on 3PX one by one, simultaneous to library building efforts. For Porta Sophia, the process of preparing a 3PX mirrors the above-described library building workflow; however, for 3PX, we draft a document that

clearly lays out the prior art we have found relevant to application claims in question. Though the process of actually submitting the 3PX documentation to the patent office can be more than a little onerous and costs a nominal fee (especially in comparison to the price tag associated with post-grant reviews), the 3PX document itself is fairly straightforward. 3PX are composed as a claims chart where on one side, we list all of the different claims listed on the patent application in question, and on the other side, we provide evidence from all the different pieces of prior art that correspond to knock each claim out. For those interested in referencing claims charts as models for potential course projects, they are all published in the press release area of the Porta Sophia website (Porta Sophia, n.d.).

Since filing our first 3PX in November 2021, Porta Sophia has filed forty-five total 3PX to intervene with overly broad psychedelic patent applications as of May 2023—including a hefty March 2022 filing in response to the COMPASS set and setting patent referenced throughout this chapter. The COMPASS 3PX was 119 pages long; we submitted thirty-nine prior art documents in response to 162 claims. Prior art for this 3PX took a variety of forms; we submitted images of the dosing room at UW—Madison to illustrate its set and setting, peer reviewed articles, prior patents, and a source from Erowid. (*Erowid*, n.d.). And as evidenced in the impact summary chart (figure eight) below, the Compass filing happens to be one of the first batch of 3PX from which we have begun to see initial impact during patent examination processes. Seemingly as a result of our 3PX, in August 2022, COMPASS canceled all their claims except one, which they drastically amended to focus on “polymorph A”—the hyper-specific crystalline psilocybin form they had previously been able to gain patent rights over described in this chapter’s preamble {Citation}. Porta Sophia’s role in this process was subsequently reported on in the *New York Times* (Jacobs, 2022).

Figure 8

Impact Summary of Porta Sophia 3PX on Overly Broad Psychedelic Patents

Patent Title	**Patent Identification & Assignee**	**Porta Sophia 3PX Acceptance Date**	**Porta Sophia 3PX Impact**
Compositions and Methods Comprising a Combination of Serotonergic Drugs	Publication # 20210085671 Application # 17/095,430 Assignee: Caamtech Inc	11/18/2021	12/14/2021: Preliminary Amendment. Original 18 claims cancelled by assignee and replaced with a new set of 7 claims that are narrower in scope than the originals. 11/07/2022: Received a non-final rejection from USPTO
Psychedelic Treatment for Headache Disorders	Publication #20210236523 Application # 17/168,638 Assignee: Yale University & US Department of Veterans Affairs VA	2/23/2022	9/14/2022: Applicant arguments/remarks made in an amendment, amended and narrowed claims. 10/3/2022: Received a non-final rejection from USPTO citing prior art from Porta Sophia 3PX as reason. 3/30/2023: Received a final rejection of all claims from USPTO
Treatment of Depression and Other Various Disorders with Psilocybin	Publication # 20230023092 Application # 17/604,610 Assignee: COMPASS Pathfinder Limited	3/9/2022	8/25/2022: Applicant arguments/remarks made in an amendment. Applicant canceled 137 of their original 162 claims. The current set of 25 claims have been revised to be narrower in scope.
MDMA Treatment to Enhance Acute Emotional Effects Profile of LSD, Psilocybin,	Publication # 20210346341 Application # 17/238,088	4/14/2022	2/23/2023: In the USPTO's notice of non-final rejection, all 28 claims of the application are rejected. In the case of 22 claims, the examiner cited prior art

or other Psychedelics	Assignee: Universitätsspital Basel		presented in Porta Sophia's 3PX as grounds for rejection.
Sexual Therapy Formulation and Method of Treatment	Publication # 202220152032 Application: 17/525,248 Assignee: Pharma American Holding Inc	7/22/2022	12/14/2022: Received a non-final rejection from USPTO citing prior art from Porta Sophia's 3PX as reason.
Effects of Mescaline and Mescaline Analogs (Scalines) to Assist Psychotherapy	Publication #20230000799 Application # 17/883,502 Assignee: Universitätsspital Basel	1/20/2023	3/16/2023: Rece,ived a non-final rejection from USPTO citing prior art from Porta Sophia's 3PX as reason.
Method of Treating Psychological and Brain Disorders	Publication # 20230000885 Application # 17/940,950 Assignee: University of Maryland, Baltimore	2/17/2023	3/10/2023: Received a non-final rejection from USPTO citing prior art from Porta Sophia's 3PX as reason.

Note. This chart represents an initial wave of impact from Porta Sophia 3PX filings. As of 4/30/23, Porta Sophia has filed a total of 45 3PX on overly broad patents, most of which have not yet seen additional patent office actions.

Conclusions

The case study of psychedelic patent rhetorics sheds light on aspects of the patenting system that have been referred to as "broken" (Love, 2022b); as well as practical avenues of how some newer systems in place are actually helping within that system, with the hope that perhaps more intervention avenues will emerge if we keep pressing. Because this approach for patent

activism can be applied to a range of topics and arenas of overly-broad patent applications, and because the method described here offers exceptional reinforcement of rhetorical skills—including analysis and evaluation of patent application claims to innovation, researching for evidence of prior public disclosures of said innovations (prior art), and assembling evidence that claims are overly-broad into a technical genre of rhetorical historiography—it presents an attractive model to generate a suite of technical communication projects that stand to engage students in diverse areas of expertise around a central intervention to protect the public domain. For example, in addition to course Wikis or blogs, smaller scaffolded assignments could include things like a narrative sketch of a patenting area and its major actors, an analysis of a particular inventor and/or their patent profile, or an analysis of technical advertising and/or press releases related to patents. Indeed, this project is novel as a model of public humanities, rhetoric-in-action advocacy work that has real potential to make an impact.

In addition, a theme from the broader dissertation that is brought to light here is illuminated in the element of the 3PX that operates as rhetorical historiography: by using prior art from places like Erowid, we are rewriting the history of innovation to include those who are not ordinarily considered experts by patent offices. In this way, what we're doing with Porta Sophia is inherently upsetting notions of expertise and ethos. A question that emerges then, is whether including a reference as prior art results in an enhancement or endorsement of a particular artifact's credibility or morality. Further, in reframing orientations to power and truth in this way, we might usefully consider with our students how patent genres give insight into the constitution of identities and ideologies.

In closing, we argue that because the 3PX now exists, their associated documents constitute an important form of rhetorical activism and a counter-genre worthy of study. Just as

Vee would say that software patents hold significance for basic questions around what code and writing are (2010), we argue that the 3PX genre forces us to ask important questions about how rhetoric is working through patent law, and what significance this has for not only histories of technical communication, but also about the history of psychedelics. Centering counter-genres like 3PX in our historiographies rewrites histories to more clearly see systemic problems and offer exigencies for activist rhetorical engagement.

Interchapter 4. Home

Yeah, I'm so like I think I like it's been a long time, like coming for me with eating disorder stuff like pretty much like been, like, struggling with it in some capacity since I was like eleven. Like many times in the past, but like still very much like working on stuff, still like significantly underweight and like all that. It's weird. it's like hard to articulate this sort of stuff because like, like, I mean I like struggle to like gain weight and like have, like rigidity around like what I eat, and when I eat, and like some like exercise, activity stuff, but like I can look in the mirror and say like, like, you look like very, like, I'm most self conscious about like how thin I look then, then, like I mean I don't like to think I'm like fat or anything, even though basically all my behavior would like contradict that. Yeah, I don't know.

[I enrolled in the trial] because, basically, I mean, over the years, like, well yeah just like wanting to gain weight and like trying so hard, and like never being able to and then like various other like health consequences of the eating disorder, like, back pain or just, like, yeah, I had like some dental stuff.

We just basically like went through my whole life story, pretty much. And like, Yeah, I don't know, I feel like this for me because I've like tried so many things like I've been like inpatient treatment like five times. So I feel like I was kind of like at my wit's end. So like I told, during some of the prep sessions like I kind of just like told them stuff that I hadn't told other people before, I don't know, whatever.

I don't know for some reason what resonated with me was one of them said, this wasn't one of the guides, it was like the PA, said, there's nothing in consciousness that can hurt you, which I thought was like an interesting way to put it.

So like I think it's probably pretty typical with with these sorts of studies. Eye shades and like for them there was like a weighted blanket, like that was optional. And then… soundtrack. It's like very eclectic with a lot of classical stuff. It was quite a bit of classical some like some like kind of like chanting, but like a lot of it was like classical and choral. And a lot of it was just like, maybe not my thing. Or like, definitely not something that I would just like listen to myself, but some of it was like, I don't know, like, some of it just seemed like really evocative.

For the first session, I just basically lived there for six hours, and nothing happened. But there was like in the middle of it I just pretty much like broke down in tears and kind of like cried in a way that I hadn't cried in a long time. Not that I really like cry often but it was just like this cathartic like release that lasted for, I don't know for a few minutes like in the middle of that six hours and then afterward. And I think a lot of that was kind of like just related to, like, oh here like I've been kind of like, trying to recover for like 20 years and here I'm doing this, like, kind of out there thing like with the hopes that like oh maybe something finally might help and like nothing happened.

But, yeah, that, then that night… like driving back with my [family member], and then like into the night just kind of like spending time with them, like I pretty much cried for like hours. Just, I think it was like for me, I think a lot of it was like grieving, like lost time of my youth was what that was kind of all about. But it was just like, feeling in a way that like I think I was just so used to like bottling things up, and like numbing things but I was just like, feeling in a way that I hadn't felt in years and years and years. So, yeah, that was the first session.

But for the second one, like I wasn't expecting anything to happen this time because nothing happened the first time. And so like I went in, not really expecting anything and then like, Yeah, it's probably 15 or 20 minutes in, I started getting a little kind of like nauseous, and then just basically, it was kind of like, in my mind, kind of like split into three parts like the first

part was like, I thought I was in hell. And I thought that that was just like, I was in an all white room, and I can't remember exactly what was happening but essentially I was in like this very short, like time loop of like trying do something. And it lasted like probably fifteen to thirty seconds and it would just repeat over and over again. And I was like, trying to get out of it and like no matter what I did, like, I would just be like stuck in this loop in this like, all white room with like out any… yeah, it was just like me there. And I thought that that was like going to be forever. I mean, at some point, like, I remember the thought of, like, oh, like maybe at some point I basically like just like let go of like trying to get out of the loop. And then, like it all just kind of like dissolved.

There was at some point where it was like, kind of like scenes from my past, like big scenes from my past. And then there was just kind of like this, I mean, getting back to the inevitable… Just kind of like this, yeah just like this indescribable experience of like bliss and just like freakiness, and like I lost track of, like, place and time, and everything, and was, yeah. I don't really know describe it very well. But like normally… Normally, my mind is like thinking about food or, like, how active I've been or whatever, like, it's kind of like a low level process in my brain at all times. And I do remember like that. Just like not being there at all for a period of time. Yeah.

And then, I don't really remember this but apparently in my reflection I have from around that time I was thinking a lot about like the future and like, like things that I might do in the future and that really, like, there's nothing really holding me back but myself. So just like I felt like more self advocacy then I really had ever before. And I remember feeling like just warm. And like cozy and like really at home in my body in a way that I had never felt before.

The biggest thing for me is just kind of like, it's totally like shifted my priorities in terms of like, like social things, like connecting with other people. Like before the study I pretty much was just pretty isolated. Like I would interact with people at work and like really not cared to like do anything outside of work, or like school or anything like that. But now, like, I'm actually like starting to prioritize stuff and like, just feel a broader like depth of emotion and, more openness to experience than I ever have, as far as I can remember. So like while it didn't, it wasn't like a fantasy, or it wasn't like a switch flipped, night and day, it just seems to be a gradual like unfolding of openness and growth.

And I've gained like 20 pounds since then. And like I used to be, I just had a physical the other day, and I don't really like to look at my weight, or at least I didn't in the past because like I would like see the number and it would like, even though I was like wanting to gain weight, it would like derail me and I would get like almost OCD focused on it. So like I didn't look at my weight when I had my physical but then the nurse wrote it down on a sheet of paper, and I accidentally looked at it, but it didn't really faze me at all, which was kind of surprising.

So I think it's been a lot of like gradual stuff that maybe like I might not recognize the amount of progress that I made like in the moments, but like now it's like I talked to you and like reflect over the last year and a half, it's like, I'm by far doing the best I've done in, since I was eleven.

Chapter 5. Conclusion: Building Better Worlds

I find it useful to build from ecological and constitutive rhetorical theories in the context of psychedelics because psychedelic rhetors like Angeli and Brogan—in their association with the cultural milieu of conspirituality that I describe in Chapters Two and Three—illustrate the ethical complexity of the transformative constitution of the psychedelic subject within greater ecologies. The theory I forward here sheds light on how it is that psychedelic subjects are not only constituted, but also at times radicalized, through a reorienting of relationships to truth and evidence via "mystical" and otherwise intense subjective experiences. Because logical persuasion also asserts rhetorical force, conceptions of expertise and ethos are drawn into this gambit, and thus an antidote cannot easily come in the form of traditional external authority. For these reasons, this project has implications for transformative rhetorics in other domains—including rhetorical theories like RNM that tend to foreground subjective experience as epistemologically valuable, and otherwise non-logical modes of understanding persuasion. Transformative experiences work as non-specific amplifiers of rhetorical ecologies of set and setting, and so too do transformative rhetorics.

One especially fertile area of research moving forward might lie in studies that seek to characterize rhetorical ecologies of literacy sponsorship within the conspirituality milieu. Of course, Angeli's books were all self-published, but Brogan is associated with the New Age publishing house founded by the controversial figure Louise Hays, Hay House. Likewise, Gaia represents a platform whose offerings significantly contribute to the perpetuation of conspirituality.

Of course, it is important to have nuance in our critiques; the solution to the problem of transformative psychedelic rhetoric's role in the perpetuation of conspirituality is not positivism. For this reason, I have included real examples of transformative psychedelic rhetoric in the form

of real trip reports from real people who have experienced positive transformations in their lives after having taken psychedelics. “Holistic” orientations to health can be great in some cases, but 2023 sees the unchecked and unregulated neoliberal wellness industry as implicated in serious harm. It is both true that “big pharma” is exploitative, and also that vaccines save lives.

In Chapter Four, this dissertation also illustrates how patent documents turn out to be an important piece of understanding the constitution of value in transformational psychedelic rhetoric across neoliberal culture, biomedicine, and industry. In this rhetorical circuit, overly broad claims to innovation not only reinscribe hype narratives, but the granting of patents also makes would-be psychedelic treatments inaccessible and sequesters technologies that should rightfully be in the public domain in order to generate profit and perpetuate inequality that drives the very systemic problems we’re in need of psychedelic treatments for in the first place. Chapter Four also underscores how a key to a shift from transformational psychedelic rhetorics that claim to “change the world” to a focus on ethical rhetorical worldbuilding is the ability to curate psychedelic sets and settings for maximum harm reduction—and it goes without saying that patenting these components disrupts that possibility.

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Appendix 1. Interview Questions: Participants in Psychedelic Clinical Trials

Pre-Interview
First, I identify myself, what I am interested in, why I decided to interview this person, etc.

About me:
I'm a PhD candidate at the University of Wisconsin-Madison studying the features of psychedelic rhetoric and how they inform the relationships between psychedelic experience and the development of health ideologies and literacies.

About the issue:
As you may know, psychedelic experiences are often characterized by their inability to be easily described -- and so they often present unique challenges to language and communicating about the experiences (this is often referred to as "ineffability"). Psychedelics also represent a health intervention that is growing increasingly popular in clinical and naturalistic contexts. Because these experiences also seem to be effective in part because of the "noetic" insight throughout the experience (i.e., the perception of being exposed to objective truth), I think that a shift in health ideology often accompanies one's exposure to these interventions. My goal in studying psychedelic rhetoric in this study is to get a better sense of how these processes play out within the context of a clinical trial, through understanding people's different ideas, concerns, points of view, and experiences.

What I'll ask:
I'll ask a series of questions that will take roughly 60-90 minutes to talk through.
I'll ask for your perspectives on: your experiences as a participant in a psychedelic clinical trial; the relationship between psychedelic experiences and your development of health ideologies; the various literacy practices you use to sustain your health ideologies; and the state of psychedelic clinical science.

What I hope will come of it:
I'll use this interview to get a better sense of how you contend with the obstacles to communication presented by psychedelic experience, and how you view the relationships between psychedelic experiences and the development of health ideologies. I hope that this work will serve as the basis for a dissertation that uses rhetorical studies to further understandings of psychedelic studies, and psychedelic studies to further understandings of rhetorical studies. I intend to publish this research in public-facing and academic venues, so perspectives given during the interview may also be shared (without identifying details) in any future publications related to this project.

Do you have any questions before we start?

INFORMED CONSENT, START AUDIO RECORDER/ZOOM RECORDING

I plan to audio record the interview, so I can transcribe it later.

Begin Interview Questions

Background

Tell me a little bit about your background and what life experiences led to your role as a participant in a psychedelic clinical trial.
→ Follow up questions as relevant in regards to previous psychedelic experiences, shifts in consciousness, health ideologies and literacy practices, communicating about ineffability and noetic experiences

Can you tell me how you learned about the psychedelic clinical trial were you enrolled in, and the process of enrolling in it?

The Psychedelic Clinical Trial

Preparation
Can you tell me about your experience in preparing for that trial, and any health-related insight that you came out of it with and/or any insight that later impacted your understanding of health/your relationship to health/illness/etc.

Dose
Describe your psychedelic experiences, and any health-related insight that you came out of it with and/or any insight that later impacted your understanding of health/your relationship to health/illness/etc.

Integration
Describe your integration experiences, and any health-related insight that you came out of it with and/or any insight that later impacted your understanding of health/your relationship to health/illness/etc.

→ Follow up questions as relevant in regards to previous psychedelic experiences, shifts in consciousness, health ideologies and literacy practices, communicating about ineffability and noetic experiences

Psychedelic Science Questions

What's your perspective on psychedelic experience and credibility - must you experience a psychedelic in order to research it? Why or why not? Do psychedelic experiences enhance or hinder (or neither) one's (scientific) credibility?
What do you see as the most pressing issues and promising developments in psychedelic science?
What are the affordances & limitations of psychedelic clinical research?

Wrapping Up

Is there anything you'd like to add?
Are there other people or resources that you think we should definitely talk to/consult for this project?