

Article

Micro-Messiahs and the Revolutionary Dynamics of Psychedelic Diffusion

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Abstract

Prophetic or messianic states of consciousness are charged with moral urgency and are active, historical, political, and sometimes infused with ego. In this paper, I inquire into psychedelic micro-messianic phenomenology and revolutionary dynamics through the historical case studies of Allen Ginsberg, Master Irineu, and John Wilson (Moonhead)—figures associated with the diffusion of LSD, Daime (ayahuasca), and peyote, respectively. I propose that, in moments of tension and uncertainty, psychedelics can catalyse micro-messianic movements through which these substances diffuse into new situations. A revelatory event motivates the subject, in fidelity to the event, to spread the substance and practice. Through the innovation, a movement emerges until it is routinised or inverted. A new status quo then stabilises, from which another revelatory event may arise. Through these historical cases, I offer a detailed analysis of such revolutionary dynamics, drawing on various theoretical perspectives (Weber, Wallace, Kuhn, Taves, Whitehouse, Rogers, Badiou, and others). In doing so, I demonstrate how psychedelic insights and actions are intertwined, and how psychedelic revelations seek to ripple outward into movements.

Keywords: revitalization; new religious movements; prophetic; revelatory events; mysticism; charisma; diffusion

1. Introduction

1.1. Eureka

“I am the Messiah. . . I’ve come down to preach love to the world. We’re going to walk through the streets and teach people to stop hating. . . . We’re going down to the city streets to tell the people about peace and love.”

—Allen Ginsberg

This is one of the key events in Western psychedelic culture that symbolises the movement of the substances from academia and small exclusive elitist circles into a countercultural movement—Allen Ginsberg—the famous beat poet—on psilocybin—at Leary’s home—running naked in a messianic frenzy with an obvious insight: mystical experiences to the masses will bring the troubled world close to redemption.

When Archimedes had his Eureka moment, he also ran naked, enthusiastic to share his epiphany. When both of these very different stories are told, there seems to be a stress on the nudity, as if the epiphanic moment contains a sort of ‘madness’ that is beyond earthly clothes. Or maybe it symbolises the birth of something new. Stripped down to some truth. Beyond the conceptual frameworks and theories. One must run and tell the



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others. Scientific revolutions share similar dynamics with other revolutions—events seek to unfold and shift paradigms and structures.

But not every epiphany ripples far.

Ruqaiya is a Palestinian woman who drank ayahuasca with an Israeli circle. In her life, she felt doubly oppressed: by Israeli society and by the patriarchal norms of her village. She moved to an Israeli town and began drinking ayahuasca with Israelis.

During a Yom-Kippur ayahuasca ceremony in 2018, she sees a historical vision of cycles of war and trauma. Holocaust, Nakba, and the apocalyptic future which has not come, yet. Mothers who sacrifice their children. She is embodying the land—the bleeding land—singing the opening paragraph of the Quran with prophetic stamina. She wants to convey a message of political liberation to others in the group. Reparation is needed. The cycles of war will continue. Stop the madness.

That moment ignited her. She began spreading ayahuasca among more Palestinians, especially women. She wanted to activate women's voices in ceremony. The women will bring the revolution, she believed. The vision gave her a sense of mission (Roseman and Karkabi 2021). She had confidence in the redemption she could bring and was guided in fidelity to her visions on her path for change. For a moment, she was a micro-messiah—but after a while, her fire faded. Her *movement* moved just slightly. She could not translate her vision into reality, and the messianic impulse got buried within.

1.2. Revelatory Events from the River to the Sea

In the winter of 2019, I was road-tripping with colleagues, from the river to the sea, interviewing Israelis and Palestinians who drank ayahuasca together within the underground cultic milieu. It was during this journey that I began noticing what I now call the messianic function: that recurring movement from revelation to reform that animates many psychedelic experiences. Enthralled by my dialogues with micro-messiahs, neo-shamans, and medicine-mystics (Roseman et al. 2021), I found myself—like every good transpersonal qualitative researcher (Braud and Anderson 1998)—transformed by the stories I encountered.

Over time, I learned that the harmony and oneness cultivated in these circles could paradoxically serve the status quo. After a few decades in Israel, ayahuasca rituals developed a localised Jewish-Israeli practice and culture. When Palestinians joined these circles, sentiments of peace were articulated through universal sentiments like 'All is One', 'Peace Starts from Within', 'Mysticism Unifies, Politics Divides'. But such universality was already particular and did not easily include Palestinian national aspirations. The All in the One was defined by Israeli culture, which tends to exclude Palestinian narratives, pains, and aspirations. The Palestinian liberatory sentiments can reintroduce conflictual duality into the unity of the ritual. The *irony in harmony* is that a momentary sense of equality within the ritual can support oppression by quieting conflictual voices and the desire to change reality outside the ritual (Saguy et al. 2009). Mystical union can serve as a spiritual bypass to ethical concerns (Jones 2004; Milli re 2017). It can deny the need for collective resistance and liberation. In the name of Oneness, conflict was excluded from that ritualistic space.

But I also witnessed other moments—psychedelic experiences that were not harmonising but revolutionary. The subject of such revelatory events acts with a sense of mission, in which they become a key actor in the potential change. Or redemption, may I say. These states were distinctly prophetic: charged with moral force, political aspiration, and a will to transform. When Ruqaiya recalled the song she sang during her apocalyptic vision, she said, "*The voice came from the center. I cannot say it was in the voice of God, though it was the voice of a messenger.*" At that moment, she experienced herself as the prophet, with an

analogy to the Prophet Muhammad. It was not just a passive ‘channelling’ of a voice, but the moral obligation and stamina to change reality based on the message.

Such prophetic or messianic experiences are not new to the psychedelic imagination. Strassman (2014) compared the experiences of DMT research participants to those of Biblical prophets. Yet what fascinates me in Ruqaiya’s story—and in those like hers—is not only the phenomenology of revelation but the *fidelity* that follows (Badiou [1988] 2007; Roseman and Karkabi 2021). Fidelity here refers to the actions, movements, and ripples that follow the event in loyalty to the message of the event. The revelatory event calls into question the status quo of the situation, and those individuals in fidelity to the event now seek to restructure the status quo based on the event. In Ruqaiya’s case, fidelity took the form of a renewed commitment to Palestinian women’s voices in ritual leadership—a revolutionary impulse arising from within a unitive practice.

Inspired by these encounters, I began seeing similar patterns elsewhere: in psychedelic history, in the so-called psychedelic renaissance, and even within myself. The messianic framework—with its interplay of revelation and revolution—offers a valuable lens for understanding how psychedelics mediate social and historical change.

1.3. Messianic Mystics

Throughout different schools of thought, religions, and cultures, the Messianic function is to redeem, and it is closely intertwined with the emotion of hope. Following Benjamin’s ([1942] 2020) concept of *weak messianic power*, I aim to secularise and soften the term, situating it on a spectrum rather than as an absolute claim to salvation. Benjamin suggests that we usually live life in a ‘homogeneous empty time,’ but once in a while, there are nonlinear bursts in history. Revolutions. Such transformative events are related to what he calls a weak messianic power, and they are connected in a thread. When we look back at history, we see revolutionary images—the French Revolution, the Hippie Revolution, the Arab Spring, the Occupy Wall Street Movement—these are peak societal moments—they are marked in history not as words but as images. Such bursts in history also carry the messianic power from previous bursts, trying to redeem what was not completed in previous attempts.

Messianic, millenarian, and revitalization movements often arise in situations and periods of political stress. Anthropologists have described them as cultural innovations that fuse revolutionary politics with religious symbolism (Weber [1921] 2019; Wallace 1956; Taves 2016; Talmon 1966). They serve as an emancipatory and activating force in situations of stagnation and passivity. For example, colonial contact gave rise to the Ghost Dance movement in North America, messianic movements in South America, the Cargo Cults in the South Pacific, and various millenarian movements in Africa (Talmon 1966), and the early Christian movement under the Roman rule of Judea. Interestingly, as liberatory aspirations are common in such movements, they also tend to include ecstatic practices and rituals to induce liberatory states of mind (Talmon 1966; Whitehouse 2004).

Can ecstatic practices, then, fuel messianic aspirations? Many scholars, like the Kabbalistic scholar Scholem ([1971] 2011, [1941] 2011), differentiated the mystical from the prophetic (see also (Thorner 1965; Williams 1983; Heiler 1919)). They argue that the archetypal mystical union is characterised by acceptance, beyond good and evil, beyond space and time, beyond identities, beyond history, with compassion, love, and harmony to all. In contrast, the archetypal prophetic/messianic events unfold within history and may involve a strong ego with a moral message. Revelation demands revolution. There is good and evil. There is Resistance. The phenomenology of insight is impregnated with action, and such insights can fuel *revitalization movements* (Wallace 1956).

In *Messianic Mystics* (Idel 2000), Moshe Idel, in his critique of Scholem, blurs this dichotomy. Mysticism and messianism, he argues, often interweave. “The emergence of a messianic consciousness can often be tied to special, inner spiritual occurrences which can provide a person with an awareness of his own special importance that will sometimes express itself in an overtly messianic mission. If the mystical goal is defined as uniting not only with the absolute and unchangeable but also with the revealed and changeable, the mystic, as part of an *imitation dei*, may be incited to act in the temporal and changing world” (p. 3). Mystical unification with the divine may thus inspire redemptive engagement with the world. Ego-dissolution can sometimes provide access to a revelatory mission.

Idel then diffuses the Messianic concept into spectrums and phenotypes. There may be one Messiah, or the Messiah in all. The messianic can manifest through a person, a community, a nation, a movement, a ritual, a protest, a festival, a tribe, or a lab. The messianic function can be diffused across space and time, with a messiah for every generation or situation. The messianic force could also be a process, an event, an experience, or a drug. Redemption need not be universal; it may be intimate and micro. Furthermore, redemption need not be religious; one can attempt to redeem from a mental health crisis, a scientific crisis, a political crisis, or a meaning crisis. Many transformative acts carry a trace of the messianic impulse. Recognising this spectrum allows us to approach it lightly—and sometimes, playfully.

1.4. Revolutionary Dynamics

From here, I will present different messianic psychedelic figures and dynamics occurring in psychedelic history. Some of the examples are bombastic, and some are lighter. I will discuss Allen Ginsberg, Master Irineu, and John Wilson (Moonhead), and briefly also mention other messianic events of various sizes. Through the stories, revolutionary dynamics will be revealed.

Such revolutionary dynamics are part of human life, and appear in the realms of science, art, politics, religion, and technology. The dynamics described here draw on those conceptualised in Wallace’s *Revitalization Movements* (Wallace 1956), Taves’ *Revelatory Events* (Taves 2016), Whitehouse’s *Modes of Religiosity* (Whitehouse 2004), Lanternari’s *The Religions of the Oppressed* (Lanternari 1963), Weber’s *Charismatic Authority in Economy and Society* (Weber [1921] 2019), Roseman and Karkabi’s *Revelations and Revolutions* (Roseman and Karkabi 2021), Rogers’s *Diffusion of Innovations* (Rogers et al. [1996] 2009), Strang and Soule’s *Diffusion in Organisations and Social movements* (Strang and Soule 1998), Kuhn’s *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Kuhn [1962] 1997), and Badiou’s *Being and Event* (Badiou [1988] 2007), to name a few.

Across many disciplines, similar dynamics are described—whether in discussions of paradigm shifts, New Religious Movements (NRMs) (Laycock 2022), social movements, media studies, or memetics. Some of the ideas are also part of pop culture and our understanding of technological innovations, as in Gladwell’s “*The Tipping Point*” (Gladwell 2006). When summarising many of these theories, we can identify key stages—and, I argue, that these are common across diverse psychedelic practices. The stages are:

Tension: tension accumulates within a stable situation, framework or practice. Times of crisis—whether they are scientific or political—are conducive to various movements and ‘prophets’. It is the crisis that intensifies the desire for redemption, and hence the search for redeemers. The status quo is somewhat weaker, and uncertainties within the situation allow creative solutions to be sought. Insights try to break through, and a yearning for revolutions grows. In such times, potential followers become more receptive, and the charismatic figure who was once considered ‘mad’ suddenly charms them with redemptive novelty.

A Revelatory Event: a moment of insight or vision bursts the status quo. The insight points to a new direction and instills the subject with a sense of mission and confidence. The revelatory event is charged with what William James termed the noetic quality, in which truth is felt as intuitive and as direct knowledge (James 1902). Psychedelics can induce various mystical and revelatory states characterised by noetic quality and certainty (Timmermann et al. 2020).

Fidelity: subjects remain loyal to the revelation and translate it into action and language. The concept of fidelity draws on Alain Badiou's *Being and Event* and serves as the bridge between revelation and movement (Badiou [1988] 2007). The event signals the excluded part, and subjects now wish to include what was previously excluded. This is an active process of inquiry that unfolds gradually through trial and error, with the revelatory event serving as a guiding intuition. In the case of psychedelics, the fidelity is not only to the substance itself, but also to the insight that emerged under its influence. The status quo is challenged as the subject in fidelity to the event seeks to draw new connections in the situation and create a renewed structure.

Movement: diffusion, innovation, expansion. A group unites around a shared mission and operates with collective fidelity—seeking to bring the novelty into life and to establish it within wider structures. The movement, in loyalty to the revelatory event, seeks to redeem the tensions by creating a better alternative. This process is attractive and charismatic, and others wish to join. In the case of psychedelics, the practice is always based on previous practices, but an innovation occurs based on the revelatory event and the structure of the situation. This innovation propels the movement as it adapts the practice to new situations and charges it with enthusiasm.

Routinisation and/or Inversion: a new orthodoxy or order emerges, or the movement is reversed. Some elements of the movement become the new status quo, while others fail. In both cases, fidelity, movement, and charisma are weakened until another revelatory event charges the new status quo with novelty again.

I will argue that micro-messianic impulses and revolutionary dynamics are ubiquitous across psychedelic practices, because psychedelics reliably create pivotal mind states, breakthroughs and insights (Kugel et al. 2025; Roseman et al. 2019; Brouwer and Carhart-Harris 2021; Van Eyghen 2023). Insights unfold into redeeming actions, with amplified hope and confidence. Movements seek to emerge. Yet, most messianic impulses do not transpire into full-fledged movements, but something moves, even slightly. Throughout the examples presented in this paper, we will consider under what conditions the micro-messianic event ripples far and when it stagnates before movement is noticed.

2. Allen Ginsberg: From Mystical Experience to Flower Power

“That famous ‘revival of religion,’ about which so many people have been talking for so long, will not come about as the result of evangelistic mass meetings or the television appearances of photogenic clergymen. It will come about as a result of biochemical discoveries that will make it possible for large numbers of men and women to achieve a radical self-transcendence and a deeper understanding of the nature of things. And this revival of religion will be at the same time a revolution”

—Aldous Huxley, Saturday Evening Post, 1958, (Huxley 1958).

The main prophet emerging in the small circles of psychedelia in the 1950s was Aldous Huxley. In fidelity to his revelatory event, in a post-WW2 society, he wrote *The Doors of Perception* (Huxley 1954) and laid the foundations for Western Psychedelia. His vision of mysticism and unitive states seeded an intellectual movement that continues to be the ground on which the psychedelic renaissance now grows. Yet, while Huxley was, without a doubt, a crucial pollinator, he also encouraged an exclusive, elitist approach to psychedelics

and argued that they should not be used by ordinary people (Huxley 1954). Ginsberg challenged that.

Ginsberg, the famous beat poet, was Jewish and gay, with a complex identity, political fire, creative mind, and revolutionary charisma. In 1948, at the age of 22, in his apartment in East Harlem, in the summer heat, with an open window, while reading William Blake's poem, the voice of Blake spoke to him. The voice was ancient, prophetic and tender. The depth of life and the universe was revealed to Ginsberg, and for the next couple of decades, in fidelity to this event, he attempted to replicate it with various mind-altering techniques and drugs.

In the 1950s, he initiated the Beat movement, strategically cultivating a literary movement of rebellious poets. Through *Howl* and the establishment's attempt to make the poem illegal, he achieved fame, inspiring many young people with the lifestyle promoted by the Beats. In 1959, seeking access to LSD, Allen experimented with it as a subject in a trial at the Mental Research Institute in Palo Alto, writing to his father on this occasion: 'The drug seemed to automatically produce a mystical experience. Science is getting very hip' (Miles 1989, p. 259).

In 1960, Ginsberg travelled to South America for a six-month adventure. He began his travels at a literary conference in Chile, sponsored by the Communist Party. At that event, he encountered many Marxists and revolutionaries, and those encounters made him contemplate politics and his role as a poet: 'So that my poetry is all a half-celestial con, worth nothing to the bloodshot eyes' (ibid, p. 265).

While still inspired by these political encounters, Ginsberg now headed towards Ayahuasca in Pucallapa in the Peruvian Andes, following William Burroughs's footsteps to track it down (Burroughs had done so seven years before, and their exchange of the *Yage letters* became a canonical text in western psychedelia (Burroughs and Ginsberg [1963] 2008). In his first Ayahuasca ritual, Ginsberg felt "a great feeling of communal fraternity and a sharing of a realisation of Infinite Intimacy" (Miles 1989, p. 268). But by the third session, he experienced a horrible confrontation with death, as brightly coloured serpents wrapped themselves around his body. He then became a snake vomiting out the universe.

When returning to the US, he visited Professor Timothy Leary at Harvard. Prof. Leary, who was already tuned in, had not dropped out, yet. He urged Leary to assume the role of *curandero* and so to imitate the indigenous ritualistic healer. So Leary, now a Curandero, provided Allen with a high dose of 36 mg of psilocybin, in 18 pills, and held the space for him and fellow travellers—in what was about to become a major revelatory event and movement; and a schism from Huxley's elitism.

The speakers play Wagner—the atmosphere is intense. Ginsberg flashes back into the frightful Yage visions from the Amazon, followed by Atomic apocalyptic visions. Being attacked by the margins of his mind, he questions his gay identity. Leary comes and reassures him that he is a great person. Ginsberg is encouraged. Wagner's *Götterdämmerung* reaches a crescendo—a messianic frenzy ruptures. The Star of Bethlehem shines, "the horns of judgement calling from the ends of the cosmos—called on all human consciousness to declare itself the end of consciousness. Seemed as if all the world of human consciousness were waiting for a messiah, someone to take on the responsibility of being the creative god and seize power over the universe." (Connors 2010, p. 84).

He runs naked downstairs proclaiming, "I am the Messiah. . . I've come down to preach love to the world. We're going to walk through the streets and teach people to stop hating. . . . We're going down to the city streets to tell the people about peace and love." (ibid., p. 85).

But Leary's firm rule was that no one leaves the house on mushrooms. So Ginsberg asks to call Khrushchev and Kennedy—Drop Acid, not Bombs—but settles for ringing his mate, Jack Kerouac, and orders him to "[t]ake a plane up here immediately, the revolution

is beginning. Gather all the dark angels of light at once. It's time to seize power over the universe and become the next consciousness!" (ibid., p. 86). Kerouac never came, but power was seized anyhow. Flower Power.

From that moment, Ginsberg's fidelity to the event reshaped the landscape of Western psychedelia. Leary and Ginsberg now formed a pact and a plot to bring mystical experiences to the masses, aligned with an egalitarian worldview and a deep belief in American democracy.

To motivate movement, the first step in their revolution plan was to create a strong 'base' by turning on influential people through Ginsberg's connections and Leary's academic credibility. Ginsberg understood that if it reached the masses too quickly, there would be a backlash, and he preferred to propel the movement through other respectable people rather than through himself, who was already known as a rebel. Ginsberg made the initial approach to culturally influential people, and Leary then sent research papers to bolster credibility. Leary would then come to New York and hold psychedelic sessions for them.

Leary, reflecting on this Event in *High Priest* (Leary [1968] 1995), wrote: "From this moment on, my days as a respectable establishment scientist were numbered. . . [My] energies were offered to the ancient underground society of alchemists, artists, mystics, alienated visionaries, drop-outs and the disenchanting young, the sons arising. . . Allen Ginsberg came to Harvard and shook us loose from our academic fears and strengthened our courage and faith in the process." (pp. 128, 133).

Yet a schism was not confined to Harvard¹. Across the continent, another break unfolded at Stanford, another seat of academic power. Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters—creative writing students and early subjects in CIA-sponsored LSD research—liberated the substance from the laboratory and brought it into public circulation. Instead of getting high in the lab, Kesey stole the LSD, massified it, and a colourful practice began emerging. The Acid Tests, the Grateful Dead, the *Furthur* bus with Neal Cassady (another Beat) at the wheel (Dodgson 2013; Wolfe [1968] 2008)—all embodied centrifugal eruption of revelation (Schunemann 2025).

In retrospect, these schisms were inevitable. Are inevitable. Epiphanic practices cannot long be contained within limiting frameworks (Whitehouse 2004).

Ginsberg's naked declaration thus marks a turning point in psychedelic history. It transformed Huxley's elitist mystical union into a mass mystical liberation. Through his fidelity to that moment, Ginsberg activated a weak messianic power that radiated through the counterculture as *Flower Power*—a term Ginsberg popularised.

This is one of many instances in psychedelic history where revelation produces fidelity, fidelity brings movement, and movement eventually settles into a new form—another temporary order awaiting its next schism.

Eventually, flower power was routinised within new-age spirituality, which still sought mind-liberation but tended to avoid political action. Retreats, workshops and festivals became part of the new status quo, and the proliferation of many esoteric practices moved underground to the emerging cultic milieu (Campbell 1972). Other psychedelic luminaries, such as Ram Dass and Alan Watts, became thought leaders in inner-spirituality and continued to preach harmony and oneness, but without the rebellious zeal of Ginsberg and the hippie movement of the 60s. *Healing culture* now utilises *plant medicines* to heal from trauma, but has stopped attempting to address the sociopolitical conditions that cause trauma (Aronovich Staroselsky 2025).

The current psychedelic renaissance is also a ripple of that event. It is still marked by some fidelity to Huxley, the 60s, and to inner spiritualities. Its various charismatic leaders—including Rick Doblin, Roland Griffiths, Amanda Feilding, Robin Carhart-

Harris, David Nutt, Michael Pollan, and Bryan Hubbard, to name a few—mobilised a mystical-medicalisation movement, charged with fidelities to their various revelatory events (Hodgkin 2023; Doblin 2016), and responded to a crisis in mental health and psychiatry. Interestingly, while medicalisation can be considered a routinisation of the 60s movement (Noorani 2020), it also operates with revolutionary dynamics within the medical establishment, as a form of paradigm shift (Roseman 2025).

(My historical account of Ginsberg's event is based on (Conners 2010; Leary [1968] 1995; Miles 1989))

3. Master Irineu: From Jungle to Jesus

Let us travel south, a few decades earlier, to meet another micro-messianic figure: Master Irineu, founder of Santo Daime. Look for the patterns.

Raimundo Irineu Serra, born in 1890 (as Raimundo Irineu de Mattos), was a descendant of enslaved Africans who lived and worked in the Amazon on the border between Brazil, Peru, and Bolivia. He came of age during the Rubber Boom—one of the most politically and socially turbulent moments in Amazonian history (1879–1912). The period was marked by intense exploitation: northerners extracted latex to meet international demand and displaced Indigenous populations, forcing them into new regions and systems of servitude. In Acre, now in the western part of Brazil, large companies seized territories then belonging to Bolivia, giving rise to a political issue exacerbated by frontier guerrillas. Amid this violent convergence, a biological and cultural mixture unfolded between indigenous people, migrants from the northeast, black slaves and their descendants, merchants of Syrian-Lebanese origin, and a few white adventurers. Many of the migrants to Acre were single men who took or bought indigenous women as partners, further increasing the region's mixed-race character. New religious movements—many of them messianic—began to emerge in these liminal territories (Luna 2011; Ribeiro 1992; Pessar 1982).

Through Irineu's work in the rubber industry in Acre, responsible for transportation, he was connected to the Amazonian peoples in the Jungle. Around 1914, Antônio and André Costa informed him of the magical brew and those who served it. He joined them in an ayahuasca ritual in Peru, led by a caboclo vegetalismo (Amazonian shamanic practitioners), that was supposed to bring financial success! Yet, all Irineu received were frightening visions of graveyards and crosses. In the historical testimonies of this event, the contrast between the intention of the ritual and what actually arrived is always emphasised. Some of the daime followers portray the caboclo who served Irineu as satanic practitioners who use the brew for *brujería* (sorcery), and within this founding myth, Irineu replaced this sorcery with Christian reference points and values. This is the innovation that propelled the practice's diffusion to new populations.

Irineu considered the experience meaningful and brewed ayahuasca himself using Antônio Costa's instructions. He invited Antônio to drink ayahuasca at home. A woman appeared to Antônio in a vision, announcing a divine mission. Overwhelmed by the responsibility, Antônio politely declined and instead suggested that Irineu might be the chosen one.

Irineu set up the hammock to face the moon and drank again. Gazing at the full moon, he saw it move closer until within it appeared the (same) woman, seated gracefully in an armchair. She told him she had a mission for him. He took it. She gave him a mission and instructed him to undertake an eight-day *dieta*—a period of isolation, fasting, and communion with nature. During the dieta, he continued to work in the forest and felt a strong bond with nature around him. He continued to meet the deity throughout the dieta, and on the eighth day, a defining revelation took place. The lady instructed Master Irineu to become a healer. And so he did.

To the lady he initially referred to as Woman, Lady, or Clara, and later as Queen of the Forest or Virgin Mary. It is his relationship with this lady that granted Irineu charisma and a micro-messianic healing mission. It is said that the only caveat the lady gave Irineu was never to charge money for healing, as then his strength will be drawn by money and not from the divine power (Moreira and MacRae 2011, p. 151).

Initially, in fidelity to the revelation, Irineu and the Costa brothers founded the 'Círculo de Regeneração e Fé' (Circle of Regeneration and Faith (CRF)) as an ayahuasca practice with spiritist characteristics. The CRF suffered from heavy police persecution and was seen by the authorities as an association of black healers using poisonous substances for witchcraft. Due to various pressures, Irineu eventually left the CRF for Rio Branco, where he formed the Santo Daime in 1930 as an innovation of the CRF (Dawson 2013; Moreira and MacRae 2011).

Ido Harogsohn suggested that Irineu received a new set and setting for ayahuasca from a divine origin (Hartogsohn 2021). In fidelity to his vision, Irineu reshaped the ritual practice itself. Influenced by Afro-Brazilian cults, he christened ayahuasca with the new name *Daime*—from the Portuguese *dai-me* ("give me"); changed the ritual to communitarian; changed the symbolic framework and the religious calendar; infused Catholic, spiritualist, and esoteric elements into the practice; and 'received' many new songs from the *Astral*.

The most crucial instruction from the deity was that he needed to sing. The songs he 'received' differed from Amazonian chants. They were hymns, sing-alongs, and anthems—joyful and participatory. This musical form, blending Indigenous chants, African rhythms, and Christian imagery, allowed the creation of a new religious movement built on love and collective redemption.

The songs became a doctrine, with his early disciples adding more songs. His first followers were displaced rubber tappers struggling to integrate into post-Boom society. Many of them were black or mixed-race. The doctrine provided order within the chaos of Acre, and a new sense of belonging, belief and discipline. Irineu's charismatic authority and healing power were reinforced by the performance of his hymns, which suggest that his powers were granted to him by the divine mother. On the liminality of Acre, Irineu succeeded in delivering a prophetic discourse that united people, when representatives of the established order had nothing to say.

Together with his followers, they forged a path from marginality toward belonging. The emergence of their new doctrine was slow. Initially, Irineu acted like many other healers and Vegetalismo, serving ayahuasca in the dark, using chants, whistling, and tobacco blowing. His reputation as a healer grew, and many in the area sought him for health-related problems. As a healer, he gained followership and was regarded as possessing supernatural powers and qualities to deal with crises, which endowed him with charisma and leadership.

The substitution of these healing practices for the more communal religious songs was gradual and took years. The initial calls, which were carried out by the ritual leader and were of a personal nature, were now supplemented with hymns that had a collective nature directed towards Christian matrices. Over time, the songs multiplied, becoming a living corpus of hymns that guided and interpreted the visionary world, and more hymns were created by his followers (many power conflicts in the community revolved around the acceptance of hymns to the doctrine). A schism had opened between the old Amazonian *vegetalismo* and a new kind of religious movement. While the ayahuasca cultural codes were previously understood only by certain ethnic groups in the Amazon, Irineu created a more Brazilian version of ayahuasca.

But eventually, novelty stabilises in a new status quo. The messianic sentiments of the early days were routinized (Dawson 2013). As the cult grew, the charismatic authority was

gradually replaced by bureaucratic authority and a stable social structure and hierarchy. At the end of the 1930s, Irineu introduced the uniform, ranks, ceremonial schedule, categories and various rules.

The 1960s were a period of prosperity for the cult's consolidation in Acrean society. Irineu befriended many politicians who also sought his advice. He sought institutionalisation through these connections and through various other organisations. Members of his community experienced social rise and became farmers and public employees. Yet, after four decades, Irineu's community rigidified. Master Irineu instructed that the doctrine would not change after his death. Orthodoxy crystallised from revelation. Such a process is common in new religious movements that modify after the first generation (Barker 2012).

Yet in any community founded on visionary practices, such closure invites rebellion. Orthodoxy is hard to maintain when everyone can become a prophet (Whitehouse 2004). Many potential rebellions wanted to emerge and were suppressed by Irineu, who criticised the prevailing disharmony. When the charismatic leader died in 1971, it was time for them to burst the status quo once again, and many 'lines' splintered from the original group.

A crucial schism was that of Sebastião Mota de Melo, known as Padrinho Sebastião. Sebastião was in his forties, already a healer and medium, when he joined the Daime in 1965. Very quickly, he became a cherished student of Irineu, and Irineu allowed him to serve Daime in his separate community. After the founder's death, tensions between communities erupted, and in 1974, Sebastião's group formally split from the central community.

His innovations were fundamental to the universalization of Daime. He introduced *Santa Maria* (cannabis) into the ritual, integrated elements from Afro-Brazilian *Umbanda* and Spiritism, and opened the community to Western seekers—hippies travelling to the Amazon in search of spiritual renewal. Under his leadership, the movement globalised, expanding from the rural rubber-tapping working-class population into middle-class urban Brazilians and international seekers.

While Irineu's community remained rigid and inward-looking, Sebastião's branch became adaptive, malleable, and dynamic. Its malleability supported the creation of many local variations in the practice. The schism thus became a conduit for diffusion: from jungle to city, from Brazil to the world. The movement carried with it a messianic undertone, seeking to create the "New Jerusalem," a vision of collective redemption.

Sebastião's story is another trajectory of revelation, fidelity, new instructions, expanded syncretism, new songs, and movement. The early expansionist years of this line were—again—infused with millenarian discourse (Dawson 2013). Sebastião's schism from Irineu, which propelled a global movement, is not dissimilar from Leary-Ginsberg's schism from Huxley—an attempt to universalize an exclusive practice. Huxley laid the foundations of psychedelia, and Leary & Ginsberg popularised it. Irineu laid the foundations of Santo Daime, and Sebastião popularised it.

A further innovation came through Daniel Pereira de Matos, a bohemian barber, shoemaker, poet, cook, carpenter and musician from Rio Branco, and an alcoholic suffering from liver problems. After hitting rock bottom, intoxicated on the banks of the Acre River, he decided to search for help from his old friend Irineu. His pivotal revelatory event occurred in a healing ritual guided by Irineu, in which two angels presented him with a blue book—a symbolic transmission of sacred knowledge. Guided by Irineu, he founded a new movement, *Barquinha* ("the Little Boat"), extending Daime's legacy into new marginalised communities (MacRae 2004; Mercante 2006), and opening the ritual to the incorporation of healing spirits similar to *Umbanda*.

Each of these offshoots illustrates the same rhythm: revelation, fidelity, movement, and routinization. The micro-messianic cycle repeats, expanding the reach of the substance

and the worldview entwined with it. Each cycle searches for redemption in its own manner, for its own crisis.

(My historical account of Irineu's event is based on (Orgad 2012; Labate and de Assis 2016; Hartogsohn 2021; Barnard 2014; MacRae 2004, 1992; Labate and Pacheco 2011; Dawson 2013; Moreira and MacRae 2011)).

4. John Wilson (Moonhead): From Peyote Shamanism to Peyote Church

"Few religious phenomena are more directly and more obviously connected with sociopolitical circumstances than the modern messianic and millenarian movements among colonial peoples (cargo-cults, etc.). Yet identifying and analyzing the conditions that prepared and made possible such messianic movements form only a part of the work of the historian of religions. For these movements are equally creations of the human spirit, in the sense that they have become what they are—religious movements, and not merely gestures of protest and revolt—through a creative act of the spirit."

—Eliade, History of Religions and a New Humanism (Eliade 1961, p. 6)

While continuing to recognise similar revelatory-revolutionary dynamics, let us go back in history again to another messiah, John Wilson, also known as Moonhead (Nishkū'ntu), and discuss the hyped diffusion of peyote into North America in the late 19th and early 20th centuries—transforming peyote from shamanic practices into the peyote cults and eventually into the organised religion known as the Native American Church (NAC).

By the mid-nineteenth century, peyote was used in northern Mexico and the southern plains of North America primarily in a non-ritualistic way for curing, clairvoyance, warfare, and divination. The ritualistic uses of peyote existed only in Mexico, most notably by the Huichol people, who used peyote since pre-Columbian times. These practices centred on individual shamans rather than collective ceremony.

The formation of communal rituals and small cults is the innovation associated with the ritualistic diffusion to the North from around the mid 19th century. In that period, a few decades after Mexico became independent from Spain, political turmoil, uncertainty, and violence prevailed in Central America. From the mid-19th century, peyote began to spread slowly from Mexico to Oklahoma (probably through the Lipan and Kiowa-Apache tribes (Stewart 1987)) due to population movements and the establishment of missions that also spread knowledge of peyote. By the 1880s, peyote had reached the Comanche, who became the locus of the emerging peyote movement. In that period, the diffusion of peyote accelerated.

It was a politically intense moment in Native American history. The short-lived Ghost Dance movement (1889–1891), along with other revolts and religious fervour, emerged at that time as a response to colonial violence and cultural dislocation. Ghost Dance was a messianic movement for Indigenous people, which served as a force of resistance and opposition to their white colonisers. The dance rituals, conducted over a few days, were a source of visions and revelations. The pan-Indian identity—the uniting of the tribes—was strengthened through the Ghost Dance as a vehicle to gather diverse tribes in opposition to their white colonisers. Mooney—the famous ethnographer and ally of Indigenous people—wrote about the ghost dance: "[The] great underlying principle of the Ghost Dance doctrine is the time will come when the whole Indian race, living and dead, will be united upon a regenerated earth, to live a life of aboriginal happiness, forever free from death, disease and misery" (Mooney [1882] 1965, p. 19).

U.S. settlers were worried about the messianic forces in the Ghost Dance movement and began opposing it, sometimes violently. Eventually, this culminated in the 1890 Wounded Knee Massacre of approximately 250 Lakota Ghost Dancers by the U.S. Army and the subsequent decline in the movement. From this vacuum, the Sun Dance and Peyotism

emerged as popular peaceful rituals to strengthen the pan-Indian identity. Peyotism can be considered a 'crisis cult' or 'crisis religion,' arising in conditions of cultural stress, shock, and acculturation (Hultkrantz 1975).

One of the leading early proselytisers of the peyote ritual was Quanah Parker, a Comanche war hero who tried peyote in 1884 and immediately became a leader in the cults and popularised the Comanche's 'Half Moon' ritual, in fidelity to his revelatory event. Parker was the son of a Comanche chief and a white woman who was captured by the tribe. He sought integration into American society, was known as a shrewd businessman, and developed many political ties that helped him establish the foundations of Peyotism. Parker opposed the messianic intensity of the Ghost Dance movement and saw peyote as a more peaceful form of resistance.

From the early days, Peyotism was persecuted by the US establishment and church, yet Parker's leadership and diplomacy helped create a stable foundation and oppose the persecutions. An interesting anecdote is that when various intoxicants were banned by the Court of Indian Offences, enforcement within the Comanche tribe was lacking. It is speculated that the reason for this was that, within "the Comanche-Kiowa reservation, the Court of Indian Offences was dominated by peyotists" appointed by the Comanche Chief, Quanah Parker (Petrullo 1934, p. 130).

Comanche's Half Moon ritual established the participatory-communal elements of the ritual, a foundational innovation that supported its diffusion to the north. This was probably the ritual that John Wilson was exposed to and innovated upon.

John Wilson was a Ghost Dance practitioner who became a Peyote roadman—a Caddo with mixed ethnicity, alcohol addiction, and liminal-charismatic personality, who found meaning in resistance. By the 1880s, in his forties, Wilson became a peyote roadman and one of the central figures in what was then a loosely connected network of peyote cults. As an influential leader in the messianic Ghost Dance movement, it was natural for him to become a peyote micro-messiah—"The Revealer of Peyote"—when the interest in Ghost Dance waned.

Wilson's origin story, as told by his nephew, suggests that Wilson received peyote buttons from the Comanche and went with his wife to a secluded place in nature, by the creek, where he consumed peyote for two to three weeks in frequent intervals. "The outcome was the revelation that motivated him for the rest of his life and made him a teacher of the peyote doctrines" (Speck 1933). In his revelations, he saw figures in the sky, celestial landmarks that represent the life of Jesus, the spiritual forces of the four directions, the empty grave of Christ, and the Road from the grave to the moon in which Jesus ascended. He was told by Peyote, who had taken human form, to walk this Road for the rest of his life. Peyote then named him Moonhead (Speck 1933; Petrullo 1934).

In fidelity to his peyote revelations, which instructed him with the nuanced details of the new ritual form, he propelled the movement forward with the innovations introduced by his Big Moon ceremony (later known as the Cross Fire ceremony). While modifying the altar and ceremony, blending Ghost Dance and Christianity into Peyotism, and receiving new songs and moral teachings, he spread a new form of ritual to the Caddo, Delaware, Quapaw, Osage, and others. With Peyote, he argued, one can receive knowledge through direct communion with God instead of from the Bible. He became an important religious leader within peyotism, but unlike Parker, he never pursued political integration, nor defended peyote against the government's attempts to ban it. His importance was simply as a roadman with exceptional qualities as a leader and missionary.

It is worth noting that, like Parker, John Wilson's wealth stemmed from his rituals, and financial incentives also played a role in motivating him. For that reason, he was ridiculed

by other tribes as a charlatan. Ambivalence is not a stranger to messianic figures, and some significant proselytisers simply have a good sense of salesmanship.

In a swift moment—a burst in history—peyote diffused throughout Indigenous people of North America, beginning with the peyote cults, proselytised by peyote prophets such as Wilson and Parker. For some, the cults served as a remedy to White schooling, deculturation, dislocation, and alcoholism. At the same time, the Christian orientation of the new rituals made newcomers comfortable with rituals as they resonated with the Christian ideas they recently learned in school, but in an indigenous setting.

Yet the majority of indigenous people in Oklahoma rejected Peyotism; these were from the ‘Five Civilised Tribes’, who had been exposed to Christianity for several generations, with some even attending universities. Peyote did not diffuse within those tribes, and its diffusion first occurred among those “wild tribes” who were looked down on by the more civilised tribes (Stewart 1987).

The tensions, liminalities, and uncertainties of the deculturated tribes were conducive to the diffusion of peyote, seeking to redeem them from their political anxieties. Many peyote roadmen emerged, each adapting peyote based on their personalities and the needs of their situations.

The diffusion of peyote cults in the following decades—a religious, political movement—threatened the American government. An anti-peyote coalition slowly emerged, including regulators, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the church, and concerned citizens. Worth noting that some bad actors within the peyote movement, who have abused their charismatic powers, fuelled the concerns of the anti-peyotists. One notable bad actor was Sam Lone Bear, who exploited many young women, extracted money from peyotists, and presented a general immoral and dishonest behaviour (Petrullo 1934).

When American regulators and policymakers pressured the peyote movement, the different cults eventually integrated and became the Native American Church (NAC) in 1918, supported by anthropologists such as James Mooney in securing legitimacy.

Through this religious framework, they successfully established a legal and regulatory framework that enabled them to continue their practice. Yet, in some sense, the NAC can be seen as the bureaucratisation of charisma and the routinisation of the peyote movement into a new status quo, and the loss of the revolutionary zeal that characterised its emergence. In the mid-20th century, large conflicts emerged within the NAC, which threatened its existence. Currently, the NAC has limited centralised powers, and each congregation makes its own rules.

The routinization through the NAC is not dissimilar from the relationship between the current Psychedelic Medicalization efforts and the Hippie ‘60s (Noorani 2020). Both medicalisation and the NAC are efforts to legitimise a previously revolutionary movement by fitting it into specific regulatory boundaries and depoliticising it. Medicalisation serves as a routinisation process for psychedelia, through the regulatory framework of the medical system; and NAC served as a routinisation process for the peyote movement, through the regulatory framework of religious freedoms.

Another splintering which emerged via Quanah Parker is crucial to note. The famous peyote anthropologist James Mooney, who befriended his informants and was much respected by them, attended a peyote ceremony with his friend Quanah Parker in November 1893 at Fort Hill. In fidelity to his revelatory event, he purchased 50 pounds of peyote and brought it back to Washington. “[L]aunching the first scientific trials of peyote on human subjects and being consumed by America’s leading authorities in pharmacy, neurology, psychology, and philosophy.” These initial studies on peyote and mescaline are regarded as proto-psychedelic. The historian Mike Jay argues that this exchange between Parker and Moon was “a transmission between worlds: from millennia of sacred tradition to the

clinical gaze of western modernity.” (Jay 2019, p. 44). Seventy years later, Aldous Huxley, guided by the psychiatrist Humphry Osmond, had his own mescaline revelatory event and wrote “The Doors of Perception” in fidelity, establishing the *psychedelic* “line” and the foundations of another movement (Huxley 1954).

(My historical accounts of Parker and Wilson are based on (La Barre [1938] 1975; Jay 2019; Hultkrantz 1997; Slotkin 1956; Stewart 1987; Petrullo 1934).)

5. More Messiahs and Messiah in All

Having traced three exemplary cases—Ginsberg, Irineu, and Wilson—it becomes easier to recognise the pattern elsewhere. Psychedelic history is rich with smaller yet resonant messianic flashes, moments when revelation ignites fidelity and fidelity seeks diffusion. These are micro-messianic ripples—brief, intense bursts that occasionally shift the direction of the wider current.

For example, we can identify the famous messianic event of the McKenna brothers, known as the *La Chorrera Experiment* of 1971, in the Putumayo region in Colombia (Davis 2019; McKenna and McKenna 1993). In fidelity to the revelatory event, the brothers elaborated a cosmology—the *Timewave Zero* theory—and a mythos of apocalypse and renewal. Furthermore, they wrote and disseminated a popular manual on how to easily grow mushrooms at home. Terence, with his distinctive oracular eloquence, became a prophet of the psychedelic revival. Enchanting people with weird mystical raps full of humour, insights, and countercultural irony, they have reignited the psychedelic spirit in Western society after the 1960s had lost its momentum.

Another micro-messianic figure is José Gabriel da Costa, who worked in the Amazon as a rubber tapper since the 2nd Rubber Boom of the 1940s. He was involved in various practices such as Capoeira, folk Catholicism, Afro-Brazilian Cults, and Spiritism. He encountered ayahuasca in 1959 and received a revelation instructing him to found a new path: the *União do Vegetal* (UDV), which would become the largest ayahuasca church (Brissac 2004).

Hushahu, a contemporary ayahuasca shaman of the Yawanawa people, also brought revolutionary dynamics to her practice. She grew up under the patriarchal order of her people, when women were not allowed to lead ayahuasca rituals. In fidelity to her revelatory event instructed by a female deity, she recognised her mission was to bring all the women and activate their voice. She then became an essential leader in the Yawanawa, bringing new music and creating a new form of sisterhood. What began as an act of rebellion became a reformation, inspiring the participation of women from other indigenous groups and beyond (Thalji and Yakushko 2018).

And, indeed, it is rare to identify micro-messianic women with movements that rippled far.

Back to Ruqaiya. In fidelity to her visions of endless bloodshed in the Holy Land, she sought liberation through ritual and community. Yet, her mission was embedded within an intense architecture of separation and domination. The status quo was oppressive, yet stable, and not many were mobilised by her fidelity. Eventually, her fire faded with a burnout. She left the Land and created a new life somewhere in Europe. Alone again. Building Home Again.

Ruqaiya had less power. Her mission was known only to a few. Her ripples have impacted only the ones close to her, who still carry some of her processes. For a moment, she was a micro-messiah—torn between loyalty to her revelatory event and her belonging to an oppressive status quo—trying to break free—trying to turn on others—carrying a secret—sharing her message, but not many could hear. In such cases, fidelities are short, but movement still exists, skipping from one inspiration to another.

Not all fidelities ripple far. Some stay an unspoken secret, a dream of the past, an episode of light madness, an unfulfilled call waiting for something to spark it again. Micro-messiahs roam the psychedelic plains, with most of us never entering history, but potentialities abound.

In recent years, I have found myself returning to the messianic question in conversations with colleagues, students, and friends. Once the word is spoken aloud, stories begin to surface. Curious and playful, I started listening to many confessions of similar stories. Many of these moments occur at the beginning of someone's psychedelic journey—a micro-messianic event charged with moral or creative intensity. Such events are impregnated with redemptive action and propel movement. A long time can pass, but fidelity is retained.

Sometimes these events remain secret. Sometimes they ignite art, research, activism, or healing. Sometimes they fade, leaving only a faint afterglow of meaning. But the pattern repeats: revelation calls for fidelity; fidelity manifests as movement; movement reshapes the world, even if only slightly.

6. Conclusions: Micro-Messianic Substance

Let me conclude with a few simple claims.

Revolutionary dynamics are present in many psychedelic practices, particularly in times of uncertainty and collective anxiety. The search for redemption, when combined with substances that dissolve boundaries and amplify meaning, gives rise to events that aspire to burst the status quo. These revelatory moments imbue participants with a sense of mission, hope, and significance. Revelation and revolution intertwine.

When we look across cases, we see the recurring structure: tension, revelatory event, fidelity, movement, and routinisation/inversion. This rhythm is spiral. Tension builds again, and new revelations arrive.

Before the schism, tension builds up, and with it, the anticipation for redemption. Waiting for a messiah. Political uncertainties can enhance the weak messianic power as the desire for redemption and relief grows, accompanied by the hope that someone or something will liberate us from our anxieties.

Then, a revelatory event bursts through an exclusive practice and propels it into movement. It carries with it the previous framework, adapts it, and diffuses it (e.g., Ginsberg & Leary spreading Huxleyan psychedelia, Sebastião globalising Irineu, Wilson's big moon ritual carries the structure of its predecessor). The fidelity to the revelatory event motivates innovation and movement. It transforms insight into meaning and practice, adapting rituals, doctrines, or cultural forms. The innovations help the substance adapt and enter a new situation. Revolutionary dynamics constantly carry the substance from one situation to another, with micro-messiahs and movements for each situation. A contemporary example is Bryan Hubbard, a charismatic who, in fidelity to his revelatory event, propels a veteran movement, and diffuses ibogaine all the way to [The White House \(2026\)](#).

This innovative–revolutionary spirit is charismatic: when history is suddenly ruptured, when the weak messianic power is triggered, when redemption is near, when hope is felt—there is attraction. This propels movement until a new status quo stabilises, stagnation is reached, the hype goes down, charisma is reduced, conflict rises, and new forms of exclusivity emerge.

Yet, most revelations do not ripple far. The micro-messianic impulse requires many conditions so it can manifest itself, similar to how many other innovations diffuse ([Soule and Roggeband 2018](#); [Rogers et al. \[1996\] 2009](#)), e.g., status, prestige, cultural resonance, charisma, crisis, a receptive audience, etc. It also requires strategic planning, such as the initial recruitment of first followers or influential figures, political negotiation skills, financial and intellectual resources, the creation of gatherings, the use of media, and so on.

Situational uncertainties are fertile ground for a movement. The liminality of such situations also allows hope to emerge, as the crisis and uncertainty signal a potential for change. In such moments, the insight needs to resonate with the latent tension. The revelatory event speaks to collective yearnings seeking expression. If the insight is too “far-out” from the situation, others will not resonate—even in times of crisis. Hence, diffusion requires simplicity of meaning and ideas, and it seems that those who are talented with words have a stronger potential to ripple insights into movements. Innovation is indeed essential for diffusion, but too much novelty can make it irrelevant.

Psychedelics, being epiphanic, can lead to many micro-messianic impulses, but most of them do not turn into large movements. Many seeds are spread, but only a few germinate. In most cases, the *movement* is micro, and the impulse fizzles out unnoticed. In some cases, the impulse is incubating, concealed within, and hidden from others. It follows a redemptive path, but unfolds through careful planning and strategy, playing the game unnoticed. Then, once in a while, we can see it clearly.

What connects the revelation with movement is fidelity (Badiou [1988] 2007; Roseman and Karkabi 2021). Fidelity is the active process by which the revelatory event seeks to integrate with the situation. It’s a process of meaning-making and inquiry. In fidelity to the event, the subject might attempt to form new language, new practices, and new relations between the event and other elements of the situation. This process may span years of trial and error, with small successes helping to sustain the flame of fidelity. When the subject fails to integrate the insight into the situation, fidelity is weakened. When the subject slowly integrates the insight into the situation, fidelity is strengthened, and momentum is built. Yet, when the integration is completed, fidelity is also weakened, as it is no longer required. The insight then becomes part of the new status quo.

Before concluding, it is important to consider the ethical challenges of my suggestion. The notions of charismatic leaders, new religious movements, and enthusiastic followership raise concerns about cultic behaviour (Van Eyghen 2024), and such are well described by Evans and Adams in their analysis of psychedelic guruism (Evans and Adams 2025). I tend to agree with these observations, recognising that charismatic leaders can abuse their power, especially when followers are in highly suggestible states of mind. But I also recognise that the fear of cults in Western society is greatly exaggerated, as acknowledged in studies of new religious movements (Barker 2012; Laycock 2022). One difference we can consider is that, unlike cults of personality, psychedelic practices make access to revelation ubiquitous. Hence, many can access charismatic authority, and the micro-messiah can easily lose their charisma when their movement is routinised, and new movements emerge. Charisma is much more diffused within psychedelic movements, as revelations are not accessible only to the leader.

It is important to note that psychedelics might not have a clear political orientation. I have already suggested in my fieldwork in Palestine and Israel that the mystical union can serve as an oppressive status quo toward Palestinians (Roseman and Karkabi 2021), and it is argued that psychedelics are politically pluripotent (Pace and Devenot 2021). Hence, micro-messianic sentiments can exist across the political spectrum, and psychedelics can infuse movements with liberatory charisma, regardless of political goals. Revolutionary dynamics exist on both the left and the right, and psychedelics can amplify those.

If we step back from psychedelia, we can see revolutionary dynamics as part of a broader human pattern described by many scholars. Psychedelics seem to tap into our revelatory-revolutionary mechanism of action. As insight-inducing, they are also fidelity-inducing. Innovation and diffusion are closely interconnected aspects of the same process. (Strang and Soule 1998; Rogers et al. [1996] 2009).

Viewing psychedelics as fidelity-inducing clarifies an aspect of their effect that extends beyond acute phenomenology. Being mind-manifesting also instils subjects with the enthusiasm to bring what was manifested in the mind back into the world. Our worldly situations are filled with structure and language, and fidelities seek to carve a path through them. Exposing these micro-messianic impulses helps clarify the active quality of psychedelic use. Not just passive experiencers of visionary states, but active, participatory actors inspired by the antipodes of the mind.

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Note

- ¹ There are a few other Harvard people preceeding Leary who are worth mentioning in this context, as they somewhat contributed to psychedelics and/or their spiritual framework. These are: Richard Evans Schultes, William Burroughs, and William James.

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