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ORAL LEGEND AND MEDIA NARRATIVE IN THE BIRTH OF THE U.S. HIPPIE SUBCULTURE

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Abstract: *How can legend scholarship be applied to the history of a recent subculture and its subsequent mass media representations? Comparing media coverage of the nascent hippie subculture with actual oral histories of participants shows not only factual discrepancies but also thematic contradictions and parallels that point to what contemporary legend scholarship calls legend formation.*

Key words: *hippie subculture, oral legend, media narrative, U.S.A.*

On Dec. 19, 1966, *Newsweek* noticed a strange new subculture in San Francisco, which had certainly seen subcultures before, most recently the Beats of the 1950s. These new and mostly young people were different from the Beats, though, more centered on music than poetry. It was their music, and the seemingly ritualized ways in which they responded to it, that mainstream media noticed first:

> Every weekend in such immense halls as the Fillmore and the Avalon Ballroom, and college auditoriums like the Pauley Ballroom at Berkeley, the music assaults the ears; strobe lights, pulsating to the beat, blind the eyes and sear the nerves. Psychedelic projections slither across the walls in protoplasmic blobs, restlessly changing shape, color and size. Two or three thousand young people jam the floor, many in "ecstatic" dress – men with shoulder-length locks and one earring, cowboy outfits, frock coats, high hats; women in deliberately tatty evening gowns, rescued from some attic, embellished by a tiara and sneakers. Arab kaftans are worn by both sexes, who also affect bead necklaces, the high sign of LSD initiation.
>
> Some of the crowd crouch close to the bandstand where the sound is most earsplitting, listening as raptly as if Horowitz were playing Mozart. The majority (including a sprinkling of young mothers with infants asleep on their shoulders) dance, dropping their inhibitions like Salome her veil, inventing odd but apparently satisfying gyrations, the whole scene a dance-happening … (*Newsweek* 1966)

A month later the magazine dug deeper, running a two-page article called "Drop-outs With a Mission":

> They smile and call themselves a new race. They want to change the United States from within – by means of a vague regimen of all-embracing love. They are nonviolent, mystical, bizarre. Psychedelic drugs are their instant passport to Nirvana, a euphoric disdain for anything "square" is their most common bond. Like the beatniks of the '50s, they are in the long tradition of Bohemia: seeking a vision of the totally free life. They are, of course, the hippies (*Newsweek* 1967)

In just a month, hippies had become instantly recognizable. The article described the previous month's "Human Be-In" in Golden Gate Park on Jan. 14, 1967, the biggest gathering of the new phenomenon to date, where some 10,000 gathered:

> … They wore blowsy furs, fresh flowers, jangling beads, floppy-brimmed hats, even Indian war paint. They waved sticks of burning incense, swirled abstractly designed banners, tooted on fifes and recorders. There under the warm sun with the faithful was the whole range of the hippie hierarchy. Poet Allen Ginsburg tried to lead the crowd in a Hare Krishna swami chant; Timothy Leary, headmaster of the LSD school, delivered a plea to "turn on, tune in and drop out," and Pig-Pen, the pop organist whose gaudy sweatshirts have become standard apparel for hundreds of teen-age girls, invoked the hippie via another favorite idiom – rock music (*Newsweek,* 1967).

San Francisco was clearly the center of the suddenly discovered new movement, or non-movement as some insisted on portraying it, *Newsweek* correctly reported.[1] But how many hippies were there, and where had they come from? The magazine reported:

> Nobody is sure how many hippies there are in San Francisco. But a source who is familiar with the distribution pattern of LSD, the psychedelic drug that activates the hip world, estimates there are about 5.000 full-time San Francisco hippies and somewhere between 25,000 and 30,000 weekend hippies, who can be loosely defined as teen-agers only sporadically switched-on.
>
> **Far-out Wares:** The important hippie stronghold is the Haight-Ashbury district, a ten- by fifteen-block area just east of Golden Gate Park. Until a year ago, it was simply another cluster of decaying Victorian frame houses. Then, in February 1966, the Psychedelic Shop opened at 1535 Haight Street and began displaying its wares of far-out books, magazines, records and amulets. This was the signal for the hippies to move in. Now there are 40 new shops and cottage industries, banded together ion their own trade association, the Haight-Ashbury Independent Proprietors (HIP). HIP includes such emporiums as the Blushing Peony Skinnydippin and the Chickie P. Garbanzo Bead and Storm Door Co., Ltd., offering sandals, marijuana pipes and handmade jewelry. (*Newsweek,* 1967)

[1] Other mass media were discovering hippies at precisely the same moment, among them *Life* magazine and the new CBS Sunday night news show, "60 Minutes."

I would like to report, a little late, that *Newsweek* got it wrong. The magazine was right about the music and the LSD, but hippies did not magically spring up in San Francisco around a set of head shops, second-hand clothing stores, Timothy Leary and Allen Ginsberg. In fact, the first hippies were more typified by guns, sagebrush and television westerns than by beads, patchouli and gurus.

Various histories of the hippie music scene do indeed report briefly, usually in a paragraph or two near the beginning, that psychedelic music and light shows started with an obscure group of pre-hippies who gathered in the summer of 1965 in the Red Dog Saloon in Virginia City, Nevada, before moving to the Bay Area in the fall of 1965. In the 1990s I tracked down some of these proto-hippies, some of whom had returned to live in the high desert foothills where the whole scene started. The oral histories I collected show that as early as 1961 "hippie" subcultural formulae were being developed by a loosely knit group that numbered at first just a few dozen but, galvanized by their summer 1965 Nevada experience, grew quickly to several hundred. Over an 18 month period from June 1965 to December 1966 – the latter date being when mass media started discovering "hippies" – this small group of several hundred grew to several thousand and formulated the dress, speech, music, art and public performance styles that made hippies an American folk subculture, albeit one quickly commodified by mass media.[2]

When I first started collecting hippie oral histories, my folklore mentor, Bruce Jackson, warned me that most of what I got would be unreliable as history. No problem, I have learned: what we get from these narratives, sometimes solo and sometimes in groups, is a kaleidoscope of legendary moments in time, sometimes remembered in multiple versions. The oral histories of these key early participants in the counterculture evince what Linda Degh calls the "conversational, dialectic-polyphonic nature" of legends –

> … They manifest in discussions, contradictions, additions, implementations, corrections, approval and disapprovals during some or all phases of their transmission, from their inception through various courses of elaboration, variation, decline and revitalization. (Degh, 2001: 2).

They certainly fit Timothy R. Tangherlini's definition of legend:

> "a short (mono-) episodic, traditional, highly ecotypified historicized narrative performed in a conversational mode, reflecting on a psychological level a symbolic representation of folk belief and collective experiences and serving as a reaffirmation of commonly held values of the group to whose tradition it belongs." (Tangherlini, 1990: 385).

[2] It is important to note here that other similar groups of what might be called proto-hippies were forming, and other influences were at work. One was the group gathering around Ken Kesey in Palo Alto, Calif. As early as 1959; another was Colorado's "Drop City" commune of 1964, itself rooted in a longer American tradition of "dropout" communal experiments; others were the academic LSD networks and Native American Church "peyote boys" mentioned briefly in this article.

They form a small sample of what could still be a large collecting project now mostly among 65- to 75-year-olds, identifying strands of legend motifs among other isolated proto-hippie groups from about 1959-65. My approximately 12 hours of tapes, samples of which are published here for the first time, serve as a very belated impetus to such an oral history collecting project that would probably offer fascinating insights into the role of legend in developing shared subcultural histories in late 20th and early 21st century America.

Such a body of subcultural oral history with its relationship to media narrative of that same subculture's history seems to overlap several of Degh's legend categories, which include alongside "the story that is unanimously identified as legend (*Sage*, or fabulate)":

> *Alltagsgeschichte*, anecdote, casus, *chronikate*, *Chroniknotiz*, contemporary legend, belief legend, belief story, *dite*, *Erinnerungssage*, *Erlebnisgeschichte*, *Erlebnisbericht*, entertainment legend, exemplary story, *fikt*, *Gesschichte*, horor story, legend-like experience story, myth, personal experience story, rumor, rumor legend, *Sagenbericht*, *sagenhafe Erzählung*, superstition, superstitious story, true story, urban belief tale, and urban legend (Degh, 2001: 97).

She adds "media narraform (Grider, 1976), retort legend, amusing legend, and admonitory legend (Pentikäinen 1989), and nasty and hostility legend (Smith, 1995)." These stories below seem to comprise such diverse genres as *chroniknotiz*, entertainment legend, personal experience story and true story, at least.

Richard Dorson's earlier observation about hippie druglore that he collected at Berkeley in 1968 is also relevant here:

> With all highly visible in-groups there coexist an esoteric and an exoteric tradition: that within the group and that about the group. The exoteric or outsiders' gags and jokes usually strike a hostile or derisive note, while the esoteric or insiders' lore projects the values of the group (Dorson: 256).

This tension between esoteric and exoteric lore can be represented as a spectrum between 1965 and 1967, one in which a purely esoteric lore gradually lost influence to an exoteric lore as hippiedom moved form a small localized subculture to a national phenomenon mediated by the likes of *Newsweek*.

America in the early 1960s was not an easy place to be an oddball. Yet there were some. In San Francisco's North Beach neighborhood, what was left of the beatnik scene survived and drew occasional wannabes. In the southwest, "peyote boys" hung out with members of the Native American Church, taking the powerful psychedelic cactus and imagining themselves Indians.[3] And at a few college campuses – Harvard in Cambridge Massachusetts, the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, the University of California at Berkeley – some professors and students were experimenting with LSD, a powerful psychoactive drug that had leaked out of U.S. government-sponsored experiments. The drug was already

[3] Travis T. Hipp in Giarelli, Tale 1, Side A.

profoundly changing its users' outlooks on life, among them the Harvard psychologists Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert.

One of the wannabe beatniks who arrived too late to actually be one was Michael Ferguson, who started a store called The Magic Theater for Madmen Only, named after the pseudonymous locale in Herman Hesse's novel *Steppenwolf*. During my recording sessions, participants repeatedly mentioned Ferguson, who died in 1979, as epitomizing the counterculture's earliest sensibility and appearance. Ellen Harmon, another too-late beatnik who arrived in North Beach from Detroit in 1961 at the age of 19, wondrously described his store as "an art gallery and things store and poetry readings. You gotta remember that this is pre-hippie and pre-psychedelic, and not really beatnik either. It kinda came in between the hippies and the beats and there isn't no real name, no cute title, that applies. But it boiled outta there …" (Giarelli: Tape 1 Side B)

Harmon remembers the years 1961 – 1965 as being part of a small group of maybe a couple dozen "funny lookin' folks":

> EH: "We were funny lookin' down in San Francisco in the preceding, like, four or five years. But we weren't a threat, 'cause one there weren't very many of us and two, we were picturesque and it's a tourist town, and people would take our pictures. You know what I mean? Instead of treating us like the enemy or being worried about what we might be up to, they weren't noticing that part. We looked okay and the tourists –
> AG: That early on?
> EH: Oh, well, we wore funny clothes, honey. Beads and fringe and all that, you know…
> AG: You were wearing beads and fringe then?
> EH: Oh Lord, whatever. We used to haunt costume shops, are you kidding? Only we wore it, you know! I don't know – we were funny lookin', you know? We were taking LSD, and we were funny – that changes you, you know? (Giarelli: Tape 3, Side A)

By 1964 Harmon was living in one of a couple of rooming houses managed by Bill Ham, who was experimenting with light shows in the basement of one house during Saturday night music sessions. At one of these light shows she encountered Chandler Laughlin, a Berkeley native and young merchant marine veteran who had been running folk music coffeehouses in Berkeley until – according to him – he went on the run from the FBI for reasons about which he remains vague. Laughlin remembers a turning point around 1963 when he obtained his first LSD (via military people who sold it on the black market, he claims) and turned on the entire club, including the musicians. So he was ready for Harmon's Pine Street scene, with its tiny rooms with velvet couches and other gaslight era furnishings scored cheap from San Francisco's second-hand shops, and its plentiful LSD.

Here – or perhaps on a street in North Beach (he is contradictory about which), Laughlin met George Hunter, who was not only already fully costumed himself

but travelled with a fully costumed band, The Charlatans. Hunter was a San Francisco State University art student influenced by French art "happenings" of the early 60s, and his Charlatans were a band who had never had a gig but who – thanks to their elaborate 1890s gaslight era style – were already being mobbed on the streets of San Francisco by teenaged girls who assumed they were another British invasion rock 'n' roll band.

The Charlatans, Golden Gate Park, San Francisco, 1964

By late 1964 Laughlin had moved to Silver City, Nevada, a tiny town in the Comstock Range between Carson City and Reno. He stayed with Don Works in the latter's old mining cabin nicknamed the Zen Mine, rapidly becoming another gathering place like the Pine street rooming houses. Works was a Marin country construction worker who'd been brought to Nevada by a friend who introduced him to peyote and the state's enduring outlaw lifestyle:

> DW: It must've been the rabbit kingdom of the world, man. There was rabbits everywhere, man, you know, like you'd go out there on the old V&T road, take your .22 out there, and just start shootin' and pretty soon you'd come back with half a dozen rabbits.
> CL: And you gotta realize, this is a total contrast. Most of us were college-university fringe political-folk dropout weirdos who, whatever milieu we were in, it had never before included going 45 miles an hour in a '37 Cadillac Fayette with the top down, smoking weed, drinking beer and shooting guns out the side at the rabbits! You know, this was more freedom than any of us had ever thought of, man. And so Don's place became real popular. Everybody on the road between anyplace and anyplace else stopped off at the Zen Mine. Which is why we invented the Red Dog, to take the action out of the front room … (Giarelli: Tape 1, Side B)

More precisely (as precisely as you can get with people remembering life-changing experiences that occurred under the influence of powerful psychedelics), the Zen Mine had grown overcrowded. As many as 40 people were crowding into the two-room cabin, staying up all night, "playing Risk, with treaties, on acid," as Laughlin recalls. So one night they decided to find a place in Virginia City, farther up the mountain and a tourist town that lived off its Wild West heritage, to act out their LSD-fuelled fantasies. One of the group, Mark Unobski, who had wealthy Memphis parents, talked his folks into giving him $5000 to buy the Comstock House at 76 N. C Street, the traditional saloon and dance hall street of the old West town. They renamed it the Red Dog Saloon, and the amorphous group, with breaks for acid-fuelled trips out into the desert, started renovating and decorating what they would start considering the "set" of their private "movie".[4] Laughlin started making regular trips to San Francisco to return with furnishings: red-flocked wallpaper with gold trim, a giant antique mirror that ran the length of the bar, velvet drapes, gaslight era chandeliers, period slot machines and framed photos. Naturally, he also returned with LSD and grass. The former was pure, often made by the exacting, legendary and recently deceased LSD chemist Owsley Stanley, who would ultimately be responsible for turning on most of the West Coast hippie scene. It made the group cohesive – they would take breaks from construction work to go out into the desert, get high and soak in the thermal waters – and it made them "funny" in the same way Ellen Harmon had already experienced in San Francisco:

> CL: Most of the gang in the early part of the Red Dog were guys that Don had worked with in construction down in Marin County. Heads and hippies – pre-hippies, but nevertheless, a real group of folks who were imported as such. A few of the folks that kept coming by would join into the thing. But the basic Red Dog group is the Marin County-Sausalito waterfront outlaw boat gang and the construction crews gang from down in there. All of whom stuck around to become bartenders or assistant cooks or something. I mean, the group came …
>
> And all of 'em – the punch line on the – the key phrase for the whole thing was, that when your feet hit the floor in the morning you were living upstairs over the bad guys' saloon down at the end of the block where everybody sat around at the back table waiting for the owner to come back and send 'em off to rustle somebody's cattle. That was our *image* and it worked – we were more Western, we looked more like what people expected a Western town and saloon to look like than anybody else in town.

What I call an ethos of the put-on, so typical of hippie culture all the way through late popular renditions like the *Cheech and Chong* films of the 1970s, developed in Nevada first. The ethos encouraged participants to let the straight world think you are what they want you to be, while you undermine them. It only works to

[4] Laughlin, Works, Hughes and Harmon repeatedly stressed the sense of being in a film, of course a classic drug-induced sensation.

its full power when there is no significant exoteric lore about the subculture in question. And anyway, some of the straight locals were pretty weird themselves, in Virginia City's old tradition. So not only was the summer of 1965 an ideal moment for the ethos of the put-on; the locale, Virginia City, was the perfect setting in which to cultivate it, with no exoteric lore impeding the esoteric lore:

> CL: I was encountering a lot of locals, because one of my jobs was to go up the street, get the mail. It was about four and a half blocks and all of its bars and in order to do public relations I was stopping in at every one of 'em. And *some* of the locals loved us to death. The ones who were also engaged in imagery and good times. The forty-niners' band, that was sort of – it was really a jug band, man … There was a guy named Badwater Bill who made a living by letting you use your camera to take a picture of your kid on his mule while he stood there lookin' like a miner. He was a psychologist from Dartmouth, who'd dropped out …

These were the days when many people did not know what marijuana smelled like, what that strange gleam in the eye from the effects of LSD meant. Still, some of the "straights" knew instinctively something was different about the newcomers, and rumors started:

> CL: … Almost all the rumors were true but they didn't know it. There was no reason they should be circulating them. We did have teenaged runaway girls, but they didn't know that. We did have drugs, and they didn't know that. They did know that we were armed to the teeth. One time Mark didn't get his money in time, and everybody was threatening not to work if they didn't get paid, so he let everybody go up to this old gun store and soft-core porn shop up the street, Charlie Stone's old Sixty-Two, and pick out whatever gun they liked, man, 'cause he had a credit line with Charlie. And so we wound up with Mark walking down the street with a double armload of long guns, man, and pistols sticking out of every pocket. So they were well aware of the fact that we were stranger than most. The sun would come up and somebody'd be sitting in the front, propped up in a chair against the front of the bar, or cleaning a gun –
> DW: Oh year, you had also given directions that anytime we stepped – from the time we got up – we were in character…

Most colorful of all were the group's women:

> CL: … all of the girls in this deal, and that was the band's old ladies, the waitresses, the cocktail waitresses – the cocktail waitresses were in tiny little short skirts, net stockings, feathered hair, full ostrich feathers and brocade – they were dance hall girls, to begin with. And everybody during the day when they were on the street – Leslie, Bill Ham the light show guy's old lady, had gotten on as seamstress, and she made these long skirts, in colorful, almost psychedelic, but nevertheless traditional Western long skirts, semi-hobble, and frilly front blouses. And the result was that all of our chicks on

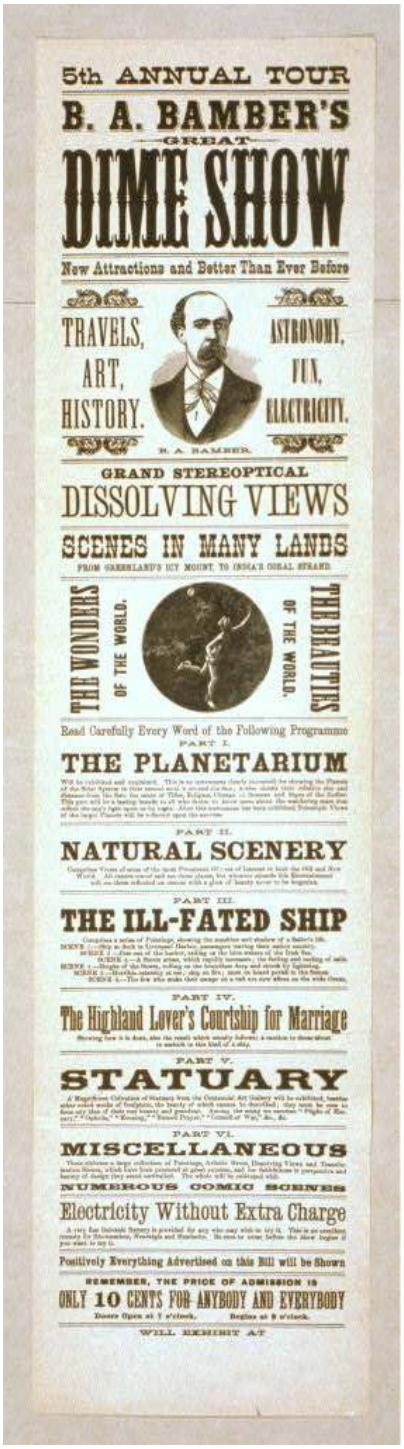
the street looked like really great 1800s hookers, you know. It was a class act all the way down the street. (Tape 1, Side B)

Lyn Hughes, Laughlin's girlfriend, became "Miss Kitty." Works, on the other hand, took the position of head bartender and the name "Comstock McLoaded". He wore gabardine brown "sheriff's pants," a red Pendleton shirt with a sleeve garter, and a handlebar moustache.

On one of his trips to San Francisco Laughlin saw Hunter and his Charlatans – who were indeed just that, still not with a single musical gig to their credit – parading in North Beach. Remembering Hunter from the Pine Street rooming houses, he invited them to audition as the Red Dog's house band. They came up to Virginia City but, alas, dropped acid before the audition[5] – musically they were worse than usual. Nonetheless, they had the look and the ethos, and they were signed. The poster that Michael Ferguson and Hunter made is now called "The Seed" by poster collectors, the first psychedelic poster:

[5] Sources: Ellen Harmon, Chandler Laughlin, Lyn Hughes

The poster evokes gaslight era art like “B. A. Bamber’s Great Dime Show” (PPOC 43):



The Red Dog poster, however, is different: typography is stretched and distorted for the word "Amazing", the word "Saloon" is given a tongue in cheek "Stars and Stripes" look", the faces of the band members have that frozen quality of late 19th century photos but with the suggestion of intoxication.

The opening advertised on this poster – June 1 – 15, 1965 – was actually delayed until June 21. On that night, another piece of subcultural formulae was born, according to Hughes and others: free-form hippie dancing. Until then rock 'n' rollers danced ever-changing formal dances – the Frug, the Hully-Gully, the Swim, the Watusi (though parents condemned their style and the way boys and girls danced separately and gyrated wildly). But from the moment the Charlatans lurched into their first song (and they were famous for not starting or ending very smoothly), the dancers lurched into a new world of movement:

> LH: The dancing style was so individual. Lucy (Hunter's "old lady") used to look like a wraith – a combination between a wraith and a Max Parrish painting. I mean she just had that etherealness … And there were other people. Zella was just – everybody moved differently. Chandler used to do this thing with his arms, you weren't sure if he was lassoing somebody or what. But it was just great, you know. Everybody had a different way. Some people were super-cool, It was a total expression of inner circumstance or feeling.
> AG: But it didn't just happen suddenly one night, dancing like that –
> LH: Well –
> AG: Or did it just happen suddenly one night?
> LH: Yeah, it did! I watched other people and then started dancing, and realized that anything went. I didn't any longer have to know a dance. So for me that was a growth experience. It was one of the things that I learned, maybe from other people that were there. So, uh, who established that kind of dancing? Somebody said that it was okay to not know how to dance, to just get out there and move. I don't know who said that, but I had never seen it before, and I certainly saw it a lot afterwards. (Giarelli: Tape 2 Side A)

This "sudden" psychedelization of a small tribe of dancers is a scene repeated frequently in the earliest mass media renditions of the counterculture, such as the American international films *Riot On Sunset Strip* (1966) and *Psych-Out* (1968), not to mention various outlaw biker exploitation films of the 1966-69 period.

The pulsing lights and protoplasmic blobs that *Newsweek* noticed a year and a half later and that would become the visual icon of the hippie aesthetic took shape at the Red Dog Saloon, evolving from Bill Ham's even earlier Pine Street basement projections. They were primitive but compelling, as Don Works and Laughlin recollect:

> CL: Bill Ham and Bob Cohen, who was an electricity and electronics competent, were commissioned by Mark to build an automated light show, 'cause Mark had seen their light shows [at Pine Street. And that was what the light show at the joint was, this box that sat up behind the drum set – and it was

> big, it was a four-by-eight box – and it had vertical axis rotating rods on which were mounted various reflecting surfaces. And then there was a color-coordinated sound separator with lights. So that there were red lights, blue lights, etcetera …
> DW: The lights would fluctuate – actually, it was one of the best light shows I think I've ever seen, man …
> CL: The other thing which we did not understand at that time, which became clear later in the psychedelic era of this game, is that the mind is an integrating organ. It attempts to integrate input. And the result is that you can effectively show any piece of film and play any piece of music, and most people's minds will make a connection between the two. So that it looks like the film is happening to the music. We learned that later. And the same thing particularly for light shows, man – if your light show is pulsating to the rhythm that is basic to the band, everything from there on looks like it's perfectly coordinated – even though it may have nothing at all to do with it. (Giarelli: Tape 1, Side B)

As the summer progressed, so did the "movie" – sometimes capturing straights who strayed too close. "Every bartender brought his own favorite gun to work with him," Laughlin recalls, "so that if you had to use a gun – which we did, occasionally, to get everybody's attention and quiet down what was turning into a fight. I mean, when you fire a shot, man, you got 60 seconds to explain to a nice, quiet audience the whole story about why they shouldn't be fighting."

Many locals loved the seeming Old West re-creation – including, at first, the sheriff, recalled Don Works. One night he came in and, following the code of the West and the unwritten rules of the Red Dog that all the people in its "movie" followed, handed his weapon over to Works, "playing" Comstock McLoaded. "Check my gun for me?" he asked.

"Sure, Sheriff," said McLoaded who took it and fired two shots down the length of the bar and then spun the cylinder. "Seems to work fine."

After an initial upset they got the sheriff calmed down and he did check his gun, but more and more locals were worrying. "All of the teenage kids were standing around on the sidewalk outside, peering in, listening to the music," recalls Laughlin. "That bothered the hell out of 'em."

As Laughlin explains, there were two worlds, what he calls "the whole downstairs and the Movie" as opposed to the upstairs:

> CL: The commercial aspect of this was not an in-crowd at all, from the opening night. You never knew who was coming in, man. The governor would have a party up, or some motorcycle gang. That was – the whole downstairs and the movie were a false front, and whatever we were doing until the bar opened during the day, was another whole scene. A few, but not too many – a whole lot of Seattle people heard the story and started showing up … And so there were a lot – there began to be a lot of strangers in the in-group, too, but all of 'em knew somebody who knew somebody. It was connected well

> enough – nobody got upstairs unless they knew pretty much – they were pretty well known. And upstairs was what – twelve, fourteen rooms? Just us – all of us." (Giarelli: tape 1, Side B)

But "ll of us" grew exponentially. Ellen Harmon came up with Alton Kelly, who would become one of the Haight-Ashbury's pioneering psychedelic poster artists. Laughlin explains:

> CL: So while this was happening, the fact of its happening was a hot topic of conversation within the various communities from which this was drawn. So we had one of the guys from down in Marin County named Sandy Boaz, man, would drive five or six people up in one of his '49 Hudsons for the weekend. And the kids form The Committee [a pioneering San Francisco experimental comedy troupe] and the North Beach club scene would put together a couple o' carloads and haul up for a week. And a lot of them, because they were working on weekends, would arrive on Tuesday or Wednesday. It was well known tat Tuesdays was our day off, when we'd all un out in the desert and drop acid and go to the hot springs together, so a lot of people would come up for that party. (Giarelli: Tape 1, Side B)

It was too good to last. In August, on a trip back from San Francisco, Laughlin and Charlatans guitarist Mike Wilhelm were arrested when police who'd stopped them "for looking weird" (Laughlin**)** found a small pill bottle full of grass in Laughlin's pocket. Relative innocents, the police never looked in the trunk to find the two kilos of marijuana there, and as for the 52 hits of acid in Wilhelm's front pocket – he and Laughlin had each taken a hit before setting out – that was still legal in California – xo say Laughlin, and Wilhelm, and Harmon and Hughes, all repeating fragments of this story. Indeed, Wilhelm recalls that when his arresting officer asked him about LSD and its effects, he gave him a hit to take at his convenience (Giarelli: Mike Wilhelm interview). Back in Virginia City, though, the report of the bust confirmed the worst fears of increasingly suspicious locals. The sheriff closed the bar and the rest of the Charlatans fled for San Francisco, ahead of further investigation by local law enforcement. Ironically, on the same day Laughlin and Wilhelm were busted, another key group of proto-hippies showed up at the Red Dog – Ken Kesey and his Merry Pranksters, to whom the Red Doggers took a lasting disliked their because a) they disrespected the Red Dog "movie" and b) some of them did hard drugs, making the Red Dog situation even more untenable (Laughlin and Works).

Back in San Francisco that fall, Harmon, poster artist Kelly, and two other friends formed the Family Dog. Their "movie" had more to do with reading Marvel Comics under the influence of psychedelics, but they were inspired by the Red Dog. In September 1965 they held "A Tribute To Dr. Strange," a dance with all the Red Dog accouterments, and suddenly 1200 people showed up in costumes reflecting a much wider range of personal movies, from Old West to Far East to comic book superhero, with similar lights and dancing as at the Red Dog. Phil Lesh, bass player for a band named The Warlocks who'd soon re-name

themselves The Grateful Dead, walked up to Harmon and said, “Lady, what this little séance needs is us”[6]

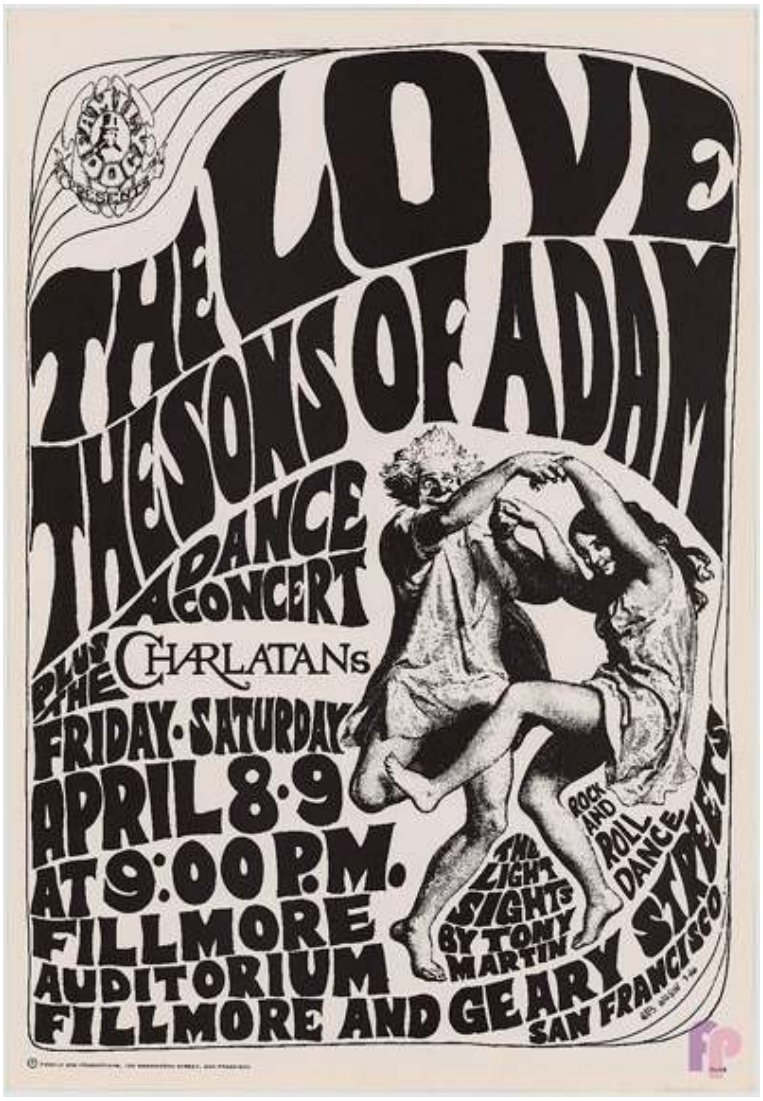
The Fanily Dog posters from August 1965 through January 1966 show the self-conscious evolution of formulae like ”put-on” gaslight era styles and a disorienting typography, the latter now inspired by comic books:

The Family Dog fell apart but reassembled in February 1966 under entrepreneur Chet Helms, whose Avalon Ballroom dances competed for the new subculture every weekend through 1966 with Bill Graham’s Fillmore Auditorium

[6] Harmon told this story as if I would already know the punchline, for she has been quoted in previous hippie histories.

via further evolutions of psychedelic poster formulae first elaborated in the Red Dog poster:

FD 1, copyright Chet Helms DBA Family Dog Productions



FD 4, copyright Chet Helms DBA Family Dog Productions

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In these two places the light shows and costumes and ethos of the put-on grew to include thousands, big enough for mass media to finally notice at the end of 1966, where we started. The Charlatans got left behind, overshadowed by the San Francisco sound's big four: the Grateful Dead, Quicksilver Messenger Service, Big Brother and the Holding Company, and Country Joe and the Fish. By 1967 psychedelia was a worldwide commodity – I wear one of its descendants, the "Flying Eyeball" tie designed from a poster for a Jimi Hendrix concert at the Fillmore, duly licensed by the estate of the late Bill Graham, as I write this. This is just one small example of the ongoing commodification of hippiedom and its descendant subcultures that began as early as 1967.

But we should give the final word to one of the original practitioners of the hippie put-on, Chandler Laughlin – who after a stint in prison for that marijuana arrest returned to San Francisco in 1967 to become the first hippie news announcer

on the first underground FM station, taking the name Travus T. Hipp, which he has used ever since in a 45-year radio career:

> CL: We did what we set out to do, which was, we got the action out of Don's front room and up to the Red Dog Saloon. But very shortly thereafter, the revelations of acid and things like that, plus – I mean, we were small stuff and woulda stayed small stuff. But behind my getting popped with Wilhelm and the Charlatans bailing for San Francisco, and all of the people who had come from San Francisco deciding that this was more fun than they could afford to be without, and Ellen and the gang putting on the dances at the first Family Dog, it became a very visible, out front social phenomenon which was rapidly identified by the establishment as the enemy. You know, so you could never get 'em cherry like that again. Where they were still wondering what you were doing when you got outta town. That's the best you can ever hope for. (Giarelli: Tape 1, Side B).

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