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Ido Hartogsohn, *The American Trip: Set, Setting, and the Psychedelic Experience in the Twentieth Century*

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The American Trip provides an engaging historical and theoretical account of the concept of 'set and setting', which has become fundamental to cultural and clinical approaches to psychedelic drug use. Developed in the 1950s and 1960s, this concept refers to the fact that individual mindset and environmental context play a critical role in shaping the character of the psychedelic drug experience. Through an extensive examination of

cultural, scientific and historical literature about psychedelic drugs, Hartogsohn, a scholar of science and technology studies, explores how this concept emerged in the early days of psychedelic research, while also arguing that its use can be extended to account for larger sociocultural conditions that also shape the effects of psychedelic drugs.

Chapters 1–7 provide historical analysis by following seven distinct contexts of psychedelic drug use in 1950s and 1960s America, highlighting how these differing contexts led to different understandings of the effects of these substances. Chapter 1 explores the ‘psychotomimetic’ (psychosis-mimicking) use of LSD and mescaline that emerged in the early 1950s. By concentrating on the work of Max Rinkel, one of the first psychiatrists to experiment with LSD in the United States at the Boston Psychopathic Hospital, Hartogsohn shows that Rinkel and his colleagues failed to consider how their psychotomimetic interpretation of the LSD experience influenced the reactions of their subjects. Chapter 2 tells the well-known story of CIA and military interest in hallucinogenic drugs, focusing on how the concept of a ‘truth drug’ shaped drug reaction in this context.

Chapter 3 traces the development of the therapeutic use of hallucinogenic drugs. Here Hartogsohn covers the birth of ‘psychedelic therapy’ in Saskatchewan and its movement to California, and emphasizes how researchers such as Humphrey Osmond, Al Hubbard and Betty Eisner began to design specific settings that would facilitate beneficial psychedelic experiences. Chapter 4 centres on the controversial figure of Timothy Leary and his popularization of the terms ‘set and setting’. Leary went so far as to say that ‘99 percent of the effects of psychedelics are set- and setting-dependent’ and explored ways to ‘program’ the psychedelic experience by altering the contexts in which psychedelics were taken. Hartogsohn focuses on how Leary and his colleagues, through an appreciation of set and setting, attempted to induce mystical experiences with psychedelics, as exemplified in the famous Good Friday experiment at Boston University Chapel.

Chapters 5 and 6 examine several studies by researchers in California that considered how psychedelic drugs influenced creativity and technical problem solving. Hartogsohn reveals how the rationale and context for these studies differed drastically from the psychotomimetic approaches of earlier psychiatrists, resulting in experiences that seemed to enhance creativity and problem solving. The historical overview ends in Chapter 7 with the exploration of prominent countercultural figures who used psychedelic experiences as political tools to generate opposition to mainstream cultural ideals.

Chapters 8–10 move into more theoretical work on the concept of set and setting, while also pointing out practical implications. In Chapter 8, Hartogsohn develops his concept of ‘collective set and setting’. Looking beyond an individual’s mindset and the environmental setting, Hartogsohn convincingly argues that larger cultural elements (such as drug laws, media content and scientific understandings) also significantly influence how psychedelic drugs are experienced. Together, these cultural elements constitute a collective set and setting, which shape the individual’s set and setting. Chapter 9 exemplifies this notion by exploring how elements of the collective set and setting within 1960s American culture influenced the character of the psychedelic experience. Hartogsohn argues that cultural themes such as the Protestant work ethic, pharmacological Calvinism, antipsychiatry and sexual liberation influenced psychedelic drug experiences and the tensions surrounding them. These larger themes characterized the ‘American Trip’, the unique kind of psychedelic experience that was a ‘reflection of the collective set and setting that existed in American society at the time’ (p. 190).

The final chapter provides a much-needed discussion of how the concept of set and setting can be integrated into drug research and drug policy. As Hartogsohn points out, while historically the concept of set and setting has been discussed mostly in the context of psychedelic drugs, it has also been used to understand the effects of other psychoactive substances (as one example, Hartogsohn points to Bruce Alexander’s ‘Rat Park’ studies).

However, most research into psychoactive drugs has tended to neglect the role that context plays in shaping drug effects. Hartogsohn suggests that current drug research may be better off by investing less in developing new drugs ‘and more in research investigating the ways in which the social and cultural environment shapes the effects of existing drugs’ (p. 278). By paying greater attention to how context shapes drug effects, researchers can design trials that move beyond the ‘magic bullet approach’ which de-emphasizes the role of non-pharmacological factors. Perhaps the most important takeaway from Hartogsohn’s book is his insistence that drug policy should take into account the importance of set and setting. Since drug laws, social attitudes and media campaigns can dramatically impact the collective set and setting in ways that increase the likelihood of harmful drug experiences, governments should strive to create a better collective set and setting by working towards policies that destigmatize and decriminalize drug use.

Overall, *The American Trip* provides a great service for anyone wishing to understand the effects of and tensions surrounding psychedelic drugs. By showing how the American psychedelic experience was constructed and shaped by the larger cultural currents of the 1960s, Hartogsohn detaches psychedelic drugs from their stereotypical and stigmatized associations with controversial military experiments and the American counterculture. This book thus challenges readers to imagine new cultural attitudes towards drugs and drug users: ‘one can envision a future modern world with a healthier, saner relationship with mind-altering drugs and experiences’ (p. 287). As Hartogsohn points out, drug use, in some form or another, is a cultural constant, as evidenced by the failure of the War on Drugs. What can change, though, is the collective set and setting within which drug use takes place.

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Antony Adler, *Neptune’s Laboratory: Fantasy, Fear, and Science at Sea*

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In this recent book, historian of science and of the environment Antony Adler considers how modern Western societies have imagined the oceans. While the main title might suggest a laboratory-focused history of science and the book follows the typical timeline of a history of marine science and hits some of the standard notes – nineteenth-century dredging, the 1870s *Challenger* expedition, marine stations in Naples and elsewhere, twentieth-century military patronage – Adler’s emphasis is generally not on how scientists have explored the oceans and what they found when they did so. Instead, as the subtitle well conveys, this is a social and cultural history of how Western societies have, over the last two hundred years, conceptualized the oceans as a place that can be scientifically understood.