

NOT YOUR FATHER'S REVOLUTION: TWO SUMMER CONFERENCES AND THE NEXT GENERATION OF PSYCHEDELICS, SPIRITUALITY AND COMMUNITY-BUILDING

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Altars, group meditation, and late-night thumping dance parties — not exactly typical conference features. This summer, however, we had the opportunity to experience two conferences that shared these elements, events that integrated celebration and spiritual exploration into their occasions. They also shared another unique characteristic; both were aimed at, and organized by, people in their 20s and early 30s. It was inspiring to see how these communities re-interpreted the lessons of older psychedelic culture and spiritual wisdom into entirely new visions of the world. On a planet that grows increasingly smaller, in a country with D.A.R.E. programs and the R.A.V.E. Act, and in California, where dozens of collectives organize guerrilla dance parties in warehouses and deserts, these new visions are necessary. They are the dynamic response to and catalyst for a changing reality. At the Gathering of the Tribes in Los Angeles and the Altered States and the Spiritual Awakening conference in San Francisco, young people gathered to honor these visions, as they learned, taught, and celebrated.

Gathering of the Tribes

Each summer, hundreds of bright-eyed ravers, desert-heads, neo-hippies and other label-defying lovers of dance music converge upon Los Angeles for Gathering of the Tribes (GOTT), an annual five-day conference and festival that unites and supports dance music collectives from L.A. all the way up to Vancouver (and a few from elsewhere in North America and Europe).

In organizing around dance events, these collectives form communities, supporting DJs, visual artists, and performers of all kinds. They serve as hubs for sharing harm reduction information and building activist networks, and they assert a shared spiritual communion unique to all-night communal dance events. Founded by Dustianne North three years ago, GOTT is an opportunity for leaders from these collectives to trade ideas, share experiences, and strategize around the common issues facing their



Hoopers practice their skills at the Gathering of the Tribes

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communities. It’s also a chance to celebrate. GOTT opened with a feast in an almost circus-like atmosphere, with stilt-walkers, fire eaters, and other performers moving through the delighted diners. The festivities continued all week, with late-night dancing and a show that featured amazing performances in dance, acrobatics, and drama.

This year, GOTT was held June 11-13, in Qtopia, a roomy warehouse-turned-event space on Hollywood Boulevard. Presentations, workshops, performances, and dance events were inspired by the theme “Evolution + Manifestation = Transformation.”

Although most participants at GOTT were of the same generation, the event began with a strong sense of history and intergenerational connection. The GOTT “elders,” mostly in their 30s, many of whom have been part of the dance community for more than a decade, told stories of their tribes’ evolution to the present day. In the “Sages Circle,” the conference hosted a delegation from an older tribe: the Prophets’ Conference. Prophets’ Conference founders Robin and Cody Johnson, visionary Barbara Marx Hubbard, and Grateful Dead lyricist and Electronic Frontier Foundation co-founder John Perry Barlow all joined GOTT to share their perspectives

on a rapidly changing world.

The conference also focused on building bridges with other activist and artistic communities, bringing representatives from hip hop culture, civil rights groups, environmental activists, and the peace movement. Within the GOTT community itself, individuals and groups presented new and ongoing projects. These included activist efforts, like the Club Safety Awareness Initiative and Dance for Peace, participatory workshops like hula hoping and trapeze lessons, and community-building projects like the Reconvergence of the Tribes in Vancouver.

Presenters also led group discussions on issues of interest to participants, such as Theo Rosenfeld and Jolayne Marsh’s discussion on polyamory, and DanceSafe staffer Melissa Martin’s talk on inspiration and motivation for activism in the dance community. Collective leaders, activists, and legal experts held a discussion circle on “The State of the Underground,” evaluating the status of the dance community’s legal situation and ac-

tivist progress. MAPS staff member Brandy Doyle had the opportunity to give her first public presentation for MAPS, to a sympathetic crowd of ravers sitting on pillows. The talk, “Mak-



GOTT participants sit on pillows, mats and other soft things during the opening meditation.

ing the World a Better Place with Psychedelics: Research, Politics, and Culture,” discussed MAPS’ research efforts, the Rites of Passage Project on families and psychedelics, and ideas for making psychedelic exploration safer and more beneficial. (I discovered I had a lot to learn from the GOTT folk. While they were mostly unfamiliar with the psychedelic therapy model, they were far more knowledgeable than I am about the therapeutic and spiritual potential of psychedelic use in a dance environment. This kind of use draws on ancient traditions of communal experience, and deserves attention in the study of therapeutic psychedelic use.)

The week ended when GOTT participants joined Moontribe, an L.A.-based dance collective, in celebrating their ten-year anniversary, at a weekend campout/dance party in a forest five hours northeast of L.A. This was the integration of all the lessons, the community-building, and the friendships formed during the event. After a day of traveling and rest, campers awoke to the sound of a single note breaking through the dawning chirps and rustles of the meadow. They forged the ice-cold stream that divided the camping grounds from the area that would soon become the dance floor. Decked out in the traditional outdoor dance party garb of layered flowing fabrics, warm fuzzy things, and eye protective goggles, they created a circle around the meadow, as each person silently joined hands with the two nearest others. When the circle was several acres wide, it suddenly collapsed on itself, into a chest-crushing group hug.

The music began.

Altered States and the Spiritual Awakening

On a chilly San Francisco summer morning, in a concrete courtyard hidden between SOMA-district warehouses and fenced parking lots, people of all ages gathered for breakfast, group meditation, and archetype-summoning to the sound of drums and didgeridoo. Thus opened Altered States and the Spiritual Awakening (ASSA), July 11-13, 2003, a conference that brought together experts from the fields of transpersonal psychology, parapsychol-

ogy, entheogens, and consciousness exploration. The event was organized by Stephen Trichter of False Profit, a limited-liability corporation with the mission of emphasizing human over financial value. Trichter’s vision for ASSA was a conference that would be affordable to young people and students like himself (he is a graduate student in psychology). He hoped to bridge the gap between a younger generation of psychonauts and spiritual explorers and the psychedelic elders they would otherwise not have the chance to meet.

This intergenerational meeting took place in the funky setting of the False Profit house/warehouse space, which was completely filled with couches for the occasion. Outside, in the courtyard, participants ate catered meals and browsed tables set up by Erowid and MAPS. MAPS also provided assistance prior to the conference by facilitating donation processing. Inside, participants attended lectures, panels, and smaller, interactive workshops on a host of topics.

Several talks approached spirituality from a research perspective. Frank Echenhofer, Ph.D. gave a fascinating talk on his EEG studies of Tibetan meditators and Brazilian ayahuasca users. Stanley Krippner, Ph.D.’s lecture on shamanism addressed ways in which the study of shamanism could make contributions to cognitive neuroscience, social psychology, psychological therapy, and ecological psychology. The six D’s of shamanic technology — drumming, dancing, dreaming, drugs, diet, and deprivation — were of special interest to the crowd, which doubtlessly contained at least a few modern-day shamans.

There were almost twenty different speakers over the weekend. Daniel Pinchbeck, who wrote *Breaking Open the Head*, talked about the works of Austrian mystic Rudolph Steiner. Bob Jesse, of the Council on Spiritual Practices, discussed “Communities of Spirit.” Luis Eduardo Luna, who leads ayahuasca retreats at Wasiwaska in Brazil, talked about ayahuasca use in a non-religious, non-shamanic ritual setting. The panels included a Q-and-A with the always popular Ann Shulgin, co-author of *Pihkal* and *Tihkal*, and Earth and Fire of

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During the workshop sessions, many presenters discussed practical possibilities for spiritual development, offering technological, therapeutic, and spiritual tools to expand, change, or otherwise explore one’s consciousness. For instance, Morgan Brent, Ph.D talked about preparation, navigation, and integration in tryptamine use. While several

Generation-bridging, one of Trichter’s goals for the event, was directly relevant to some of the talks. Maria Mangini, Ph.D., FNP, CNM gave her popular talk “Yes, Mom Took Acid,” describing her narrative analysis study by the same name, in which she examined the sociohistorical impact of prior psychedelic use in adults. Mangini brings her expertise not only as a researcher, but also as a direct participant in the heady days of early psychedelia, a Catholic school teacher, and the chair of the Haight Ashbury Free Medical Clinic’s Board of Directors. Dressed in an almost grandmotherly, and decidedly mainstream outfit, she explained that she is actively trying to change the far-out associations people have with psychedelics. “I want to make them think of me when they think of drugs,” said Mangini.

Bridge to the future

For MAPS members whose primary associations with psychedelic culture are *The Oracle* or Woodstock, these communities should serve as welcome successors to the dreams of older generations. They have taken the ideals of peaceful activism, spiritual growth, and personal freedom and brought them into a 21st century context. In sharing MAPS’ research and educational work at these events, we also had the chance to connect to our own community — a psychedelic culture which is alive and well. ■



Visual artists, as well as musicians and dancers, are celebrated and supported at dance collectives events.

workshops related to psychedelic exploration, others focused on other kinds of consciousness change, such as dreaming, kundalini, and hypnosis.

One panel, moderated by Daniel Pinchbeck, addressed “Occult chaos in the 1960s and beyond.” This conversation, between Magini, *Techgnosis* author Erik Davis, David Caploe, Ph.D., and Shanti, discussed the problems as well as the power of the 1960s psychedelic culture.