"An Unwavering Band of Light": Kurt Vonnegut and the Psychedelic Revolution

by

Carly Psenicka

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Carly Psenicka

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Carly Psenicka, Student — Date

Approvals:

____

Dr. Linda Strom, Thesis Advisor — Date

____

Dr. Diana Awad-Scrocco, Committee Member — Date

____

Dr. Stephanie Tingley, Committee Member — Date

____

Dr. Salvatore A. Sanders, Associate Dean of Graduate Studies — Date

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the connection of the hippies involved in the psychedelic revolution to four of the 1960s-era novels of countercultural author Kurt Vonnegut: *Cat's Cradle*, *The Sirens of Titan*, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, and *Breakfast of Champions*. Adopted as a literary idol by the college-age counterculture early on in the decade, by the end of the 1960s, when the counterculture had also hit its stride, Vonnegut became enormously successful with both counterculture and mainstream audiences. Scholars have largely attributed this success to the antiwar sentiments that characterized the nation in 1969, when Vonnegut published his antiwar novel *Slaughterhouse-Five*; consequently, when Vonnegut's connections to the youth counterculture are studied, more often than not, his works are primarily linked with countercultural antiwar and political activist groups. I argue, however, that the hippies of the psychedelic revolution also composed a large part of Vonnegut's audience, because his novels contained elements that matched their specific ideology as well as his pacifistic messages reflected the central concerns of antiwar and political activist groups. While many scholars have investigated the antiwar and political activists' appreciation of Vonnegut's professed beliefs and his writing, I posit that the less politically involved hippies also enjoyed Vonnegut's novels because of their similarities to the psychedelic experience.

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"A show of hands please: how many of you have had a teacher at any stage of your education, from the first grade until this day in May, who made you happier to be alive, prouder to be alive, than you had previously believed possible? Good! Now say the name of that teacher to someone standing near you."

Kurt Vonnegut, *If This Isn't Nice What Is?: The Graduation Speeches*

Dr. Linda Strom

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> I still think a fair amount about the sixties and trying to be a good hippie. I'm under no illusion that I understand exactly what was going on back then, but there are a few things that need saying. We were not the spaced-out, flaky, self-absorbed, wimpy, whiny flower children in movies and TV shows alleging to depict the times…. Things eventually went bad, drugs took their toll, but before they went bad, hippies did a lot of good.... We gave it our best shot, and I'm glad I was there.
>
> - Mark Vonnegut

Introduction

The Counterculture versus the Mainstream

Many scholars have cited the 1960s as one of America's most tumultuous and revolutionary decades. In *Hippie*, Barry Miles cites the years 1965 to 1971 as a period that "for better or for worse… revolutionized western – and eventually global – culture as utterly as any of the great turning points in our history." Thomas Frank describes the era in *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism*:

> For as long as America is torn by culture wars, the 1960s will remain the historical terrain of conflict…. We understand "the sixties" almost instinctively as the decade of the big change, the birthplace of our own culture, the homeland of hip, an era of which the tastes and discoveries and passions, however obscure their origins, have somehow determined the world in which we are condemned to live. (1)

Additionally, the 1960s birthed not only “our own culture,” but remain alive in the pop culture of today, according to Natasha Vargas-Cooper, author of *Mad Men Unbuttoned: A Romp through 1960s America*, a book that focuses not only on the acclaimed, 21st century television show that’s recreated the ups and downs 1960s advertising world for millions of viewers, but also on the decade itself. She writes:

> This is the shortest answer I can come up with when asked what the show *Mad Men* is about: It’s about the culture clash and contradictions that occurred during the twilight of the Eisenhower era, the great societal shake-up of the 1960s, and how that pressurized time in history formed modern America, its families, its consciousness, and its consumers. (xi)

The “culture clash” that Vargas-Cooper mentions is no small part of the 1960s. In fact, it resounded so loudly throughout the past fifty years that it’s the first thing she brings up when describing a millennial television show about the era. The two cultures at war during the decade were the mainstream culture and the counterculture. In his 1969 work *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and its Youthful Opposition*, Theodore Roszak summarizes the division as “a strict minority of the young and a handful of their adult mentors” (xii). Though he excludes certain groups from his discussion of the counterculture that some scholars might argue did comprise or contribute to it, including “more liberal youth, for whom the alpha and omega of politics is no doubt still that Kennedy style” and “old-line Marxist youth groups,” he explains his choices:

> If there is any justification for such exceptions in a discussion of youth, it must be that the counter cultural young are significant enough both in numbers and in critical force to merit independent attention. But from my own point of view, the counter culture, far more than merely "meriting" attention, desperately requires it, since I am at a loss to know where, besides among these dissenting young people and their heirs of the next few generations, the radical discontent and innovation can be found that might transform this disoriented civilization of ours into something a human being can identify as home. (xii-xiii)

The key, repeated words in Roszak's description of the counter culture are "young" and "youth," thereby classifying the mainstream, opposing culture as "old" or "adult." Even when describing his exclusion of certain youth groups, he classifies them using the description "old-line" or with cultural facets of the mainstream, like the Kennedys. Roszak goes so far as to suggest that the youth counterculture movement created all of "the radical discontent and innovation" that so many scholars describe as characterizing the 1960s. Robert Sam Anson agrees with this sentiment in *Gone Crazy and Back Again: The Rise and Fall of the Rolling Stone Generation*, writing that the 1960s were "made" by "the young men and women who grew up on Dr. Spock, puzzled their parents, saw their heroes murdered, dropped out, turned on, protested, made love, went to war, and, in the space of a decade, changed America as it has seldom been changed before" (xv). Thus, without the youth movement, without the "culture clash" between the young counterculture and the adult mainstream culture, the 1960s would not have been "the

decade of the big change" that "revolutionized western – and eventually global – culture" (Vargas-Cooper xi; Frank 1; Miles).

What characterized this counterculture composed of "college-age and adolescent young," aside from its definitive age group, were "interests… in the psychology of alienation, oriental mysticism, psychedelic drugs, and communitarian experiments," according to Roszak (xii). Of course, he seems averse to including any of the politically inclined groups that also caused quite a stir and that most scholars argue fall under the countercultural umbrella. Movements like the New Left fought for a variety of issues like free speech and economic reform, as well as the civil rights, gender equality and disarmament that specific groups like the Black Panther Party, the feminist movement and Vietnam War protestors demanded (Klatch 1-5; Lee and Shlain 127). Despite their differences, however, and although their means to the end and smaller aims might not match, the groups all shared the general objective of creating a more compassionate, equal, and peaceful world. Not only did these separate parties' end goals overlap, but all of them were primarily run by American youth. Though chiefly interested in political revolution, like Roszak's counterculture composed of "college-age and adolescent young," the New Left, civil rights, feminist and antiwar movements caught fire on college campuses (Lee and Shlain 126-127; Shapiro 4; Bloom 6).

This thesis explores the facets of one particular group of the youth counterculture, the hippies involved in the psychedelic revolution, in relation to four of the 1960s-era novels of countercultural author Kurt Vonnegut: *Cat's Cradle*, *The Sirens of Titan*, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, and *Breakfast of Champions*. Adopted as a literary idol by the college-age counterculture early on in the decade, by the end of the 1960s, when the

counterculture had also hit its stride, Vonnegut became enormously successful with both counterculture and mainstream audiences. Scholars have largely attributed this success to the antiwar sentiments that characterized the nation in 1969, when Vonnegut published his antiwar novel *Slaughterhouse-Five*; consequently, when Vonnegut's connections to the youth counterculture are studied, more often than not, his works are primarily linked with countercultural antiwar and political activist groups. I argue, however, that the hippies of the psychedelic revolution also composed a large part of Vonnegut's audience, because his novels contained elements that matched their specific ideology as well as his pacifistic messages reflected the central concerns of antiwar and political activist groups. The tales of self-growth and heightened awareness that characterize Vonnegut's novels, for example, resounded especially with the hippies who consumed psychedelic drugs in an attempt to reach greater self-understanding, enlightenment, and peace. Many of his sensory science-fiction descriptions of otherworldly creatures and planets also aligned with the hippies' drug-induced experiences and the art that emerged from these hallucinations and his writing style and themes bear resemblance to those of seminal psychedelic texts, like *Heaven & Hell, The Psychedelic Experience,* and *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*. Finally, throughout the decade, Vonnegut's beliefs not only aligned with theirs, but changed in a similar manner, as demonstrated by his novels, in particular *Breakfast of Champions*, in which he describes lacking a culture at the same time as hippie and psychedelic culture began to disappear. Thus, while scholars have investigated the antiwar and political activists' appreciation of Vonnegut's professed beliefs and his writing, I argue that the less politically involved hippies also enjoyed Vonnegut's novels because of their similarities to the psychedelic experience.

Enter Kurt Vonnegut

In addition to the vast number of young people, as Roszak mentions, “a handful of their adult mentors” also made up the counterculture. These “mentors” ranged from adults physically involved with leading the movement, such as Timothy Leary and Allen Ginsberg, to those whom the counterculture youths idolized, but who had little interest in guiding the wayward young. Among the second group was author Kurt Vonnegut. Although his first short story was published in 1950, Vonnegut didn’t experience enormous fame and success until the 1969 publication of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, at the same time the counterculture movement reached its peak (*Understanding Kurt Vonnegut* 1). The simultaneous popularity of Vonnegut and the counterculture is not a coincidence. Though “he makes no concessions to the cult bit,” that Vonnegut’s natural inclinations toward “relentless pacifism” and “distrusting institutions” appealed to the college-age counterculture that felt the same couldn’t be helped (Kramer 26; Sheed 11). His ideals matched the various counterculture movements’ so closely that many countercultural college students adopted him as a literary hero. Those ideals included “simple decency and love,” pacifism, “civil rights, women’s equality” and “environmentalism,” and Vonnegut’s use of these principles as themes in his works helped him find an early audience with the counterculture (*Understanding Kurt Vonnegut* 14; Sumner 15).

Cat’s Cradle, the first of his novels to attract a following, “caught hold with a younger audience – the college crowd that, by the end of the decade, made Vonnegut the most popular writer in America. Though still not widely known in the early 1960s Vonnegut was building up a cult following with his paperback sales” (*Understanding Kurt Vonnegut* 54). Many scholars attribute the popularity of this particular novel to its

anti-war message. The baby boomers that comprised the counterculture were not only the first generation born into a world with nuclear weaponry, but also experienced ongoing international tension in the form of the Cold War and incoming, escalating international tension in Vietnam that almost required their participation with the installment of a military draft and mounting domestic protest. Not surprisingly, many of them were against nuclear arms and war in general, and so they appreciated an author who clearly also held these beliefs. *Cat's Cradle* is, most simply, "the story of two doomsday devices, either of which can lead the human race to the apocalyptic end it seems destined for" (*Understanding Kurt Vonnegut* 56). Vonnegut's clear distaste for such "doomsday devices" in the novel, one of which is the atom bomb, matched that of the mounting number of college students joining in anti-war protests and promoting peace. Because of this shared ideology, it was easy for the early counterculture to pick up Vonnegut as one of their "handful of adult mentors" (Roszak xii).

Vonnegut's success and popularity expanded alongside the counterculture throughout the decade. His 1965 novel *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* contained the pacifistic takeaway message "god damn it, you've got to be kind," mirroring the ideals of peace and compassion the counterculture increasingly promoted (129). Thus, the book found an even wider audience than *Cat's Cradle* had, since Vonnegut had found a home in the youth counterculture and it was ever-growing. The novel was also the first to gain positive critical attention (Shields 186). Gregory Sumner claims in *Unstuck in Time: A Journey through Kurt Vonnegut's Life and Novels* that "what makes this work a breakthrough… is its unabashed heart," its clear missive of kindness and harmony that also characterized the ideology of the counterculture (105). In this way, the ideals shared

by the counterculture and Vonnegut spread to a slightly wider and more mainstream audience because of the critical attention the novel received. The counterculture continued to grow by the millions, supporting Vonnegut's works all the while, so that by the time *Slaughterhouse-Five* was published in 1969, it had hit an all-time high, and Vonnegut's popularity came into full bloom alongside it.

The enormous anti-war protests of the counterculture were broadcast to mainstream televisions across the nation in 1969 alongside graphic footage of the aggression and violence in Vietnam. By that time, "twenty thousand Americans had already been killed in action" and "a hundred and ten thousand were wounded," yet the war appeared far from over (Lee and Shlain 211). Most Americans now shared the anti-war sentiments of the counterculture as a result, so when *Slaughterhouse-Five* was published, an enormous audience welcomed it with open arms. The novel focused on Vonnegut's experience in World War II and presented a clear anti-war attitude that mirrored the general feeling of the nation. Vonnegut's name had spread throughout the burgeoning counterculture, and, now that the mainstream shared his and the counterculture's pacifistic outlook, he experienced even greater fame and success. As Sumner explains, because of both the earlier "embrace of *Cat's Cradle* and other experimental novels by an emerging youth counterculture" and "the publication of *Slaughterhouse-Five*… in the midst of the Vietnam trauma," "the book… made Kurt Vonnegut a household name" (4).

Another phenomenon occurring alongside the nation's concurrence regarding the Vietnam War was the mainstream culture's co-option of countercultural trends. Once the cause of a tense "culture clash" that defined the decade, the fashions, vocabulary,

symbols, art, and music (to name a few facets) of the youth counterculture were increasingly used by advertisers to sell products to mainstream youth who liked the spirit of rebellion the counterculture embodied, but who didn't have the spirit to actually rebel (Vargas-Cooper xi). As the 1970s began, magazine, television, and radio ads for countercultural products seeped into the homes of the mainstream until even the adults who once disdained the movement were swept up in its trends. This adoption of countercultural fads can also explain Vonnegut's heightened popularity after the publication of *Slaughterhouse-Five*. Since the novels so resonated with the suddenly fashionable counterculture, they, like so many other countercultural artifacts, became trendy to the mainstream.

In 1973, just after the publication of *Breakfast of Champions*, literary scholar Jerome Klinkowitz published *The Vonnegut Statement: Original Essays on the Life and Work of Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.* The book compiled critical essays about Vonnegut after his sudden prominence following *Slaughterhouse-Five*. Klinkowitz explains the phenomenon that led to the compilation:

> His novels, many of which were virtually ignored at their first publication, were all back in print, selling millions; *Slaughterhouse-Five*, his most recent book, was a popular, literary, and academic success, and graduate schools across America were accepting dissertations on his work. Even Vonnegut's publisher, Seymour Lawrence, seemed interested in reading a critical manuscript on the whole phenomenon. (Klinkowitz and Somer 2)

Despite these studies, dissertations, "pamphlets, symposia, and special numbers of critical journals" on Vonnegut, *The Vonnegut Statement* was the first book of critical essays with Vonnegut and his works as its subject, and it established Vonnegut as not only a popular author, but one who deserved academic recognition, as well (Klinkowitz and Somer 2-3).

The "thesis" of *The Vonnegut Statement* is "that *Slaughterhouse-Five* constituted a resolution of sorts to themes and techniques developing throughout his previous work; and that although he was certainly producing more… it seemed safe to offer analysis of this first, twenty-year phase of Vonnegut's career" (Klinkowitz and Somer 3). This thesis is now well known and accepted by Vonnegut scholars; Sumner summarizes it, "Kurt Vonnegut's 'war story' would have to wait to be told, germinating for years until he could arrive at a form and a language to convey what he saw in all its surreality" (18). The theory is that Vonnegut worked his way up to his "masterpiece," *Slaughterhouse-Five*, "the novel on the Allied bombing near the end of" WWII on Dresden that he survived, by including parcels of the experience throughout his earlier works (*Understanding Kurt Vonnegut* 1; *Conversations with Kurt Vonnegut* xi). The experience was too traumatic to detail all at once, so he left it in the themes and details of "his previous work." Sumner's descriptions of Vonnegut's novels include specifics of each that demonstrate this build-up to *Slaughterhouse-Five*: the "worried" "commentary on the scientifically engineered future" in 1952's *Player Piano*; protagonist Malachi Constant's literally mindless "military service" in 1959's *The Sirens of Titan*; the historical setting for 1961's *Mother Night*: "Hitler's Reich," which made the novel "more disturbing and harder to engage with detachment than in his first two books"; the "insider's view of the military-industrial complex Vonnegut had seen after the war… and the indifference he

observed to the uses made of their discoveries, especially among those who came of age before World War II" offered in *Cat's Cradle,* an expansion on the themes of *Player Piano* that specifically names WWII as the point of worry; and "the further unburdening of Vonnegut's war story" in *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater*, which depicts "the journey of a combat veteran haunted by the fragility of human materials, so ready at any moment to combine with oxygen and burn" (22; 39; 59; 81-82; 105). Of this 1965 novel, the last before *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Sumner also writes, "We can see the author nearing his destination on the long road back to Dresden" (105).

The themes and particulars underlying this theory all surround the topic of war in Vonnegut's earliest novels, because *Slaughterhouse-Five,* his "masterpiece," was a "war story"; thus, certain aspects in the novels leading up to *Slaughterhouse-Five*, to validate the theory, also have to involve war (*Understanding Kurt Vonnegut* 1; Sumner 18). Yet this is also because, as Vonnegut scholar William Rodney Allen explains, "It is tempting to see POW Vonnegut's chance survival of the obliteration of Dresden as the central event in his life," though Vonnegut has mentioned, "the importance of Dresden in my life has been considerably exaggerated" (*Conversations with Kurt Vonnegut* xi; Standish 94). This doesn't entirely discount the theory. In fact, as Charles J. Shields details in his authoritative biography of Vonnegut, *And So It Goes*, the author "had been taking unsuccessful runs at" *Slaughterhouse-Five* "ever since he got out of the service" (8). Certainly, some of Vonnegut's ideas for this long-attempted work made their way into the successful "runs" that he published before it.

The theory does, however, "exaggerate… the importance of Dresden," and consequently war, in Vonnegut's works, just as he explained it (Standish 94). This causes

most scholars who investigate Vonnegut's novels in connection with the counterculture to focus primarily on their links to the anti-war movement and the political activism surrounding it. This thesis, however, seeks to prove that members of counterculture groups other than Vietnam protest and activist movements enjoyed Vonnegut's novels, as well, and for different reasons than his pacifistic messages and his strong anti-war sentiments. In this introduction, I've outlined the major connections drawn between Vonnegut's pacifism in *Cat's Cradle*, *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater*, and *Slaughterhouse-Five* and the anti-war movement of the counterculture and mentioned some of the criticism on the topic. In addition to these sources, many other scholars have investigated the links between these novels and the antiwar and political movements of the counterculture.[1] As previously mentioned, however, the counterculture encompassed several distinct movements with the general goal of a more compassionate, peaceful world, but their means to this end were different, and not all of them were so actively concerned with protesting the war or altering American politics.

What Interested Hippies

The hippie movement most notably refrained from activism and protest, especially as the decade wore on (Miles 10). Their main concerns, as Roszak detailed, were "the psychology of alienation, oriental mysticism, psychedelic drugs, and communitarian experiments." They believed that pursuing these interests would lead them to a greater understanding of themselves and, consequently, a heightened understanding of the outside world. Thus, before they could take on any political cause, such as the Vietnam War, women's rights, civil rights, or free speech, they first had to have a firm grasp on themselves and their immediate surroundings. Once this self-peace

was achieved, they could feel at peace with the outer world, and there would be no need for protest or activism. Their belief was that, if everyone could be turned on by "mysticism, psychedelic drugs, communitarian experiments," or even "the psychology of alienation" via integral texts, they would meet with the same self-peace and understanding that the hippies had and, afterward, come to harmonic terms with the rest of the world. Peace would be achieved on a global scale, one individual at a time, "only by stepping outside society… to look at it objectively – to see what was wrong with it, to see how they'd like to change it" (Miles 10). For the hippies, it wasn't about getting involved; it was about "going with the flow" (Wolfe 141).

The hippie movement, like other counterculture groups, saw millions of young people in its ranks by the end of the 1960s (Lee and Shlain 252). Since Vonnegut attained such massive popularity within the counterculture and outside of it in 1969, it can be assumed that a good number of these millions appreciated Vonnegut's novels as much as those involved in the antiwar and political movements, despite their lack of involvement in the protests and activism to which so many scholars link the works. The hippies wholly supported the ideals of peace, love, and compassion that connected Vonnegut to the more politically active countercultural groups, but, in addition to these facets of the novels, Vonnegut's works featured elements that mirrored the hippies' intense focus on self-growth to achieve these ideals. Because of the resemblance of their philosophy in Vonnegut's texts, the hippies were particularly drawn to him and his books.

For example, Vonnegut's heroes "are so profoundly alienated from society and self, so utterly overwhelmed by feelings of futility and shame, they lapse into complete

helplessness," according to Lawrence R. Broer in *Sanity Plea: Schizophrenia in the Novels of Kurt Vonnegut* (3). Broer goes on to write that the alienation of these "war-scarred, death-haunted heroes" is because they "are so dehumanized by anonymous bureaucracies, computers, and authoritarian institutions, and so immobilized by guilt and fear, they… turn into disembodied creatures with disintegrating minds" (3). While the hippies may not have concerned themselves with the political issues and worrisome scientific advancements Broer claims are the root of Vonnegut's heroes' estrangement from both themselves and society, Vonnegut's clear explorations of the "psychology of alienation" in his novels interested the hippies, as Roszak suggests such studies did.

Vonnegut's fictional religions also appealed to the hippies, who were interested not only in "oriental mysticism," as Roszak explains, but an enormous variety of other religious and spiritual groups promoting "imaginative speculation and belief" (Miles 20-22). Vonnegut creates the Church of God the Utterly Indifferent in *The Sirens of Titan* and Bokononism in *Cat's Cradle* for readers with such interests to peruse. He also attracted to hippie readers who were strictly Eastern mystics, as well. Klinkowitz describes 1960s and '70s students' views of Vonnegut as "the font of mystic wisdom," and, though not the most flattering article on oriental mysticism, Vonnegut explores the topic himself in his 1969 article for *Esquire* "Yes, We Have No Nirvanas," about Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, perhaps the largest proponent of such mysticism for the hippies (*Vonnegut in Fact* 19; Chryssides).

Additionally, according to Roszak's description of their interests, hippies were drawn to Vonnegut's work and person because of his affinity for "communitarian experiments." At the end of *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater*, protagonist Eliot Rosewater

adopts all of the children in poverty-stricken Rosewater County in order to ensure that they inherit his massive wealth, thereby creating an extended family. In this way, Vonnegut demonstrates the enormous amount of good he believes such extended families could do for society, a conviction he frequently expounded upon in interviews and lectures, such as one with Art Unger in the December 1971 edition of *Ingenue*:

> I think that most of the unhappiness – the indescribable malaise – that people are feeling these days is really a longing for a large *permanent* family. The ideal commune would be one in which the people have actually grown up together – that's the sort of commune humans have lived in for most of their history on earth. So it's better if you have bloodlines. But, if you can't, you can at least have a lot of people. (16)

This faith in the efficacy of communal lifestyles and extended families matched the hippies', many of whom started communes in the 1960s with the purpose of not only curing loneliness and unhappiness, but also benefiting society in various ways (Miles 20).

The hippies appreciated Vonnegut's works and lifestyle for many reasons; the above are only a few that could easily be further investigated and expanded upon. Since there are so many facets to the hippie movement and elements of Vonnegut's beliefs and writing that connect with each, it is easier to explore one characteristic of the movement and the ways Vonnegut's novels appealed to the hippie readers associated with that one, rather than attempting to link the broader movement with his work as a whole. Therefore, I have chosen to specifically investigate the reasons why psychedelically-inclined hippie readers of the 1960s were attracted to Vonnegut's novels from this time. Like the antiwar

protest and activist groups that are often studied in connection to Vonnegut's 1960s-era works, the hippies of the psychedelic revolution promoted and celebrated peace and compassion, so they also enjoyed the pacifistic messages of Vonnegut's books; however, certain aspects of their ideology and lifestyle matched other elements in Vonnegut's works and appealed to them more. Thus, these specific characteristics warrant study. Vonnegut's focus on self-growth and emphasis on awareness, in particular, interested psychedelically-inclined hippie readers, because much of the philosophy behind psychedelic drug use centered on this kind of enlightenment, awareness, and self-development. Additionally, his detailed, sensory descriptions of fantastic, science-fiction landscapes paralleled the drug-induced hallucinations that hippies were having and the art that emerged from these trips, and his subject matter and writing style matched seminal texts of the psychedelic revolution, such as *The Doors of Perception*, *The Psychedelic Experience*, and *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*.

The psychedelic drugs that informed these texts were one of the primary interests of the counterculture as a whole, as Roszak states. Martin A. Lee and Bruce Shlain write in *Acid Dreams: The Complete Social History of LSD* that "the LSD story is inseparable from the cherished hopes and shattered illusions of the sixties generation" (xxv). Most countercultural groups, however, were focused on changing the world, and psychedelic drugs "could dredge up all sorts of weirdness that had little to do with the world of *Realpolitik*; if anything, all the psychic debris was likely to be more distracting than stimulating when it came to questions of strategy and organization" to which political and activist groups were dedicated (Lee and Shlain 166). The hippies' devotion to self-growth, though, was best served by the use of psychedelic drugs, which "altered

consciousness" and helped to "expand the human mind" (Hayes 3). At the end of the decade, as other countercultural groups turned away from psychedelic drugs in favor of more intense protest and activism, the hippies used more and in greater numbers as their movement expanded, evidenced by the "close to half a million people" at the 1969 Woodstock music festival, where "nearly everybody was buzzed on something" (Miles 10; Lee and Shlain 252). Since the hippie movement concerned itself with self-growth through psychedelic drugs and psychedelia more than political and activist movements' "questions of strategy and organization" with which psychedelic drugs interfered, I am focusing on the psychedelically-inclined hippies of this time as readers of Vonnegut's novels; by numbers and by dedication, hippies were the main proponents of the psychedelic revolution, so an emphasis on them in this investigation of the revolution and its interpretations of Vonnegut, rather than psychedelically-inclined political and activist groups', is sensible.

A focus on the psychedelically-inclined hippies also adds to the existing conversation regarding Vonnegut's connections to the counterculture. Scholars have tended to center on Vonnegut's 1960s era novels in relation to countercultural antiwar and activist movements, and, consequently, they've analyzed these novels primarily for messages of war and peace. The hippies' lack of concern and involvement with political and antiwar protest calls for an examination of different details of Vonnegut's works not necessarily regarding his stance on and experience with war, particularly those details that relate to the psychedelic experiences that so many hippies had. Thus, this thesis seeks to add to the scholarship on Vonnegut and the counterculture not only by examining a previously unexplored countercultural group's relationship with Vonnegut's novels, but

by analyzing Vonnegut's novels for elements other than those concerned with war and peace that would've appealed to this group. More exactly, I examine the psychedelically-inclined hippies' appreciation of Vonnegut's works and the characteristics of his novels that would've specifically interested them beyond his pacifism and antiwar sentiments, such as his emphasis on awareness and self-understanding and his fantastic sci-fi descriptions that matched their otherworldly experiences with psychedelic drugs.

My primary argument also strives to turn away from the traditional thesis regarding the counterculture and Vonnegut's work that is so often explored, that which involves Vonnegut's connection to 1960s antiwar activism and political movements. While that study is important and valid, I feel that it leaves out integral counterculture groups that also appreciated Vonnegut's novels and helped to compose his increasing readership: the hippie movement and the psychedelic revolution, movements that, more often than not, intertwined. Steven Heller illustrates this entanglement and emphasizes the importance of it within the counterculture as a whole in *Sex, Rock & Optical Illusions*: "During the mid-1960s, San Francisco was at the vortex of the counterculture. The hippies prevailed, hallucinogenic drugs were plentiful and rock and roll knew no bounds" (9). By locating the center of the counterculture in San Francisco, the known hippie haven, Heller demonstrates the major impact that the hippie movement and the hallucinogenic drugs that accompanied it had on the broader counterculture. Furthermore, as Lee and Shlain demonstrate, LSD had an especial influence on the entire counterculture, and the hippies comprised the largest part of the LSD-consuming population. Any assessment of the period that does not include the hippies and their involvement with the psychedelic revolution is bound to be incomplete. Since the

psychedelically-inclined hippies took up so much space in the counterculture and therefore helped compose Vonnegut's audience in the 1960s, they must have found certain characteristics of his work particularly appealing, and, in order to help complete the scholarship on Vonnegut and the counterculture, I will analyze his books in this thesis for those elements that particularly attracted readers from the psychedelic revolution and the hippie movement.

Vonnegut's growing popularity throughout the decade and enormous success at its end suggest that he had a wider audience than just those young people involved in activist and political movements. While many scholars have traced Vonnegut's success back to the young adults and college students who made up the wider counterculture and observed that Vonnegut's readership expanded alongside the broader movement, indicating a sustained connection, it should be noted that when *The Sirens of Titan* and *Slaughterhouse-Five* experienced peak popularity in 1969, so did the psychedelic revolution and the hippie movement, in particular; it can thus be assumed that a decent portion of Vonnegut's countercultural audience participated in one or both of these mammoth movements, and, therefore, the features of his novels that appealed to this specific crowd warrant scholarship. Additionally, for a study of Vonnegut's links to the 1960s counterculture to be complete, it must examine all of the groups that fall under the countercultural umbrella, especially such large groups as the hippie movement and psychedelic revolution that influenced the overarching counterculture enormously and are thus inextricable from the broad label of "counterculture." I hope to add to the conversation regarding Vonnegut's countercultural connections by investigating his ties to the hippie movement, and, in particular, the psychedelic revolution.

Why the Psychedelically-Inclined Hippies Also Enjoyed Vonnegut

In order to prove that Vonnegut's works appealed to the less politically and more psychedelically-inclined hippie readers, I've chosen to analyze four Vonnegut novels popular during the 1960s and early 1970s for elements that fans of the psychedelic appreciated. Each chapter of this thesis explores how a different novel aligned with the beliefs and experiences of the psychedelically-inclined hippies in order to prove that this countercultural audience enjoyed Vonnegut's works as well as members of the antiwar protest and activist movements, though for different reasons that connect with their specific ideology. These four novels (in the order in which they are examined in the thesis), *Cat's Cradle*, *The Sirens of Titan*, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, and *Breakfast of Champions*, all share an overarching theme of awareness integral to Vonnegut's works. Loree Rackstraw writes in "Quantum Leaps in the Vonnegut Mindfield" that "his novels cheerfully lure us into questioning the nature of being and reality: why is there something instead of nothing? How do we know? Such questions inevitably lead to a recognition of complementarity: we cannot 'know' anything without being" (51). Psychedelic drugs led users to the same questions and, sometimes, seeming answers regarding "the nature of being and reality" that Vonnegut explores in his novels. Thus, the hippies who used psychedelics in order to gain heightened awareness appreciated novels like Vonnegut's that asked and attempted to answer those questions in which they were so interested.

Additionally, *Cat's Cradle*, *The Sirens of Titan*, and *Slaughterhouse-Five* have sci-fi elements that parallel psychedelic experiences and the art, music, and fashions that emerged from them. *Cat's Cradle* depicts a post-apocalyptic world that, in some ways, mirrors the altered reality psychedelic drug users experienced during their trips.

Vonnegut's descriptions of this apocalypse are reminiscent of trends in psychedelic art and music, as well, like op art and guitar feedback that characterized psychedelic rock. The illustration of Mercury Vonnegut provides in *The Sirens of Titan* is similar to the colorful patterns that psychedelic drug users hallucinated, psychedelic artists recreated, and with which psychedelic enthusiasts decorated their homes and themselves. The planetary adventures he writes in *Slaughterhouse-Five* have links to psychedelic culture, too. Psychedelic drug users often reported paranormal encounters akin to those the protagonist Billy Pilgrim has with aliens, known as Tralfamadorians, and these experiences were depicted in psychedelic art, particularly on posters for psychedelic rock concerts.

These novels also share similarities to seminal psychedelic texts. *Cat's Cradle* presents an investigation of good and evil like those in Aldous Huxley's drug-influenced books *The Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell*. Protagonist Malachi Constant's journey in *The Sirens of Titan* through space and self is much like the psychedelic drug journey through which Timothy Leary takes readers in *The Psychedelic Experience*, his manual for tripping based on *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. In addition to its takeaway phrase and message "so it goes" that reflects the beliefs of Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters as reported in Tom Wolfe's *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test,* the postmodern style of *Slaughterhouse-Five* is reminiscent of other postmodern texts that psychedelic enthusiasts enjoyed because of their fragmented style and subjective narration, such as Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, William Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*, and Allen Ginsberg's "Howl."

Breakfast of Champions, though it doesn't contain the sci-fi elements of *Cat's Cradle*, *The Sirens of Titan* and *Slaughterhouse-Five*, does hold a message of hope that the entire counterculture desperately needed in the early 1970s, when the novel was published and the counterculture was all but dismantled. The hippies appreciated the promise of hope Vonnegut offers amidst the crumbling culture that he portrays in the novel and that affected disinherited members of the counterculture at the time of its publication, and that the message came through Vonnegut's interpretation of a painting, one that resembled minimalist psychedelic art, meant something to the readers from the defunct psychedelic revolution.

That Vonnegut's work has connections to the counterculture is no secret. Scholars have explored the various links his novels held for the antiwar movement for decades, and the pacifistic messages of his texts appealed to the counterculture as a whole. I surmise, however, that the hippies of the 1960s, and especially those involved in the psychedelic revolution, would've appreciated Vonnegut's works for reasons beyond his pacifism, as outlined above. While many scholars have investigated the antiwar and political activists' esteem for Vonnegut's professed beliefs and his writing, I argue that the less politically involved hippies also enjoyed Vonnegut's novels because of their similarities to the psychedelic experience.

Chapter 1

Introduction: Cat's Cradle Attracts the Counterculture

Numerous academics, including Vonnegut scholars Gregory Sumner and William Rodney Allen, as mentioned in the introduction, have observed connections between *Cat's Cradle* and the 1960s counterculture and credit it as the novel that initially drew members of the counterculture to Vonnegut's works and imagined persona. A basic temporal link between the movement and the novel exists since the novel's publication in 1963 coincided with the beginnings of the counterculture, and scholars have expounded upon this connection primarily by noting the similarities of the work to the countercultural anti-war attitudes. Most members of the counterculture were Baby Boomers, the first generation born into a world with nuclear arms. With the ever-present threat of nuclear warfare looming over their youth, they could easily identify with "the story of two doomsday devices, either of which can lead the human race to the apocalyptic end it seems destined for" that Vonnegut creates in *Cat's Cradle* (*Understanding Kurt Vonnegut* 56). Margot A. Henriksen explains the countercultural appreciation of the novel on this basis in *Dr. Strangelove's America: Society and Culture in the Atomic Age*, describing the novel as "a symbolic portrait of a nuclear scientist which captured the rising countercultural concern about the moral void that had swallowed America in this scientific and technological era" (188).

The basic plot of *Cat's Cradle* follows protagonist Jonah to the island of San Lorenzo, "a banana republic… fifty miles long and twenty miles wide" in the Caribbean (*Cat's Cradle* 79-81). There he meets up with "the three children of Dr. Felix Hoenikker,

one of the so-called 'Fathers' of the first atomic bomb" and recently departed (*Cat's Cradle* 6). He comes to realize that Dr. Hoenikker created another doomsday device before his death called ice-nine, which his children have split up, and their carelessness with the creation leads to an apocalypse. Doubtlessly, any person living in a world suddenly equipped with nuclear weaponry could appreciate *Cat's Cradle's* concern with morality in regards to scientific advancements, but the members of the counterculture felt an especial connection with the novel because of their overarching countercultural ideals of peace, compassion and equality (Sumner 84; Henriksen 309).

Some countercultural groups, however, while still maintaining attitudes similar to the overarching counterculture, were not as involved in the anti-war and nuclear disarmament ventures to which many scholars attribute the book's popularity with the counterculture. At a 1965 anti-war rally in Berkeley, for example, Ken Kesey told 15,000 listeners that "there's only one thing's gonna do any good at all… And that's everybody just look at it, look at the war, and turn your backs and say… Fuck it," while his band of Merry Pranksters wore Day-Glo costumes and played "Chinese music" behind him (Wolfe 224-225). The Merry Pranksters were a small part of the larger group of hippies that other countercultural "movement activists looked on… with disdain. They couldn't see how these people could spend their time taking drugs, making music, meditating and contemplating the void when people were being murdered by their own government in a nondeclared war" (Miles 10).

Most hippies shared the same peaceful values as other countercultural groups, but they weren't as politically active because, as Tom Wolfe continually demonstrates in his account of the Merry Pranksters' escapades, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, they were

more concerned with their personal peace versus widespread peace. To illustrate this sentiment in relation to the Merry Pranksters' Vietnam rally antics, Wolfe uses a Joachim Wach quote that reads, "tends to react against political disorder because he is concerned with the deep basic religious experience, the deepest sources of life; transient politics are insignificant to him" (216). To reach this religious experience, the hippies turned, more often than not, to psychedelic drugs; after having their own religious experiences, they felt the best way to turn others on to peace was not through protest, but through this psychedelic awakening (Wolfe 147-148). Kesey believed, for instance, in "whole multitudes of people joining hands in a clump and walking away from the war" after having the psychedelic experience (Wolfe 235). Early hippies like the Merry Pranksters spread the word of spiritual enlightenment and the drugs necessary to reach it so effectively that by 1969, millions of countercultural youth were directly involved in the oft-disdained psychedelic revolution, and millions of mainstream Americans were enjoying the offshoots of the psychedelic drug experience: music, art, fashion and culture (Lee and Shlain 253-254).

At the same time as the psychedelic revolution grew, "Vonnegut was building up a cult following with his paperback sales," beginning with *Cat's Cradle* in 1963 (*Understanding Kurt Vonnegut* 54). Although the counterculture as a whole composed this cult following, it can be assumed that different factions of the whole appreciated different things about this novel, since different groups had different concerns. Countercultural activists appreciated the book's strong nuclear disarmament message, as many scholars have noted, but hippies more involved in the psychedelic revolution and

less involved in political action, a decent portion of the counterculture, could enjoy it for other reasons.

The science-fiction details of *Cat's Cradle* and Vonnegut's examination of religion, good and evil, and awareness in the novel aligned with the hippies' psychedelic interests and beliefs. Psychedelically-inclined readers could relate the science fiction elements of *Cat's Cradle* to their psychedelic experiences. The altered reality of a world with ice-9, one of the "two doomsday devices," often parallels the altered reality psychedelic drug users envisioned during their trips. These readers also appreciated the exploration of good and evil that the novel's fictional religion, Bokononism, offers, since much of the early psychedelic experience and ethos was based upon greater spiritual understanding and the juxtaposition of good and evil present in Aldous Huxley's *The Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell*. Psychedelic art and literature that emerged later in the 1960s continued this trend, so even mainstream readers familiar with traditional psychedelic culture could relate the basis of Bokononism to the psychedelic. Although the counterculture appreciated the nuclear disarmament message of *Cat's Cradle*, it was not the sole reason for the cult following initiated by the novel; its sci-fi alternate reality and examination of good and evil through a fictional religion drew in the hippies of the psychedelic revolution.

Microscopic Earth-Shakers: Ice-Nine and LSD Alter the World

The fictional creation *Cat's Cradle* centers upon, ice-nine, is a new type of ice "as hard as a desk – with a melting point of… one-hundred-and-thirty degrees" (*Cat's Cradle* 46). It's "a new way for the atoms of water to stack and lock, to freeze" and, if one shard

of a crystal of ice-nine finds its way into any body of water, it will teach the hydrogen and oxygen atoms "the novel way in which to stack and lock, to crystallize, to freeze" (*Cat's Cradle* 45-47). Therefore, if a shard of ice-nine falls into a stream that flows to a river that flows to an ocean, all of the bodies of water would freeze, "and that would be the end of the world" (*Cat's Cradle* 50). This is how the fictional world of *Cat's Cradle* ends: with a tiny shard of ice-nine landing in the wrong hands.

Originally, ice-nine was a request on the part of a Marine general who "felt that one of the aspects of progress should be that Marines no longer had to fight in mud" (*Cat's Cradle* 43). A capsule of ice-nine would effectively freeze the mud the Marines had to fight in, and any soldier "could carry more than enough of the stuff to free an armored division bogged down in the Everglades… under the nail of his little finger" (*Cat's Cradle* 43). Interestingly, at the same time as *Cat's Cradle* was being written and published, the U.S. government was searching for ways "to develop a speech-inducing drug for use in intelligence interrogations" (Lee and Shlain 3). One of the results of these government experiments was lysergic acid diethylamide or LSD, the drug that ignited the psychedelic revolution.

Like ice-nine, a miniscule amount of LSD could lead to enormous alterations. The creator of the substance, Dr. Albert Hofmann, recalls the first time "he accidentally absorbed a small dose through his fingertips, and soon he was overcome by 'a remarkable but not unpleasant state of intoxication… characterized by an intense stimulation of the imagination and an altered state of awareness of the world" (Lee and Shlain xviii). Though initially government-sanctioned, the drug made its way into the hands of doctors and, eventually, into the bodies of patients, who spread the word throughout their

communities, and even CIA agents who experimented with it passed it on to their colleagues and friends. Of course, the government never meant for the drug to escape its grasp, just as the fictional U.S. government in *Cat's Cradle* never meant for ice-nine to even exist, let alone cause planetary destruction. Although some theorists question the government's role in perpetuating LSD throughout the country in the 1960s and suggest that it may have gone so far as to disseminate the drug to distract rattled youths from Vietnam, the government most likely did not intend for the drug to cause widespread change (Lee and Shlain 285-286). In this way, LSD is a kind of real ice-nine; originally engineered to assist the military, it escaped the government's clutches and caused massive alterations to the country and countless citizens' minds. Thankfully, though, the accidental release of LSD did not have apocalyptic results.

The general population didn't realize the government's involvement with LSD until after the psychedelic heyday, however, so these similarities between LSD and ice-nine wouldn't be realized by readers involved in the 1960s psychedelic revolution at the time of *Cat's Cradle*'s publication. The likenesses to the psychedelic experience they observed stem from the alteration of the world post-ice-nine. The "intense stimulation of the imagination and altered state of awareness of the world" users gained from LSD engendered good and bad experiences alike, "a range of responses moving from extremes of anxiety to extremes of pleasure" (*The Varieties of Psychedelic Experience* 5). Drs. Robert Masters and Jean Houston characterize LSD trips in *The Varieties of Psychedelic Experience: The Classic Guide to the Effects of LSD on the Human Psyche*:

> Changes in visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, gustatory, and kinesthetic perception; changes in experiencing time and space; changes in the rate

> and content of thought; hallucinations; vivid images – eidetic images – seen with the eyes closed; greatly heightened awareness of color;… and, in general, apprehension of a world that has slipped the chains of normal categorical ordering. (5)

These symptomatic changes in perception and anxieties about a chaotic world brought about by LSD could lead to hallucinatory experiences similar to those post-apocalyptic scenes described by Vonnegut in *Cat's Cradle*. Psychedelic art and music based upon the drug experience depict scenes akin to his vivid imagery of the changed world, and the tendency of LSD to reveal the disorder of the world in surreal ways matches the *Cat's Cradle* storyline, in which the planet's turmoil, illustrated by an imaginative and brilliantly described apocalypse, is uncovered by a tiny crystal of ice-nine.

Jonah describes the moment the ice-nine falls into the sea:

> There was a sound like that of the gentle closing of a portal as big as the sky, the great door of heaven being closed softly. It was a grand AH-WHOOM. I opened my eyes – and all the sea was *ice-nine*. The moist green earth was a blue-white pearl. The sky darkened. *Borasisi*, the sun, became a sickly yellow ball, tiny and cruel. The sky was filled with worms. The worms were tornadoes. I looked up at the sky where the bird had been. An enormous worm with a violet mouth was directly overhead. It buzzed like bees. It swayed. With obscene peristalsis, it ingested air. (261)

This description contains some of the classic, general elements characteristic of an LSD trip: "changes in visual and auditory perception; greatly heightened awareness of color; and apprehension of a world that has slipped the chains of normal categorical ordering" (*The Varieties of Psychedelic Experience* 5). "Psychedelic apocalypse," in general, is a "moment or phase definitive of the psychedelic experience," and the particular details of this scene, specific sounds and visuals, have also been reported by psychedelic drug users and depicted by psychedelically influenced artists (Reising 528).

In *The Varieties of Psychedelic Experience: The Classic Guide to the Effects of LSD on the Human Psyche*, Masters and Houston publish first-person accounts of the experiences of LSD users. One of the first examples they record deals with an apocalyptic vision "definitive of the psychedelic experience" (Reising 258). The user, referred to as S, reports:

> I closed my eyes and experienced a vision of the future that unfolded in vivid colors before my closed eyes and was accompanied by voices that were audible, however, only inside my head. I found myself and the rest of mankind standing together on the foothills of the earth, being addressed by two splendid and luminous figures many hundreds of miles high…. They told us that they were the elders of this particular part of the cosmos and had lost their patience with the human creatures of the earth. The recalcitrance of greedy, warring, barbarous mankind had overexceeded itself and now that nuclear power had been discovered the outrageous breed evolved on our planet might yet attempt to subvert the whole cosmos. And so it had been decided in the Council of Elders that unless

> mankind could find something in its creations with which to justify itself, it would have to be destroyed. (19-20)

This particular vision addresses the concerns of the apocalypse of *Cat's Cradle*. Both doomsdays are brought on by scientific devices that give humans the power to destroy the planet, and, in the case of *Cat's Cradle*, the fictional ice-nine that ends the world symbolizes the very real nuclear power S describes. In S's account, a Council of Elders decides to end the world because of the potential for apocalypse caused by recalcitrant human control of nuclear power. Similarly, in *Cat's Cradle*, the religious figure of San Lorenzo, Bokonon, predicts the world's fate in the hands of humans. When he discovers the existence of ice-nine just before the impending apocalypse it causes, Jonah wonders, "What hope can there be for mankind… when there are such men as Felix Hoenikker to give such playthings as *ice-nine* to such short-sighted children as almost all men and women are?" (245). He then realizes Bokonon answers his question in *The Fourteenth Book of Bokonon* "entitled, 'What Can a Thoughtful Man Hope for Mankind on Earth, Given the Experience of the Past Million Years?' It doesn't take long to read *The Fourteenth Book*. It consists of one word and a period. This is it: 'Nothing'" (245).

Although humankind in S's vision manages to dissuade the Elders' destruction for a time, S reports that, after a while, there was "suddenly – destruction! The air was thick with the ammonia smell of death. Noxious vapors stung the eyes and choked the throat. The stench of the Apocalypse rose up with the opening of the graves of the new and old dead…. The world had become a reeking decay" (20-21). This intense sensory hallucination in S's apocalypse is similar to the vivid sensory details Vonnegut provides in his depiction of the fictional apocalypse. Though S's changes in sensory perception are

primarily olfactory and Jonah reports auditory and visual changes in his surroundings, both renderings of the world at an end are powerful and illustrative enough to stimulate an audience's senses.

Psychedelic art worked to activate changes in sensory perception, as well, in the same fashion as a psychedelic trip. The idea to recreate acid trips through "the fusion of different artistic techniques in producing all-encompassing sensory spectacles" preoccupied the art world in the 1960s (Grunenberg 7). These events ranged from the party atmosphere of Ken Kesey's Acid Tests to shows like Mark Boyle and Joan Hills's *Son et Lumiere for Bodily Fluids and Functions*, where the artists "employed their own blood, sweat, urine, vomit and semen in their liquid projection experiments" to demonstrate the "innately destabilizing potential" of the psychedelic and the counterculture it spawned "to bring things down in the world" (Grunenberg 38). In the case of Boyle and Hills, the world they attempted to bring down and destabilize was "the bourgeois obsession with 'slavish conformities of dress' and degrading 'grooming'" (Grunenberg 38). The theory of ending this mere portion of society is far more trivial than the end-of-the-world scenario in *Cat's Cradle*, in which the entire planet is destroyed, but, in practice, the two works contain similar elements. When the ice-nine fell into the sea, as Jonah describes, "The sky darkened. *Borasisi*, the sun, became a sickly yellow ball, tiny and cruel" (261). A "Burning Slide," Figure 1, from *Son et Lumiere for Earth, Air, Fire, and Water*, shown in 1966, matches this apocalyptic image. The outer corners of the slide are completely black, and a golden circle inhabits the center of the frame. The inside of the orb, however, is filled with small, spore-like white balls; the white spheres could easily be a virus invading the golden cell and rapidly spreading,

hence the image displays something of a "sickly" sun, still burning cruelly through the dark apocalypse.

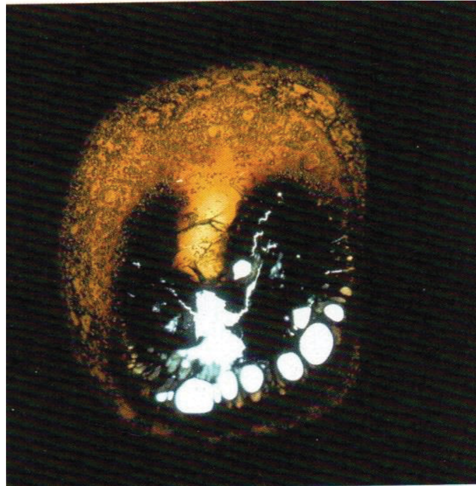

Fig. 1. "Burning Slide from Son et Lumiere for Earth, Air, Fire and Water" (1966). Source: Boyle, Mark, and Joan Hills. *Burning Slide from Son et Lumiere for Earth, Air, Fire and Water*. 1966 *Summer of Love: Art of the Psychedelic Era*. Ed. Christoph Grunenberg. London: Tate Publishing, 2005. 36. Print.

Other forms of psychedelic art contained imagery paralleling Vonnegut's apocalyptic description, as well. Rock posters, an increasingly popular medium for psychedelic art throughout the 1960s, depicted dark content infused with psychedelic swirls and colors to illustrate the "underground" sound of some psychedelic rock. Hapshash and the Coloured Coat, members of the underground psychedelic art and music scene in the 1960s, created the poster found in Figure 2. Arthur Brown, the singer for whom the poster was made, called himself the "God of Hell Fire," was known for his bizarre onstage antics, and aimed to portray his title and behavior in this poster (Farren and Loren 69). Hapshash and the Coloured Coat designed "a dragon and serpents' lair" around his portrait, and "not content to infuse it with psychedelic hues and colors, the pair also threw in classic images they absorbed growing up" (Farren and Loren 69). This mixture of childhood imagery (Donald Duck and Mickey Mouse near Arthur Brown's

face, to be precise) with demonic illustrations and chaos implies a sort of end to innocence. The image of Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck in the hell-like "serpent's lair" is as foreboding as any apocalypse: what was once cherished and comforting is now all mixed up with malevolence. Moreover, the serpents at the bottom of the poster are more worm-like than snake-like; their ribbed bodies don't appear to end in distinguished heads, and the violet "infusion" of the poster matches Vonnegut's description of the tornado, an "enormous worm with a violet mouth" (*Cat's Cradle* 261).

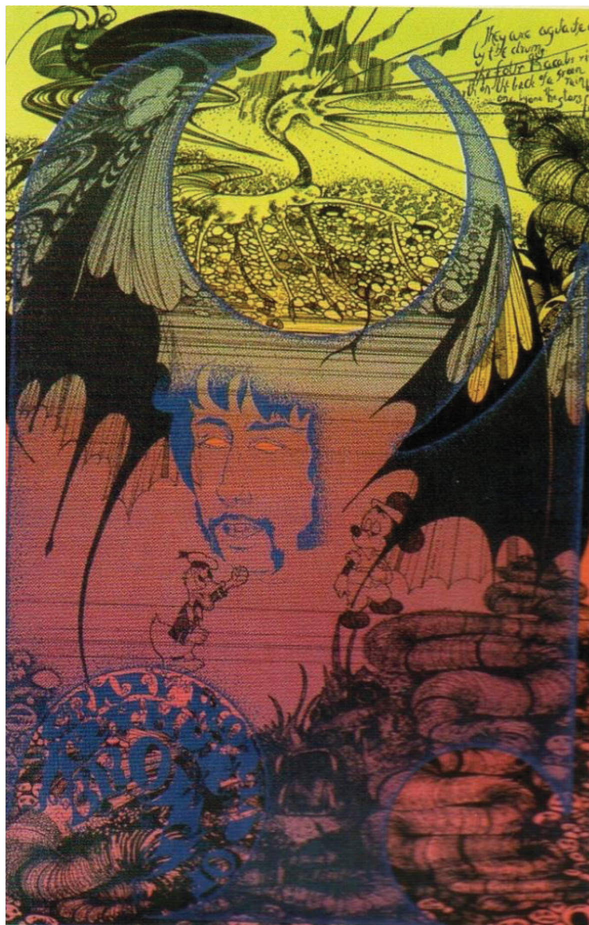

Fig. 2. "Arthur Brown poster." Source: Hapshash and the Coloured Coat. *Classic Rock Posters: Sixty Years of Posters and Flyers, 1952-2012*. Eds. Mick Farren and Dennis Loren. New York: Metro Books, 2012. 69. Print.

The movement of this "enormous worm," its swaying and "obscene peristalsis," is best reflected in another popular art form associated with psychedelia (*Cat's Cradle* 261).

Optical illusions, or op art, are very closely associated with psychedelia because of their "psychedelic style": "free-wheeling shapes, exaggerated acid colours and pervasive formal entropy… pure opticality and visuality, disembodied form, colour and light, ideally experienced in a state of total sensory overload" (Grunenberg 13; 36). Op art came of age with the psychedelic revolution, and, as the title of David S. Rubin's book *Psychedelic: Optical and Visionary Art since the 1960s* suggests, psychedelia and optical artwork have been linked together since their '60s heyday. One of the most popular optical illusions emanates from a spiral shape, like those shown in Figure 3. The repeated colors and spirals in the poster create "extreme demands on the eye" that result in a sensation of motion: as a viewer attempts to focus on the poster, it looks as if the spirals are spinning or moving and invokes dizziness. It takes the viewer "to the verge of the bearable, and sometimes even beyond" (Ruhrberg 345). The poster is understood to be a stationary and unchanging work of art, yet it appears to wave and swirl as it's studied. Karl Ruhrberg explains in *Art of the 20th Century* that "what lends the seemingly so simple forms… their flickering, ambiguous appearance… is the contradiction between the physical fact and the psychological effect…. We find it capable of inducing doubt as to the dependability of our entire perceptual experience" (345). The lively colors and alterations in perception caused by optical art like that in Figure 3 are inextricable from the psychedelic experience. As Milton Glaser puts it in his preface to Victor Moscoso's collection *Sex, Rock & Optical Illusions*, op art was a "seemingly deranged, drug-obsessed visionary picture show" (7). It is not one picture, but appears to move, like a show, or like Vonnegut's apocalyptic tornados that "swayed… with obscene peristalsis." The almost nauseating effect gained from staring at the spirals of Figure 3 for too long

make this poster an excellent example of the “obscene peristalsis” Vonnegut describes; the way the blues and reds spin and wave can be sickening.

Fig. 3. “Man with Spiral Eyes” (1966). Source: Moscoso, Victor. *Man with Spiral Eyes*. 1966. *Sex, Rock & Optical Illusions*. Seattle: Fantagraphics Books, 2005. Print.

Steven Heller writes in his introduction to *Sex, Rock & Optical Illusions* that posters like that in Figure 3 "did for graphic design what bands like the Grateful Dead, Jefferson Airplane, and Big Brother and The Holding Company did for rock music: They turned up the volume and broke all the rules" (9). Like the posters to which they're compared by Heller, psychedelic music also contained vibrant elements akin to those Vonnegut uses in his description of the *Cat's Cradle* apocalypse. Psychedelic rock bands began to incorporate new, onomatopoetic sounds into their songs in order to properly depict the sensory changes accompanying psychedelic drug experiences. The "fuzztone and feedback" often present in psychedelic rock, according to Arnold Shaw in *The Rock Revolution*, is reminiscent of the tornado that "buzzed like bees" (146; *Cat's Cradle* 261). Michael Hicks devotes an entire chapter of *Sixties Rock: Garage, Psychedelic, and Other Satisfactions* to this sound: "the fuzz" (12-22). He describes the psychedelic guitar sound as "a warm, powerful, sonorous sizzle" (12). Psychedelic musicians like Jimi Hendrix and the Yardbirds reworked their amplifiers and used "fuzz boxes" to achieve this buzzing effect that brought their sounds to life for listeners. Hicks explains that "through fuzz, a guitarist could give his or her instrument a voice. It might be the transcendent, Middle-Eastern voice… the brassy, urban voice… or anything in between. It might even be the voice of another species… the buzzing of '2,000 Pound Bee'" (21-22). The flexibility of fuzz allowed musicians to translate their psychedelic trips into songs and relate the sounds of their trips to listeners; they could paint an aural portrait of their drug experiences with this technique, and, as Frank Zappa explained, listeners "get the same effect… as from taking acid, but without any of the bad stuff" (qtd. in Shaw 150). Hicks's use of '2,000 Pound Bee' by the Ventures to describe "the fuzz" especially

correlates with Vonnegut's description of the apocalyptic tornado that "buzzed like bees." Both Vonnegut's description and the Ventures' heavy use of the fuzz box create vivid sensory experiences for their audiences that bring the buzzing tornado and the '2,000 Pound Bee' to life.

The sonority of "the fuzz" and other psychedelic rock sounds also mimics Jonah's description of the apocalypse in *Cat's Cradle* (Hicks). He explains that, when the ice-nine falls into the sea, "there was a sound like that of the gentle closing of a portal as big as the sky, the great door of heaven being closed softly. It was a grand AH-WHOOM." In his article "The Church of the Sonic Guitar," Robert Palmer "suggests that amplified guitar sonorities such as fuzz turned the guitar into a huge bell – a resonant, overtone-laden chiming sound, full of a 'clanging' that 'ritually invokes sonic space'" (Hicks 20-21). The phrase "ritually invokes sonic space" insinuates that psychedelic guitarists sought to take up an enormous aural space, easily "as big as the sky," and the "invocation of sonic space" that psychedelic musicians attempted to create through their guitars led to larger, grander sounds that might "sound like that of the gentle closing of a portal as big as the sky." Hicks cites Link Wray's "Rumble" as containing "a massive, carillon-like instrument that made the guitar sound both majestic and ominous" (21). A "sound both majestic and ominous" could be equated with the phrase "the great door of heaven being closed softly"; "the great door of heaven" implies the utmost majesty, but its closing suggests ominousness in line with an apocalypse.

"The great door of heaven" was not only replicated in psychedelic sounds; its implications also resonate in the name of one of the most popular psychedelic bands of the 1960s: The Doors (*Cat's Cradle* 261). The Doors, a psychedelic rock band formed in

1965 California, gained immense popularity throughout the 1960s because of their psychedelic sound and references to the lifestyle of uninhibited sex and drug use increasingly pervading mainstream society through the growing counterculture. The band derived its name from Aldous Huxley's *The Doors of Perception*, a 1952 essay about Huxley's experience with mescaline that inspired him so greatly, he "unabashedly declared himself a propagandist for hallucinogenic drugs" (*When You're Strange*; Lee and Shlain 46). He and Dr. Humphrey Osmond, the "young British psychiatrist who was working with LSD and mescaline" and prompted Huxley's revolutionary mescaline trip, helped to ignite the psychedelic revolution in major ways (Lee and Shlain 45). In fact, the two initially coined the term "psychedelic" to describe the "mind-manifesting" drugs with which they experimented (Lee and Shlain 55). Huxley and Osmond's endorsement of psychedelic drug use first turned "the educated public" on to the drugs, and word of the substances and their effects quickly spread beyond the literati with whom Huxley and Osmond interacted (Lee and Shlain 47). *The Doors of Perception* and its sequel *Heaven and Hell* especially spurred on psychedelia; the book became a kind of psychedelic primer for users and psychedelic enthusiasts and had "an enormous impact" on the counterculture, particularly on the hippies of the psychedelic revolution (Lee and Shlain 47).

Huxley and Vonnegut Examine Good and Evil

Though his works concerned drug use before the mescaline trip described in the work that so affected the psychedelic revolution, *The Doors of Perception*, Huxley cited the adventure as "without question the most extraordinary and significant experience this side of the Beatific Vision…. It opens up a host of philosophical problems, throws

intense light and raises all manner of questions in the field of aesthetics, religion, theory of knowledge" (*Moksha* 42). One of the largest philosophical problems Huxley encountered and explored further in *Heaven and Hell* is the idea that an individual's perception informs reality. The titles of both books were inspired by a line in William Blake's work *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*: "If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear to man as it is: infinite" (*When you're Strange*). Blake's work takes on the polarity of "heaven" and "hell," or good and evil, and surmises that, if not for human perception, heaven and hell would appear as they really are: immeasurable and unified, hence their marriage. Informed by his mescaline vision, Huxley came to a similar belief, that, depending upon the individual perceiver, any experience could be heaven or hell (*Heaven and Hell* 69-70).

This exploration of the subjectivity of good and evil within *The Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell*, seminal texts for the psychedelic movement, exists also in *Cat's Cradle*, and thus, the novel appealed to psychedelically-inclined readers on this basis. The fictional religion Bokononism, in particular, deals with this concept. For instance, practicing Bokononism is punishable by death in the Republic of San Lorenzo, situating it as a "bad" religion opposite to "good" Christianity, but almost all of the inhabitants of the island are "secretly" Bokononists, despite the threat. When questioned, the inhabitants insist that they are not Bokononists, because of the negative connotations associated with Bokononism, but, simultaneously, they practice Bokononist rituals and read the *Books of Bokonon* openly. This confusion between what is inherently "good" and "bad" and the subjectivity of the dichotomy lies at the foundation of Bokononism.

This is how it works: In 1922, Lionel Boyd Johnson, a sailor, and Earl McCabe, a Marine deserter, found themselves shipwrecked on San Lorenzo (*Cat's Cradle* 107). Vonnegut describes their initial meeting with the island's natives:

> When Lionel Boyd Johnson and Corporal Earl McCabe were washed up naked onto the shore of San Lorenzo… they were greeted by persons far worse off than they. The people of San Lorenzo had nothing but diseases, which they were at a loss to treat or even name. By contrast, Johnson and McCabe had the glittering treasures of literacy, ambition, curiosity, gall, irreverence, health, humor, and considerable information about the outside world. (123)

Using their "glittering treasures," Johnson and McCabe quickly took control of the island and its inhabitants. They "dreamed of making San Lorenzo a Utopia. To this end, McCabe overhauled the economy and the laws. Johnson designed a new religion" (*Cat's Cradle* 127). The religion Johnson invented was Bokononism, the name coming from the islanders' pronunciation of "Johnson": "Bokonon." Johnson took up this new name, and created a source of "dynamic tension" in his religion to keep the people of San Lorenzo occupied and happy (*Cat's Cradle* 102).

"Dynamic tension" is "the belief of Charles Atlas that muscles could be built without bar bells or spring exercisers, could be built by simply pitting one set of muscles against another. It was the belief of Bokonon that good societies could be built only by pitting good against evil, and by keeping the tension between the two high at all times" (*Cat's Cradle* 102). To achieve this end, Bokonon created his religion, Bokononism, and

conspired with McCabe to create tension. McCabe outlawed Bokononism at the behest of Bokonon, whom he also outlawed. McCabe became the leader of San Lorenzo, while Bokonon went into hiding. McCabe installed an enormous hook on the island on which Bokononists would be hung and killed if caught practicing.

In this way, Bokonon and McCabe created a tension between good and evil: Bokonon represented "good," and McCabe and his hook represented "evil." To keep the tension "high at all times":

> McCabe would organize the unemployed, which was practically everybody, into great Bokonon hunts. About every six months McCabe would announce triumphantly that Bokonon was surrounded by a ring of steel, which was remorselessly closing in. And then the leaders of the remorseless ring would have to report to McCabe, full of chagrin and apoplexy, that Bokonon had done the impossible. He had escaped, had evaporated, had lived to preach another day. (*Cat's Cradle* 174)

The play between good and evil that Bokonon and McCabe were staging kept all of the islanders occupied and distracted from their otherwise depressing lives. They had no money or employment, scarce resources, and insurmountable diseases, but, at the same time, they had a religion that inspired them, something to believe in, and a constant production of good versus evil that they lived within. Their lives took on meaning beyond their discouraging state.

Bokononism demonstrates the subjectivity of good and evil, or heaven and hell, which Huxley ponders in *The Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell*. Good and evil

are human constructs in the Bokononist religion. The construct is not entirely negative; the perception of clear right and wrong creates life and purpose for the inhabitants of San Lorenzo that had not existed before Bokononism. Understanding that the concepts of good and evil underlying Bokononism are nonexistent without constant human production and recitation, however, is the key to true enlightenment. The opening sentence of *The Books of Bokonon* is "all of the true things I am about to tell you are shameless lies," demonstrating the Bokononists' recognition that their religion is a construction and is not objectively true; only their willing participation in the Bokonoist lie perpetuates it (*Cat's Cradle* 5). This fundamental Bokononist understanding mirrors Huxley's belief that reality is tinted by human perception: the way the world is perceived by an individual makes it so. Thus, in both *Cat's Cradle* and *The Doors of Perception*, good and evil are not constants and are not inherently separate, as they're determined by individual perception.

Since members of the psychedelic revolution adopted *The Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell* as psychedelic texts, and Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle* explored theories of perception and good and evil in fashion similar to these works, *Cat's Cradle* appealed to psychedelically inclined readers on this basis. In addition, *The Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell* represented the spiritual beliefs of the psychedelic revolution. Huxley's message within these texts was that mescaline helped him achieve the understanding that Blake described: "If the doors of perception are cleansed, everything would appear to man as it is: infinite." Thus, readers felt encouraged to use psychedelic drugs to find this enlightenment. *Cat's Cradle* provides a religion with Bokononism for seekers of spiritual guidance, like those members of the psychedelic

revolution following Huxley's lead in search of enhanced insight. As Barry Miles illustrates in *Hippie*, the hippies who composed the psychedelic revolution seemed to have an especial thirst for religious guidance. In addition to joining the psychedelic revolution, hippies felt drawn to religious sects including "scores of Hindu swamis, mostly in competition with each other and denouncing the others as frauds. There were also western witches, wiccas and wizards, the followers of the OTO, the Golden Dawn society, the Great Beast Crowley, the followers of lay lines and the flying-saucer watchers" (Miles 21-22). It should come as no surprise, then, that hippie readers of *Cat's Cradle* attached themselves to Bokononism in the same manner as they did psychedelia, Hinduism, and scores of other spiritual ventures. In "Teaching Kurt Vonnegut on the Firing Line," an essay written for *The Vonnegut Statement*, Jess Ritter describes hippie students in her college literature courses during the late 1960s and early 1970s adopting vocabulary from *Cat's Cradle*, like the word "karass," "teams that do God's Will without ever discovering what they are doing," and mentions that a typical class contained the "occasional Bokononist" (32-34; *Cat's Cradle* 2). Clearly, in addition to presenting philosophies similar to those in psychedelic primers *The Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell*, the Bokononism of *Cat's Cradle* presented a spiritual draw that attracted the enlightenment-hungry, psychedelically-inclined hippie audience.

Conclusion: Cat's Cradle Appealed to the Hippies

The fictional religion of Bokononism and its exploration of good and evil, in addition to the sci-fi details of apocalypse that mirrored aspects of the psychedelic experience and trends in psychedelic art and music, made *Cat's Cradle* interesting and enjoyable for psychedelically-inclined hippie readers. Though the hippies appreciated the

novel's nuclear disarmament message, as well, their reluctance to actively join in antiwar protest or political rallying, as demonstrated by Kesey's band of Merry Pranksters, suggests that they enjoyed the novel for other reasons, like its psychedelic-reminiscent apocalypse descriptions and similarities to seminal psychedelic texts *The Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell*. As Vonnegut was unintentionally "building up a cult following" of countercultural college students, it can be assumed that, because of their presence in the counterculture, hippies helped compose this initial audience (*Understanding Kurt Vonnegut* 54). Ritter further proves their readership of *Cat's Cradle* in the essay "Teaching Kurt Vonnegut on the Firing Line" by describing hippie students' affinity for Bokononist vocabulary to describe their own lifestyles. Additionally, in 1963, when *Cat's Cradle* was published, the hippie movement and psychedelic revolution, alongside Vonnegut's career, were just beginning. As these movements expanded, so did Vonnegut's audience, further validating the argument that hippies and other psychedelic enthusiasts made up a proportion of the early Vonnegut fandom. By the end of the decade, the hippie movement had reached its peak, and, just before the publication of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, when Vonnegut achieved uncharted fame, another of his novels had become surprisingly popular. Like *Cat's Cradle*, *The Sirens of Titan*, originally published in 1959, found its ideal audience with the counterculture youth, and, in particular, the hippies of the psychedelic revolution.

Chapter 2

Introduction: The Sirens of Titan Finds an Audience

By 1969, *The Sirens of Titan* had amassed so many admirers that Vonnegut inquired of his publisher, "what are the chances of *The Sirens* coming out in an attractive edition? My mail continues to indicate that people like that book best of all" (*Letters* 147). The novel didn't meet with initial popularity when published in 1959: reviewers encountered trouble "comparing the novel to something identifiable" and copies "whirled around on racks of paperbacks in drugstores and bus stations, not chosen" (Shields 161-162). A decade later, however, despite the underground appeal of *Cat's Cradle* and the mainstream success of *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater*, Vonnegut's fans appreciated *Sirens* so much that most of them liked it "best of all." Its emphasis on the importance of self-understanding and love and sensory, otherworldly descriptions aligned with the hippies' psychedelic beliefs and experiences, so that it achieved such success at this time is no surprise.

At the same time as *The Sirens of Titan* experienced increased popularity, the hippie movement reached its peak, drawing in millions of participants and creating art, music, and fashion that crept into mainstream American culture. As resistance to the Vietnam War grew, many anti-war citizens drifted toward the ideals of peace and compassion that characterized the hippie movement (Lee and Shlain 214). New supporters often subscribed to the hippie lifestyle –one which, as Barry Miles explains, "really was about sex and drugs and rock 'n' roll" (16). Ever-increasing numbers of young people began participating in "the happy communalism of a circulating joint and

shared spiritual experiences on acid" (Miles 302). The Woodstock music festival that characterized 1969 saw "close to a half million people…. But there was no disaster – no riots and no violence…. What kept the peace was no great secret. Nearly everybody was buzzed on something" (Lee and Shlain 252).

The use of psychedelic drugs to achieve peace peaked in 1969 with "close to a half million people" experimenting with the substances and millions more absorbing the culture that the drugs produced (Lee and Shlain 252). The psychedelic bands at Woodstock also played through the speakers of mainstream Americans' television sets and radios; rock and roll "by 1969 had become a billion-dollar enterprise (Lee and Shlain 253). Psychedelic art appeared in television shows, movies, magazines, concert posters, and on the walls of suburban homes, forming an "incestuous relationship with popular culture, low art and entertainment" (Grunenberg 7). The colorful patterns associated with the psychedelic drug experience cropped up in advertisements that "reflected new hallucinogenic styles as quickly as they could be invented" and decorated the homes and bodies of previously straitlaced citizens (Frank 106; Polson 64). Mainstream America grew more open to psychedelic culture. In 1969, American readers were poised to interpret and appreciate the psychedelic qualities of *The Sirens of Titan*.

The Sirens of Titan depicts a science-fiction trip through time and space alongside protagonist Malachi Constant's inner journey to self-realization. At the outset of the novel, Winston Niles Rumfoord, a millionaire stuck in a chrono-synclastic infundibulum or "a region of the cosmos where space and time curve," predicts Constant's fate (Sumner 43). He claims to know Constant's destiny for certain, explaining, "When I ran my space ship into the chrono-synclastic infundibulum, it came to me in a flash that

everything that ever has been always will be, and everything that ever will be always has been," and informs Constant that he will be moving through space. "Your destination is Titan," he explains, "but you visit Mars, Mercury and Earth again before you get there" (*The Sirens of Titan* 24). Throughout this journey, Constant undergoes many trials and tribulations, both physical and emotional, before coming to a greater understanding of himself and the world around him and the conclusion that "the purpose of human life… is to love whoever is around to be loved" (*The Sirens of Titan* 320). Many psychedelic drug users could relate to the inner conflicts Constant feels while on the path toward enlightenment and heightened self-awareness and recognize the results of his internal trip: greater serenity and understanding leading to greater compassion for humankind and harmony with the external world. All psychedelic enthusiasts, whether or not they partook in the drug experience, were familiar with this emphasis on peace and love, as it characterized the hippie movement and psychedelic revolution, and they also perceived the resemblances between Vonnegut's descriptions of space life and popular psychedelic art, music and fashions.

Like other countercultural trends adopted by the mainstream, Vonnegut's work, first appreciated by an underground, collegiate readership in the early 1960s, integrated into mainstream society as the counterculture expanded. As mentioned in the introduction, by decade's end, Vonnegut's novels had gained an expanded audience because of their recognition by his initial countercultural fan base. While many sources have noted this connection between Vonnegut's 1960s works and the counterculture, however, *The Sirens of Titan*, written before the countercultural Vonnegut heyday, remains unlinked to the counterculture, despite its recognized popularity and the

interesting connections between the science fiction aspects of the novel and the psychedelic qualities of the counterculture. America's heightened awareness of and involvement in psychedelic culture led to the 1969 success of *The Sirens of Titan*: many readers enjoyed "that book best of all" because it contains recognizable parallels to the increasingly popular psychedelic drug experience and psychedelic art (*Letters* 147).

Journey through the Self

Although *The Sirens of Titan* aligned with the psychedelic hippies' beliefs and experiences, the connection, however strong, wasn't intentional on the part of Vonnegut, as was the case with most of his novels. The journey through selfhood that protagonist Malachi Constant makes and the conclusion he reaches about the meaning of life resounded more with the young hippies than Vonnegut's own generation, despite the fact that the chaotic ins and outs of his own youth originally inspired the plot of *The Sirens of Titan*. Vonnegut and other male members of his generation had, by 1959, experienced the typical turbulence of adolescence and young adulthood combined with the horrors of the Great Depression, service in World War II, and the atomic age. Sumner postulates that the wild journey of Malachi Constant through space and toward finding himself in *The Sirens of Titan* is "a reflection on the path traveled by Vonnegut and his generation of young men" (39). Constant encounters feelings of emptiness and uncertainty on his stormy and confusing trip that parallel those of a generation saddled with the conflicts of World War II and the Great Depression. Vonnegut is sure to create a plotline similar to the trajectories of his and his contemporaries' lives to illustrate the causes of these existential emotions, as Klinkowitz points out:

> He is careful to make all of this science-fiction paraphernalia correspond to familiar elements in twentieth-century American lives. Rumfoord looks, speaks and acts like Franklin Delano Roosevelt, whose presidential 'New Deal' did create a new and workable secular mythology for an America paralyzed by the Great Depression. Malachi's adventures parallel the experiences of many Americans of Vonnegut's age: an adolescence free of responsibilities, then military service (as Malachi's experiences on Mars are so tellingly parodied), followed by a heroic attempt to keep together a family amidst the centripetal forces of modern life. (*Kurt Vonnegut* 44)

The Sirens of Titan is, in effect, the story of the Silent Generation's struggles with the ups and downs of their personal lives and the world-shattering events of the early 20th century. As the novel aged, however, a new, younger audience developed a different interpretation that fit more with their own psychedelic lifestyles.

The journey through selfhood and the takeaway message from *The Sirens of Titan* epitomized the general beliefs of the 1960s counterculture, particularly throughout the hippie movement and the psychedelic revolution. Timothy Leary, the espoused leader of the psychedelic revolution, writes of his first psychedelic drug experience, "It was above all and without question the deepest religious experience of my life. I discovered that beauty, revelation, sensuality, the cellular history of the past, God, the Devil, all lie inside my body, outside my mind" (Lee and Shlain 73). The discovery of a universe and holiness within his self, a revelation similar to Constant's, led Leary to experiment with psychedelic substances at Harvard, where he worked as a professor of clinical psychology (Lee and Shlain 73-74). He emphasized the importance of selfhood in his

work, preferring to conduct his studies "with subjects, rather than on them" (Lee and Shlain 76). To achieve this end, he often took psychedelic drugs alongside his test subjects and attempted to lead them through their trips to religious and self-affirming experiences like his own. His enthusiasm for psychedelic substances as a means of self-realization also extended into his personal life, and he encouraged his friends to partake in the experience. After Leary turned on Allen Ginsberg, the psychedelic revolution was born.

Allen Ginsberg's first experience with psilocybin, taken under the watchful eye of Leary, led him to Leary's revelations about the holiness of the self and Constant's conclusions about the meaning of life: the choice to love the self and others despite any limitations. He proclaimed in Leary's living room, "I'm 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" (*High Priest* 120-121). Because they not only caused religious self-realization but also inspired feelings of peace and love he wanted to spread to others, Ginsberg believed that "psychedelic drugs held the promise of changing mankind and ushering in a new millennium" (Lee and Shlain 78). He imagined that if more people experienced psychedelic drugs and discovered self-peace and the desire to love and act decently toward others, their enlightenment would make the world a more peaceful and loving place. Together with Leary, Ginsberg turned on as many influential people as possible, "painters, poets, publishers, musicians, and so on," to psychedelic drugs (Lee and Shlain 79). In turn, these people spread the word about the psychedelic drug experience not only by advocating the drugs, but by creating reproductions of their trips in art, writing and

music. In this way, psychedelics quickly reached a wide audience, and thousands of people joined in the psychedelic revolution.

As the revolution grew, Leary published *The Psychedelic Experience* in 1964, a manual for tripping based on the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* that walks psychedelic drug users through their experiences to enlightenment. The book served as a psychedelic road map for "thousands of people during the '60s" (Pinchbeck xiii). Similar to the plot of *The Sirens of Titan*, Leary prescribes for the masses a type of "odyssey from chaos to exile, and then to home – which turns out to be a state of mind and a way of relating to others, rather than a destination" as Sumner put describes the plot of *The Sirens of Titan* in *Unstuck in Time* (40). According to *The Psychedelic Experience*, trippers first experience ego-loss. Then, after their selves have disappeared, they can expect to hallucinate. In addition to seeing other versions of themselves and the world within themselves, Leary warns readers that the outside world transforms as well, and reports visions of patterns and waves "of external forms" (45). Finally, when trippers re-enter reality, they must choose "a good post-session robot"; they have been enlightened and now must make the choice to act in a manner befitting this enlightenment, loving themselves and others (72). Luckily, the psychedelic experience provides them with "multitudinous levels of awareness," making the choice to remain and act as enlightened beings that much easier (Pinchbeck xi).

The thousands of people turned on to psychedelic drugs in the 1960s appreciated Constant's journey since they'd similarly traveled through their selves. Like Constant, users surrendered their free will and egos when they took psychedelic substances. They experienced the emptiness, chaos and confusion accompanying this loss and the

subsequent hallucinations, and ended their journeys with heightened self-realization and the choice to love and act decently toward themselves and others. Psychedelic enthusiasts who chose not to partake in the drug experience but enjoyed the general message of the revolution also appreciated the novel since it depicted the goals of the movement: peace, love and understanding. These aims of the psychedelic revolution, first spouted by Ginsberg in December 1960, cropped up increasingly throughout the decade (Lee and Shlain 77). As the movement gained momentum, its beliefs crept into mainstream America primarily through music and advertising, turning a new audience on to the principles of the psychedelic revolution, whether they realized the association or not. Consequently, a new audience came to appreciate the general message *of The Sirens of Titan*, that "the purpose of human life… is to love whoever is around to be loved," because it matched their adopted ideals (*The Sirens of Titan* 320).

The Sirens of Titan opens with a line that immediately spoke to the hippies involved in the psychedelic revolution: "everyone now knows how to find the meaning of life within himself" (1). Much of the psychedelic drug experience involves self-realizations and recognition of one's connectedness to the universe. Poet Octavio Paz describes the peak of the acid experience as a point when "the self disappears, but no other self appears to occupy the empty space it has left. No god but rather the divine. No faith but rather the primordial feeling that sustains all faith, all hope. Peace in the crater of the volcano, the reconciliation of man – what remains of man – with total presence" (84). In *The Sirens of Titan*, Malachi Constant undergoes a similar process of self-realization, and Vonnegut touches on all of Paz's bases, from the initial emptiness that disappears with the self, to the eventual peace and sanctity that accompanies true self-

awareness. Gregory Sumner demonstrates the novel's similitude to psychedelically invoked self-realization, summarizing it as "an odyssey from chaos to exile, and then to home – which turns out to be a state of mind and a way of relating to others, rather than a destination…. Amid concentric circles of manipulation… Malachi Constant embraces the truths that reside within" (40).

The truths Constant embraces at the end of the book reflect the peace and reconciliation Paz describes encountering at the end of his psychedelic journey. To reach these similarly hopeful states, both Malachi Constant and psychedelic wayfarers like Paz must first endure the disappearance of selfhood and the disorder that follows this emptiness. Whereas psychedelic trippers experienced this chaotic voyage solely in their minds, however, Constant also survives a physical expedition that parallels his inner movement from unawareness, to confusion and emptiness, and, finally, to enlightenment and peace.

When Winston Niles Rumfoord predicts Constant's fate ("Your destination is Titan… but you visit Mars, Mercury and Earth again before you get there"), he claims that during Constant's space voyage, Constant will marry Mrs. Rumfoord on Mars, where the two will have a child named Chrono, and the three will live together on Titan after Constant's adventures on the other planets (24). Although Constant initially fights his fate, he soon accepts a position as a lieutenant-colonel in the Army of Mars after a destructive bender and the failure of his father's business. As Constant's life plays out as predicted, he realizes that he does not, as he once imagined, have control of his decisions, and, thus, his self dissolves.

Vonnegut portrays this disappearance of Constant's self through Unk, an older and brainwashed Constant operating in the Army of Mars as a soldier programmed to destroy Earth. Unk's memory is routinely wiped, and his motions and thoughts are controlled by a radio antenna inside of his skull that hurts him whenever he does "something a good soldier wouldn't ever do" (*The Sirens of Titan* 100). This lack of control over any element of his life and disappearance of thought and emotion symbolizes the type of emptiness briefly described by Paz after the self disappears in a psychedelic trip. There is nothing in Unk's mind to replace the memories and knowledge the Martians have wiped, nothing inhabiting the empty space that Unk's self used to occupy. According to Paz, a new self progressively fills this void in the psychedelic experience. Although Paz's telling of psychedelic self-realization proceeds smoothly, countless trippers recollect having some difficulties getting through the experience. Oftentimes, psychedelic drug users endured psychological pain before breaking through to deeper versions of themselves, along the lines of what Unk endures in his attempts to break free of mind control.

Psychedelic-induced mental struggle most notably occurred when trippers failed to heed a famous warning regarding the use of psychedelic substances: don't look in the mirror (Hayes 33). Upon looking into mirrors, psychedelic users reported seeing varieties of selves, not all of them pleasant, much like Constant encountered a number of his selves, some of them innocent, some villainous. As Charles Hayes writes in his introduction to *Tripping: An Anthology of True-Life Psychedelic Adventures*, "when you look into the mirror on the psychedelic, you've got to be ready for the entire menagerie, the thousand and one clowns that emerge from a single face. The parade of images may

seem to reveal the alpha and the omega, as though a seed has been exploded into all of its generations and incarnations" (34). The description of "the thousand and one clowns that emerge from a single face" corresponds with the multiple selves Constant inhabits throughout *The Sirens of Titan*: all of his personalities, stemming from a single self, are mere clowns who have no control over their fates. Some of these selves, as is the case with Unk, are emptier than other selves, like the fulfilled Constant at the novel's end.

Throughout *The Sirens of Titan*, Constant experiences what many trippers report seeing while looking into mirrors: the alpha and the omega and every generation and incarnation of himself. These different selves rouse a variety of emotions within him that psychedelic drug users also encountered. Though he begins the novel as self-assured, self-obsessed, and ignorant, the initial thought of his lack of free will produces an anxiety that alters his character. Constant then experiences emptiness upon losing his knowledge and self, loneliness when dismissed by his wife and child, frustration at his lack of control, and, finally, resignation to his fate. He admits, upon landing on Earth as the Space Wanderer, that neither he nor any higher power controlled his destiny, but that he was merely "a victim of a series of accidents, as are we all" (233). Likewise, psychedelic users felt similar emotions when the substances exposed them to a lack of free will in their trips and lives:

> The too-sudden opening up of the universe can, in turn, induce an onslaught of panic at what Aldous Huxley called the "horror of infinity," a terror at the vastness of the void within or without, of the utter minuteness and aloneness of the soul in the cosmos. A clenching reflex is, after all, a natural response to the floor and ceiling flying out of your mind…. An

> eschatological theme is recurrent throughout many a trip. A sense of finality comes over the subject, who feels that he's just spent his last chance to fulfill a required regimen before vaporizing into nothing, that he's moving at increasing velocity toward the end of his temporal cell, the current mode or pattern he's in, or of life itself…. Many new resolutions are made under such duress. (Hayes 15)

Constant makes such new resolutions after he lands on Titan, where his final self discovers the type of peace Paz and other psychedelic drug users found in themselves at the end of their trips. Sumner explains Constant's realization in the following quotation:

> He comes to understand that heroism lies not in dramatic, macho gestures or the mastery of ultimate principles, but in making peace with our tragic limitations, acting with decency, and caring for those around us. With him we learn that there is something irreducibly beautiful about human beings, and that we *do* have choices, even in an absurd, largely determined existence. For all of our delusions and blind grasping, we remain capable always of dignity, self-sacrifice, and love. (40)

At the end of *The Sirens of Titan*, Malachi Constant finds that, despite his lack of free will in controlling the events of his life, he still has the power to control his feelings about these experiences. He can either choose to fight against his fate, as he did at the novel's outset, or he can choose to calmly accept his destiny and make peace with the notion that he has no control. Ultimately, Constant chooses acceptance and peace, and he discovers that "the purpose of human life… is to love whoever is around to be loved," knowledge

reminiscent of the self-realization at the end of a psychedelic voyage (*The Sirens of Titan* 320). Constant can't choose who he will love or how he will live, but he can choose how he feels about these fates. Choosing to love those who happen to surround him and accepting his fate as it's handed to him creates purpose and peace within his otherwise meaningless life.

Paz attempts to describe a kind of faithless divinity he's found within the human self, "a feeling that sustains all faith and all hope." This explanation of an intangible and almost indescribable self-affirmation is also in Sumner's summary of Constant's realizations. At the novel's end, Constant makes peace with himself and those around him. He comes to terms with the universe he cannot control and manages to control the universe within his self, like so many members of the counterculture attempted to achieve through psychedelic drug use. He learns that he can control his own little universe through self-peace and by loving and understanding others, sentiments reflected in the slogans of the hippies. He finds the meaning of life within himself.

The Harmoniums Resemble Trips and Trends

In addition to the link between the powerful plotline and takeaway message of *The Sirens of Titan* with the experiences and aims of the psychedelic revolution, the details and descriptions of outer space and extraterrestrial life in the novel also correspond closely with psychedelia. Vonnegut's science-fiction portrayal of different creatures and planets resembles reports of the hallucinations experienced during psychedelic trips and reproduced in 1960s art and trends. By 1969, when Vonnegut asserted that *The Sirens of Titan* was his best liked book, psychedelia had begun invading

mainstream America. Patterns depicting the hallucinatory effects of psychedelic substances became part of popular culture, and, through popular music and television, people could experience the effects of psychedelic drugs from a distance. The Beatles' *Yellow Submarine* epitomizes this phenomenon.

Released in 1968 to mass appeal, the cartoon film *Yellow Submarine* tells the story of Pepperland, "a place where happiness and music reigned supreme. But that was all threatened when the terrible Blue Meanies declared war and sent in their army led by a menacing Flying Glove to destroy all that was good." Thankfully, the Beatles liberate Pepperland with their songs and "bring down the evil forces of bluedom" (*Yellow Submarine*). To reach Pepperland, the Beatles must board a yellow submarine and endure an undersea journey that seems more like the time and space romp through which Vonnegut takes readers than a simple underwater trek. While the Beatles actually went on the psychedelic voyages that inspired their popular film, their vast audience safely experienced their onscreen recreations of the trips. When the audience saw the Blue Meanies, they saw the same "wrathful deities" that typify psychedelic hallucinations, according to Timothy Leary: "Instead of many-headed fierce mythological demons, they are more likely to be engulfed and ground by impersonal machinery, manipulated by scientific, torturing control-devices and other space-fiction horrors" (*The Psychedelic Experience* 54). As displayed in Figure 4 and previously described in Chapter 1 by Masters and Houston's characterization of trips, the looping, repetitive patterns in the cartoon demonstrate the wavy, distorted way psychedelic users often viewed real external objects during psychedelic trips, and the emphasis of bright, vivid colors emulates the increasingly vibrant quality that colors take on (*The Psychedelic Experience*).

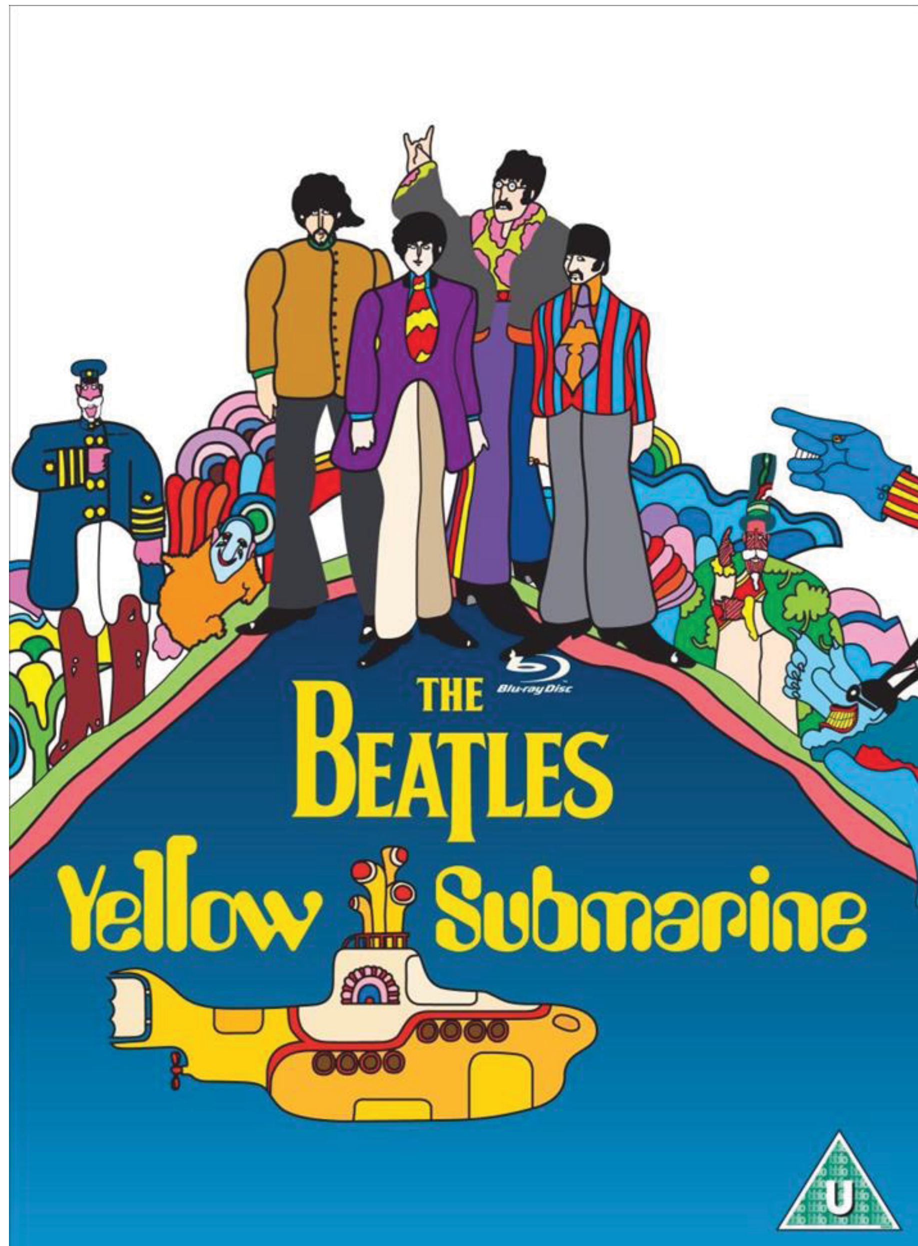

Fig. 4. Yellow Submarine. Source: *Yellow Submarine*. Dir. George Dunning. Perf. George Harrison, John Lennon, Paul McCartney, and Ringo Starr. Apple Corps, 1968. Film.

If America wasn't seeing hallucinations reproduced onscreen en masse, they certainly heard about them. Psychedelic rock music "was being broadcast throughout the English-speaking world." (Lee and Shlain 180). The lyrics of psychedelic rock songs told tales of trips, like the Beatles' "Tomorrow Never Knows," a description of the psychedelic journey: "Lay down all thought surrender to the void/it is shining, it is

shining/that you may see the meaning of within/it is speaking, it is speaking/that love is all and love is everyone/it is knowing, it is knowing." The close correspondence of the lyrics with Leary's prescribed psychedelic trip and Paz's description of his psychedelic journey illustrates the close relationship of psychedelic drug use with popular music at this time, and, consequently, mainstream America's intimacy with the psychedelic experience. The lyrics also reflect the journey of Malachi Constant in *The Sirens of Titan*, in that he surrenders to a type of void, recognizing his lack of free will, and comes out knowing a hopeful truth: that he still has the capacity and choice to love. In the late 1960s, Americans familiar with popular music, even if they hadn't used psychedelic drugs, could interpret the parallels between Vonnegut's plotline and their favorite songs that related the psychedelic experience.

Also reminiscent of psychedelic music were Vonnegut's descriptions of vivid colors and patterns. Colors consistently appeared throughout 1960s psychedelic rock lyrics. In addition to the Beatles' lyrics about "strawberry fields forever" and "tangerine trees and marmalade skies," Jimi Hendrix's "Purple Haze," climbed up the Billboard hot 100 pop chart in 1967 and "Crimson and Clover" by Tommy James and the Shondells "sold five million copies" in 1968 ("Strawberry Fields Forever"; "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds"; Whitburn 176; Creswell 842). The lyrics to "Crimson and Clover," "crimson and clover over and over," correspond with the colorful repetitive patterns psychedelic drug users frequently hallucinated when tripping, while the song's number one status demonstrates its appeal to an enormous audience across America, extending beyond the members of the psychedelic revolution.

The lyrical depictions of psychedelic patterns that flooded the country in the late 1960s are akin to Vonnegut's brilliant details in his description of harmoniums, the only creatures that inhabit Mercury in *The Sirens of Titan*:

> The creatures in the caves are translucent. When they cling to the walls, light from the phosphorescent walls comes right through them. The yellow light from the walls, however, is turned, when passed through the bodies of the creatures, to a vivid aquamarine…. The creatures in the caves look very much like small and spineless kites. They are diamond-shaped, a foot high and eight inches wide when fully mature. They have no more thickness than the skin of a toy balloon. Each creature has four feeble suction cups – one at each of its corners. These cups enable it to creep, something like a measuring worm, and to cling, and to feel out the places where the song of Mercury is best. Having found a place that promises a good meal, the creatures lay themselves against the wall like wet wallpaper. (188)

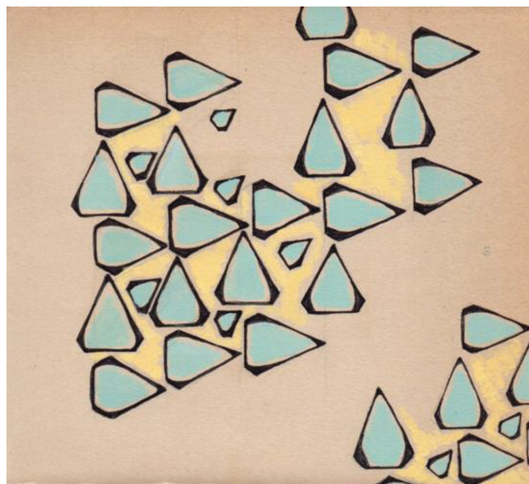

Fig. 5. Harmoniums. Source: Van Kirk, Rikkianne. *Harmoniums*. 2013. Kurt Vonnegut Memorial Library, Indianapolis.

This description and Rikkianne Van Kirk's interpretation (see Fig. 5) are also reminiscent of prints and patterns that covered the walls of households aesthetically interested in the psychedelic. The 1960s saw an increase in home décor "with repeating shapes, psychedelic patterns and acid-edged colors: the perfect style complement for the drug-soaked Decade of Love" (Polson 64). Mary Ellen Polson's account of interior design echoes Vonnegut's passage and Van Kirk's illustration regarding the harmoniums: their "yellow light" and "vivid aquamarine" "acid-edged colors," as well as the creatures' small diamond shape bring up an image akin to that décor Polson describes, demonstrated in Figure 6.

Fig. 6. Op-Art inspired carpet from a 1967 issue of *House and Garden Guide to Interior Decoration*. Source: Heathcote, David. *Sixtiestyle: Home Decoration and Furnishings from the 1960s*. Queensway: Middlesex University Press, 2004. Print.

The trend of psychedelic home design in the 1960s no doubt gathered momentum from the increasing popularity of psychedelic art throughout the decade. As mentioned in Chapter 1, in *Summer of Love: Art of the Psychedelic Era*, Editor Christoph Grunenberg describes psychedelic art as "the expansion of form, colour, media and space in response to an expanding consciousness. The fusion of different artistic techniques in producing all-encompassing sensory spectacles was central to the new movement" (7). These "sensory spectacles" included Andy Warhol's Exploding Plastic Inevitable event, where he displayed a variety of art forms simultaneously. He explains in *POPism*, "The idea was to give people a preview, through a mixed-media show, of what an ideal LSD trip was like" (231). The Exploding Plastic Inevitable spectacle mixed music provided by the Velvet Underground, lights, dancing, and projections of films and art that included "Op art patterns, coloured lights and the reflections from a disco ball" (Grunenberg 32).

Warhol projected patterned slides (see Fig. 7) onto the walls, floors and ceilings at his 'Exploding Plastic Inevitable' show, and adherents to psychedelic trends drew their ideas for psychedelic wallpaper, carpet, and fabric design from op-art like his. Warhol's slides match Vonnegut's description of Mercury's caves more accurately than the patterns in home décor trends, though, because of the multimedia involved in their presentation. The slides, like the harmoniums, are translucent, and when light moves through them, it becomes more brilliant. In addition, the added colored lights, reflections, music and dancing made viewing the slides part of a multi-sensory experience; 'Exploding Plastic Inevitable' attendees were able to connect the slides to sound and physical movement rather than simply seeing them. Likewise, the harmoniums are not just static creatures that form patterns on Mercury's cave walls; they creep and cling and

feel in an attempt to find “the song of Mercury” on which they feed (*The Sirens of Titan* 188).

Fig. 7. “Slides used in the Light Shows at Andy Warhol’s ‘Exploding Plastic Inevitable’ events” (1966). Source: Warhol, Andy. *Slides used in the Light Shows at his ‘Exploding Plastic Inevitable’ events*. 1966. *Summer of Love: Art of the Psychedelic Era*. Ed. Christoph Grunenberg. London: Tate Publishing, 2005. 29. Print.

As in psychedelic art, Vonnegut involves multiple senses in his harmonium portrayal, undoubtedly catching the interest of readers involved in the psychedelic movement who enjoyed the “all-encompassing sensory spectacle” and, in many cases, experienced this spectacle firsthand through psychedelic drug use (Grunenberg 7). R. Gordon Wasson wrote of similar patterns he hallucinated during his first time ingesting psilocybin mushrooms in his groundbreaking 1957 *Life* magazine article “Seeking the Magic Mushroom,” “the visions came whether our eyes were opened or closed…. They were in vivid color, always harmonious. They began with art motifs, angular such as

might decorate carpets or textiles or wallpaper or the drawing board of an architect." The harmonious nature of Wasson's visions suggests the name of Vonnegut's creatures, harmoniums, and both descriptions report vivid colors. Wassan also sees angular art motifs and relates them to home décor, establishing a clear connection between the psychedelic drug hallucinations, psychedelic art, and popular 1960s interior design that resembled Vonnegut's description of Mercury.

Conclusion: The Psychedelic Hippies Appreciated The Sirens of Titan

Whether they physically joined the hippie movement or encountered psychedelic art, music and trends in their everyday, mainstream lives, young people at the end of the decade were poised to appreciate the psychedelic qualities inherent in Vonnegut's science-fiction work. Though *Cat's Cradle* created Vonnegut's underground following and introduced him to the counterculture and *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* amassed his mainstream audience, the more sci-fi *The Sirens of Titan*, according to his fan mail, became the book readers liked "best of all" (*Letters* 147). The novel's journey through time, space and self-reflection paralleled the experiences of thousands of American youths tripping on psychedelic substances at the decade's end, and the results of the experience, a realization that "the purpose of human life… is to love whoever is around to be loved," reflected the ideals of the burgeoning hippie movement (*The Sirens of Titan* 320). Messages of peace and love traveled not only in countercultural circles in 1969, but invaded the mainstream through art, music, and fashion alongside reproductions of psychedelic hallucinations. This heightened appreciation of the psychedelic in the mainstream and the increased participation in the psychedelic revolution and hippie movement at the end of the 1960s created an audience more receptive to the psychedelic

qualities of *The Sirens of Titan*, contributing to the novel's vast popularity. The 1959 audience to which the novel premiered left it on drugstore shelves, ignoring its unattractive cover and science-fiction narrative. The American audience a decade later, however, wrapped up in psychedelic drugs, art, music, and trends, read the psychedelic in the science fiction work, enjoyed its fantasy backdrop, and related their own trips to self-realization, peace and love to Malachi Constant's chaotic journey through space and self.

Chapter 3

Introduction: Vonnegut Comes Alive with Slaughterhouse-Five

In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, an interaction occurs between protagonist Billy Pilgrim and his science-fiction author hero Kilgore Trout that Vonnegut must have experienced increasingly throughout the 1960s. Billy approaches Trout in an alley after Trout has had a miserable encounter with one of the paperboys he manages as a circulation man for a local newspaper and asks:

> "Are – are you *Kilgore* Trout?"
>
> "Yes." Trout supposed that Billy had some complaint about the way his newspapers were being delivered. He did not think of himself as a writer for the simple reason that the world had never allowed him to think of himself in this way….
>
> Billy was certain that he had made a mistake. "There's a writer named Kilgore Trout."
>
> "There *is*?" Trout looked foolish and dazed.
>
> "You never heard of him?"
>
> Trout shook his head. "Nobody – nobody ever did." (168-169)

Before 1969, Vonnegut was largely unheard of. Then, in 1969, after the unsuspected popularity of *The Sirens of Titan*, Vonnegut released his "war book" *Slaughterhouse-Five* and captured the attention of the entire nation (*Slaugherhouse-Five* 22).

Slaughterhouse-Five tells the story of Billy Pilgrim, a man who "has come unstuck in time" and thus moves back and forth throughout his life without any warning (*Slaughterhouse-Five* 23). He doesn't experience time in a linear fashion, but "pays random visits to all the events" of his lifetime (*Slaughterhouse-Five* 23). Though the novel includes quite a few different storylines throughout Billy's life, the central story details Billy's involvement in WWII and mimics Vonnegut's real WWII experience in many ways. Billy is a POW who survives the firebombing of Dresden in a slaughterhouse, just as Vonnegut was and did. In fact, Vonnegut writes himself into the novel several times. Though a minor character, whenever Vonnegut mentions that he was the character he just described, "That was I. That was me. That was the author of this book," he emphasizes the reality of war (125). The horror of war isn't fictional. Vonnegut experienced the terrors he details firsthand, and his relation of them in *Slaughterhouse-Five* struck a chord with a nation in the midst of the brutal Vietnam War.

Although Vonnegut wrote his "war book" about WWII, its publication just followed pivotal moments in America caused by the country's involvement in Vietnam (*Slaughterhouse-Five* 22). The 1968 Tet offensive signaled that U.S. involvement in the war was far from over, despite the ever-growing numbers of American casualties: "twenty thousand Americans had already been killed in action, a hundred and ten thousand were wounded" (Herring 184; Lee and Shlain 211). The Tet offensive and the seemingly endless number of victims, in addition to "the revelations of My Lai, the tiger cages, the napalm, the cancer-causing defoliants, the carpet bombings, the delayed-action antipersonnel weapons, the images of daily carnage on television," brought the entire nation together in agreement that America's involvement in Vietnam should cease (Lee

and Shlain 227). Lee and Shlain explain that in 1968, "the peace movement… was now a mass movement. Polls showed a majority of Americans disapproved of the administration's Vietnam policy" (214). Because of its vehement antiwar message, *Slaughterhouse-Five* found an enormous audience in 1969, when the collective American spirit had largely turned against the war in Vietnam.

For this reason, scholars often identify the strong, national antiwar sentiment as the cause for not only the counterculture's affection for *Slaughterhouse-Five*, but also its enormous commercial appeal. While the novel's antiwar message may be the main cause, it is certainly not the only reason the novel caught the attention of so many readers. By 1969, millions of young people had joined the hippie movement, as indicated by events like Woodstock and the ever-increasing population of hippie haven San Francisco. The expanding popularity of the hippie movement also led to the burgeoning growth of the psychedelic revolution (Miles 10). As the counterculture grew, the new experiences these drugs produced led to new or different philosophies, art and culture than that present in mainstream society.

The most renowned of the hippie ideals paralleled those of the antiwar, civil rights, and leftist political groups that characterized counterculture activism: peace, compassion, and brotherhood. The hippies, however, believed that peace was largely achieved individually and through psychedelic drugs, rather than through mass organization and protest, as demonstrated in the introduction of Chapter 1 through a description of Kesey's involvement at an anti-war rally. Hippies were told to "turn on" to drugs and "drop out" of society by leaders like Leary (detailed more extensively in Chapter 2), and to "go with the flow" and live peacefully in the present by figures like

Kesey, passively accepting their environments and the paths their lives were taking (Lee and Shlain 89; Wolfe 141). Much to the derision of other counterculture groups, they spent their time meditating, taking drugs, and creating art, instead of attempting to affect widespread change (Miles 10). Thus, while the hippies certainly appreciated the antiwar message of *Slaughterhouse-Five* that spurred along Vietnam protestors, other elements in the novel appealed to them more.

For instance, like psychedelic drug users' hallucinations, not all of *Slaughterhouse-Five* was rooted in reality. Among the settings Billy Pilgrim visits during his time travels is the planet Tralfamadore. After his daughter's wedding, he is picked up by Tralfamadorian aliens who take him to their planet and hold him in a zoo. Like that notion of time present in *The Sirens of Titan*, the Tralfamadorians in *Slaughterhouse-Five* see that "all moments past, present, and future, always have existed, always will exist" (*Slaughterhouse-Five* 27). Psychedelic drug experiences led pioneers of the psychedelic revolution to believe that they were part of an unalterable universal pattern, much like this one in *The Sirens of Titan* and *Slaughterhouse-Five*, in which all things "always have existed, always will exist." Additionally, the repeated phrase throughout the novel, "so it goes," reflects the hippies' "go with the flow" attitude. In the cases of the hippies, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, and *The Sirens of Titan* (more extensively detailed in chapter 2), these ideas determine that humans do not have free will, leading to the phrases "so it goes" and "go with the flow," and, rather than lamenting their free will deficiency, the hippies, Billy Pilgrim, and Malachi Constant find peace in accepting their fates as part of a fixed pattern, moving with this unchangeable, universal flow, and informing others of this view to spread comfort and contentment.

In addition to these shared beliefs, hippies also canonized the novel because of its similarities to other counterculturally idolized literary works. The book's structure, "the telegraphic schizophrenic," as Vonnegut calls it, has some stylistic features reminiscent of those in novels like *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *Naked Lunch*. Rather than following a linear storyline, Vonnegut jumps back and forth in time, because, as he begins the novel, his protagonist "Billy Pilgrim has come unstuck in time" (23). He explains this concept:

> Billy has gone to sleep a senile widower and awakened on his wedding day. He has walked through a door in 1955 and come out another one in 1941. He has gone back through that door to find himself at 1963. He has seen his birth and death many times, he says, and pays random visits to all the events in between. (23)

Vonnegut depicts all of these scenes in a seemingly random order to illustrate Billy's sudden leaps in time. The fragmented nature of *Slaughterhouse-Five* can be compared to William Burroughs's cut-up method that he uses in *Naked Lunch* and Ken Kesey's use of hallucinations to interrupt his schizophrenic protagonist's subjective narrative in *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Mental instability, like the schizophrenia Kesey's protagonist suffers from, is also an integral part of *Slaughterhouse-Five*. The oft-debated topic[2] of whether Billy Pilgrim suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder or literally visits other planets in this science-fiction work also appealed to the psychedelic revolution. Because psychedelic drugs frequently put users in various states of psychosis, much of the hippies' venerated and representative literature involved clinically insane characters; however, like Billy Pilgrim, the madness of these characters didn't completely

inhibit them or their humanity, but often increased it, as the psychotic experiences from psychedelic drugs did for many users. Aspects of psychedelic culture also related to the paranormal, in the event that Billy's trips to Tralfamadore are taken literally. Trippers frequently reported supernatural and extraterrestrial phenomena while under the influence of psychedelic drugs, and psychedelic art and music reflect these experiences.

While hippies appreciated the antiwar message of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, there were other features of the novel that appealed to them more, especially on the basis of their psychedelic affiliation, such as the novel's similarities to seminal psychedelic texts, its supernatural, sci-fi images, and its repeated "so it goes" message. Since Vonnegut's popularity skyrocketed in tandem with the membership of the hippie movement and its assimilation into mainstream culture in 1969, it's safe to assume that a decent portion of his readership appreciated this novel because of its psychedelic characteristics. The success of *Slaughterhouse-Five* is often attributed solely to the strong antiwar sentiment sweeping the nation at the time of its publication, but its philosophical message, its similarities to other idolized countercultural works, and its descriptions of the otherworldly that matched those appearing in psychedelic art and music also connect it to the burgeoning hippie movement and psychedelic revolution.

Slaughterhouse-Five Resembles Psychedelic Texts

Slaughterhouse-Five is introduced, in its epigraph, as "a novel, somewhat in the telegraphic schizophrenic manner of tales of the planet Tralfamadore, where the flying saucers come from. Peace." The Tralfamadorians, an alien race who kidnap protagonist Billy Pilgrim in their flying saucer, have novels that are "laid out in brief clumps of

symbols separated by stars…. The clumps might be telegrams" (*Slaughterhouse-Five* 88). As the Tralfamadorians explain:

> There are no telegrams on Tralfamadore. But… each clump of symbols is a brief, urgent message – describing a situation, a scene. We Tralfamadorians read them all at once, not one after the other. There isn't any particular relationship between all the messages, except that the author has chosen them carefully, so that, when seen all at once, they produce an image of life that is beautiful and surprising and deep. There is no beginning, no middle, no end, no suspense, no moral, no causes, no effects. What we love in our books are the depths of many marvelous moments seen all at one time. (88)

Vonnegut attempts to imitate this structure with *Slaughterhouse-Five*. Humans cannot see time "all at once," like the Tralfamadorians can, but the story is told in this manner. The novel is "telegraphic," broken up into short passages detailing "a situation, a scene" in Billy Pilgrim's life. These moments are scattered, however, so that they do not appear in chronological order. At one moment, Billy is a child, at the next he's an adult on Tralfamadore, then he's a young man in World War II, then he's an optometrist in New York. The events seem randomly placed, or "schizophrenic," because Vonnegut is emphasizing the lack of traditional story structure that exists in Tralfamadorian tales: "no beginning, no middle, no end," etc. Since humans can't see these scenes "all at once," they can't discern, in the same way as Tralfamadorians, that there is "no beginning, no middle, no end," but the haphazard structure helps to demonstrate this concept. If humans were able to read *Slaughterhouse-Five* all at once, they'd see all of these seemingly

scattered moments happening simultaneously, Billy Pilgrim's life in full, "an image of life that is beautiful and surprising and deep."

While Vonnegut assigns this "telegraphic schizophrenic manner of tales" to those "of the planet Tralfamadore," they were also characteristic of many other literary works akin to the counterculture, particularly to the psychedelic revolution. These works tended toward the postmodern, presenting the argument that "truth is 'subjective' because it depends on how different individuals look at the world, and it varies from person to person" and using "experimental forms to show how people create their own subjective truths" (Marvin 16). The apt quote that opens Martin A. Lee and Bruce Shlain's *Acid Dreams* epitomizes the philosophy behind both the psychedelic revolution and postmodernism: "We do not see things as they are, we see them as we are." Experiments in form also helped writers to "bridge the gap between 'reading and saying': the whole Kesey experiment was aimed at the immediacy of saying, the present word, the NOW, but the intervention of literature, of reading and writing, was inescapable" (Whelan 64). It's impossible to translate the exact present via the written word; by the time the moment is written down and read, it has already passed. Different styles, however, like the "telegraphic schizophrenic" and "experiments in narrative perspective, extending the work of such high modernists as James and Faulkner," helped writers to portray a more precise perspective and allowed readers to more effectively view the story from the narrator's eyes (Whelan 67). Thus, the connection between postmodern literature and a psychedelic audience runs deep.

A known example of postmodern literature that resonated deeply with the psychedelic crowd of the 1960s is William Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*. Hailed as "a drug

book – the drug book," *Naked Lunch* notoriously flows in a disorganized and "structurally disorienting" manner (Harris and MacFadyen xi). Burroughs used "the cut up method" to create this work, cutting a page of prose "down the middle and cross the middle" to create four sections that he then rearranged to compose a new page ("The Cut Up Method" 346). This method was used "to produce the accident of spontaneity" that Burroughs believed led to "the best writing ("The Cut Up Method" 346). This "accident of spontaneity" emulates "the NOW" that hippies attempted to constantly live in, so *Naked Lunch*'s postmodern, cut-up form, in addition to its drug-centered content, appealed to the present-minded psychedelic revolution. Ken Kesey's *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* also experimented with form, in that its narration unfolded in the mind of a schizophrenic and was thus interrupted by hallucinations. Psychedelic drug users were familiar with these interruptions because of psychedelic drugs' tendency to produce psychoses similar to schizophrenia; they, too, experienced hallucinations that broke up their traditional thought patterns while under the influence of psychedelic drugs, so they had an enhanced understanding of this particular stream-of-consciousness-like narrative. Kesey's writing was informed by psychedelic drugs and his "experiment… aimed at the immediacy of saying," so this work especially connects to the psychedelic drug experience (Whelan 64). In addition, this narrator offered a subjective perspective not often portrayed in earlier, more objective literature and thus emphasized the importance of individual experience that hippies touted. Although Vonnegut did not write *Slaughterhouse-Five* or any of his works under the influence of any drug (as mentioned in the introduction, he "made no concessions" to any counterculture movement), unlike Burroughs and Kesey, nor does the book refer to recreational drug use, hippies of the

psychedelic revolution were accustomed to the “telegraphic schizophrenic manner” of *Slaughterhouse-Five*; its form was reminiscent of the cut-up *Naked Lunch* and the oft-interrupted *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, styles that mimicked the psychedelic drug experience (Kramer 26).

The subjectivity of *Slaughterhouse-Five* also parallels that in *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest* and leaves room for different interpretations regarding the sanity of the narrator. The “schizophrenic manner” of the novel does not only indicate the style of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, but suggests a possible affliction plaguing protagonist Billy Pilgrim. Scholars have often debated whether Billy’s adventures on “the planet Tralfamadore, where the flying saucers come from” and random movements through time are literal or if they are the result of Billy’s horrific experience in WWII; the time and space travel could all exist in Billy’s mind as a symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder, then called “gross stress reaction” in the DSM (Andreasen 67-71). In support of this theory, Billy admits early in the novel that “the trips aren’t necessarily fun. He is in a constant state of stage fright, he says, because he never knows what part of his life he is going to have to act in next” (23). This description of Billy’s experience matches the description of PTSD and, thus, gross stress reaction Susanne Vees-Gulani gives in her article “Diagnosing Billy Pilgrim: A Psychiatric Approach to Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five*.” She includes research from the 1994 edition of the DSM that proves “exposure to trauma results in symptoms such as persistently re-experiencing the events” and writes that “‘being spastic in time’… is a metaphor for Billy’s repeatedly re-experiencing the traumatic events he went through in the war” (177-178).

Interestingly, the premise of madness underlies other popular countercultural fiction, as well. *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *Naked Lunch* both depict the inner workings and patients of insane asylums, and psychedelic pioneer Allen Ginsberg wrote, "I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness" and reached out to mental patient Carl Solomon in his famed poem "Howl" (62). Perhaps this proclivity for fictional madness stems from the tendency of psychedelic drugs to inflict psychomimetic symptoms. Readers could liken their psychedelic drug experiences to the psychoses occurring in the characters' minds, since the two happenings were so similar. Psychedelic drug users had, in a way, felt the characters' madness, leading to a deeper, sympathetic understanding of these texts. Thus, readers of *Slaughterhouse-Five* with a penchant for psychedelic drugs had enhanced insight into the scattered, science-fiction story of Billy Pilgrim, if they took the perspective that his adventures were stress-induced.

If the story is read from a more literal standpoint, with the view that, as the novel is a work of science-fiction, Billy can and does physically travel through space and time, psychedelic readers could also feel an exceptional connection to the novel. Billy's trips through space center around the planet Tralfamadore, as is indicated in the epigraph. He first reports his abduction "on an all-night radio program devoted to talk":

> He told about having come unstuck in time. He said, too, that he had been kidnapped by a flying saucer in 1967. The saucer was from the planet Tralfamadore, where he was displayed naked in a zoo, he said. He was mated there with a former Earthling movie star named Montana Wildhack. Some night owls in Ilium heard Billy on the radio, and one of them called Billy's daughter Barbara. Barbara was upset. (25)

Barbara tries repeatedly to convince her father that his alien encounter is crazy and untrue, but he never gives up the claim. As unbelievable as such encounters seem to Barbara and may seem to some readers, as well, non-fictional psychedelic drug users have often reported paranormal experiences akin to Billy Pilgrim's during their trips. Additionally, among the hippie religious factions mentioned in Chapter 1 are "the followers of lay lines and the flying-saucer watchers," and aliens, UFOs, and other extraterrestrial trappings have a place in psychedelic art, so psychedelically-inclined hippie readers had an especial affinity for Billy's travels with the Tralfamadorians (Miles 21-22).

Vonnegut and the Hippies Imagine the Paranormal

Terence McKenna, whom Charles Hayes describes in *Tripping: An Anthology of True-Life Psychedelic Adventures* as "arguably, the most eloquent and persuasive spokesman for the psychedelic experience… that the planet has ever unleashed," has often reported extraterrestrial encounters as a result of his psychedelic drug use (411). In his 1975 work, *The Invisible Landscape: Mind, Hallucinogens, and the I Ching*, McKenna details his experiments with psychedelics during their heyday in the 1960s and early 1970s and reports his paranormal experience under the influence of ayahuasca, "a hallucinogenic Amazonian plant concoction":

> We could feel the presence of some invisible hyperspatial entity, an ally, which seemed to be observing and sometimes exerting influence on the situation to keep us moving gently toward an experimental resolution of the ideas we were generating. Because of the alien nature of the

> tryptamine trance, its seeming accentuation of themes alien, insectile, and futuristic, and because of previous experiences with tryptamine in which insectile hallucinatory transformations of human beings were observed, we were led to speculate that the role of the presence was somehow like that of an anthropologist, come to give humanity the keys to galactarian citizenship. We discussed this entity in terms of a giant insect and, through the insect trill of the Amazon jungle at midday, seemed able to discern a deeper harmonic buzz that somehow signified the unseen outsider. This sense of the presence of an alien third entity was sometimes very intense. (Metzner 1; McKenna 100)

Other ayahuasca users have shared McKenna's experience with the psychedelic, noting that they've encountered supernatural or extraterrestrial presences that serve as guides on their trips (Metzner 46-55). Similarly, the Tralfamadorians of *Slaughterhouse-Five* lead Billy toward a greater understanding of time, which he then spreads to other humans, despite their initial disbelief in his alien encounters. Billy writes to his local newspaper that the Tralfamadorian "creatures were very friendly, and they could see in four dimensions. They pitied Earthlings for being able to see only three. They had many wonderful things to teach Earthlings, especially about time. Billy promised to tell what some of those wonderful things were in his next letter" (26). Like McKenna's "hyperspatial ally," the Tralfamadorians hope to guide humans to a greater understanding of the universe.

Unlike the "insectile" being McKenna hallucinated, however, the Tralfamadorians "were two feet high, and green, and shaped like plumber's friends. Their suction cups

were on the ground, and their shafts, which were extremely flexible, usually pointed to the sky. At the top of each shaft was a little hand with a green eye in its palm" (100; *Slaughterhouse-Five* 26). The different characteristics of the paranormal entities, according to psychedelic philosophy, are caused by the different environments in which the beings appear; surroundings were extremely important to potential drug users, as a negative, troubling setting could induce a "bummer" as easily as a calm, positive setting could induce a good trip (*The Psychedelic Experience*). By this token, McKenna imagined "a giant insect" as his supernatural guide because of the influence of the sounds surrounding him, "the insect trill of the Amazon jungle at midday" (100). A psychedelic reader could attribute the appearance of the Tralfamadorians to the setting of the novel. The creatures take on the stereotypical "little green men" extraterrestrial description in some regard. Due to the space-traveling nature of the novel, readers could interpret this quality as homage to traditional science-fiction, and the Tralfamadorians' plunger shape is likely attributed to what John W. Tilton calls "cosmic satire" in his work *Cosmic Satire in the Contemporary Novel*.

According to Tilton, Vonnegut's work transcends the categorization of "black humor" and is better described as satire, but, because of its "frequent expression in fantasy," his satire is "cosmic"; it extends into the universal. Therefore, Vonnegut's depiction of the Tralfamadorians as plungers with some traditional sci-fi characteristics is his satire of the genre. The Tralfamadorian shape could also symbolize the purpose of the Tralfamadorian, to dislodge human thought from its current wayward state. It is the Tralfamadorians, after all, who help Billy Pilgrim become "unstuck in time" (*Slaughterhouse-Five* 23). Crude as this image seems, Vonnegut's work is largely

satirical and darkly humorous, so this style and mindset informed his extraterrestrial imaginings, according to psychedelic belief, much like McKenna's environment informed his.

Paranormal phenomena also worked their way into psychedelic music and art as the psychedelic revolution grew. Jazz musician Sun Ra, for instance, claimed to have made a trip to Saturn as a college student while involved deeply in religious meditation:

> My whole body changed into something else. I could see through myself. And I went up… I wasn't in human form… I landed on a planet that I identified as Saturn… they teleported me and I was down on stage with them. They wanted to talk with me. They had one little antenna on each ear. A little antenna over each eye…. They told me… the world was going into complete chaos… I would speak, and the world would listen. (Szwed 28-29)

After Sun Ra's abduction, he quit college and dedicated himself to music. Performing experimental jazz with a group of musicians called the Arkestra, he found an audience in members of the psychedelic revolution, who appreciated how "far out" he sounded (Szwed 219). His performances also included the spectacle to which hippies had grown accustomed at festivals and acid tests: dancers, lights, and pyrotechnics accompanied his free jazz (Szwed). While he collected psychedelic listeners, Sun Ra continued to insist on the truth of his trip to Saturn, much like Billy Pilgrim assured his daughter of the veracity of his Tralfamadorian travels. The inhabitants of Saturn also told Sun Ra that he "would speak, and the world would listen," just as the Tralfamadorians hoped that Billy would

“teach Earthlings” their philosophy on time (*Slaughterhouse-Five* 26). If Sun Ra could attract a psychedelically-oriented audience with his experimental music and planetary theories, then surely Billy Pilgrim, whose supernatural story reads similarly, and his reports of Tralfamadorian time appealed to the same population.

The theme of the paranormal featured in other forms of psychedelia, as well. Psychedelic art depicted supernatural images from drug experiences. Masters and Houston explain in *Psychedelic Art* that “psychedelic experience drastically alters both inward and outward awarenesses. One’s apprehension is of a world that has slipped the chains of normal categorical ordering. A vast range of phenomena normally excluded enter into the extended consciousness” (89). During a psychedelic drug experience, according to Masters and Houston, the mind opens to the supernatural “normally excluded” from human awareness. Imagery like Rick Griffin’s alien in Figure 8 demonstrates the supernatural beings that could enter the consciousness during psychedelic trips. Figure 8 “depicts an alien with a tablet of LSD marked ‘pay attention’ grasped firmly in its claw” (Farren and Loren 77). The alien in this poster matches the common “little green men” idea of otherworldly lifeforms, and, thus, it can be likened to the little green Tralfamadorians that Vonnegut creates in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. It seems to offer viewers “a tablet of LSD” in its extended hand, which clearly connects the psychedelic revolution to visions of the supernatural, like this one. The writing on the tablet that tells viewers to “pay attention” reads like Leary’s advice to “turn on” to acid and “tune in” to the truth. Perhaps, if one “pays attention” with the help of LSD, they will have experiences that involve paranormal entities and, in doing so, come to a greater understanding of the universe. Art like this not only directly links the otherworldly to the

psychedelic experience, but it also illustrates the alien forms that appeared to psychedelic drug users like McKenna during their trips that made extraterrestrials like Vonnegut's Tralfamadorians seem more vivid and easily imagined.

Supernatural forces weren't always clearly hallucinated, however, as McKenna indicates when he writes that he could initially "feel the presence of some hyperspatial entity," rather than "see" its presence (100). The sensing of paranormal forces connects to a principle underlying much of the psychedelic experience, Carl Jung's theory of synchronicity, "one of the most suggestive attempts made to bring the paranormal within the bounds of intelligibility" (Main 1). Jung's theory of synchronicity describes the idea that events are subject to a larger pattern and cannot always be explained by causality. This principle not only connects the theory of time present in both *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *The Sirens of Titan* to the psychedelic revolution that embraced the synchronicity theory, but it also further connects the psychedelic revolution to supernatural phenomena, and, thus, to the science-fiction otherworldliness of *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

In *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle*, Jung asks, "How are we to recognize acausal combinations of events, since it is obviously impossible to examine all chance happenings for their causality? The answer to this is that acausal events may be expected most readily where, on closer refection, a causal connection appears to be inconceivable" (8). The suggestion here is that there is "a world that has slipped the chains of normal categorical ordering" (*Psychedelic Art* 89). According to this principle, events don't necessarily follow a pattern of cause and effect, but are instead "a falling together in time, a kind of simultaneity" because of a universal energy underlying everything (Jung 8).

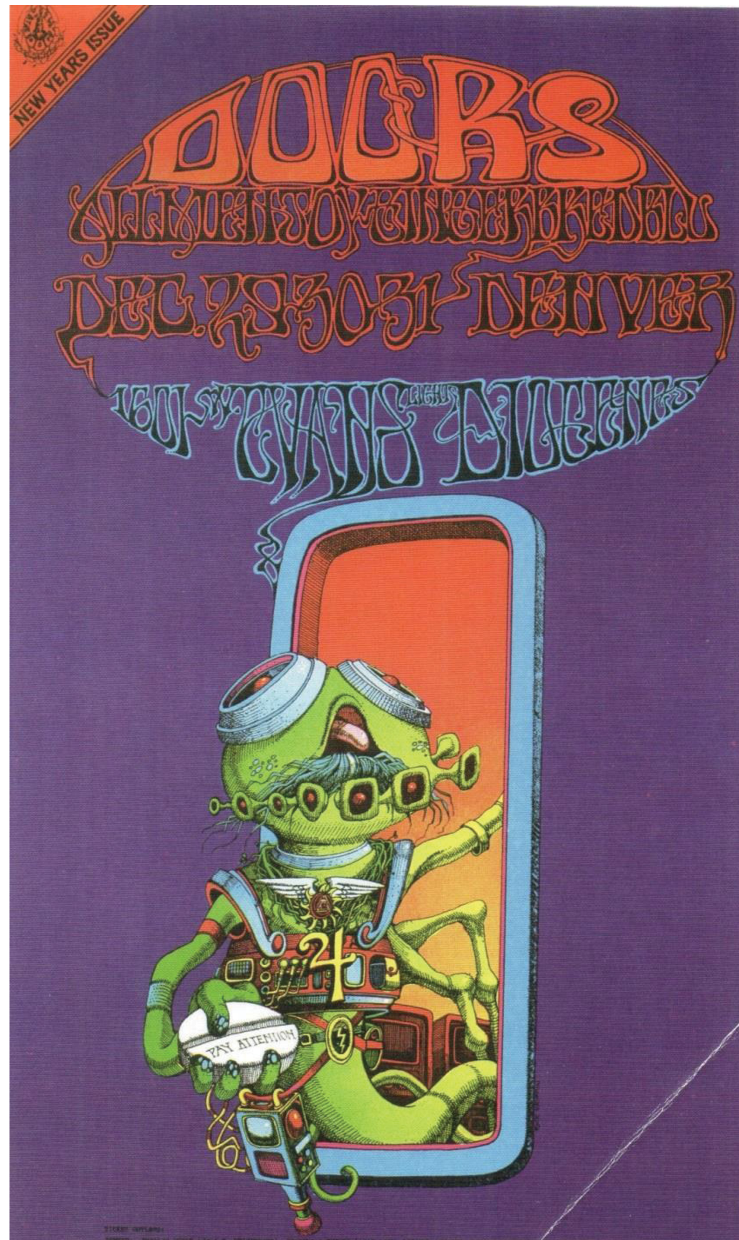

Fig. 8. “The Doors and Allmen Joy poster.” Source: Griffin, Rick. *Classic Rock Posters: Sixty Years of Posters and Flyers, 1952-2012*. Eds. Mick Farren and Dennis Loren. New York: Metro Books, 2012. 77. Print.

This theory of synchronicity explains paranormal phenomena that are otherwise inexplicable, since they don’t seem to have a clear cause, like ESP. The psychedelic revolution picked up on this theory because of a “weird synchronization” they felt with others and the environment while under the influence of psychedelic drugs that “usually struck outsiders as mere coincidence or just whimsical, meaningless in any case” (Wolfe

140). To them and philosophers like Jung, however, the synchronization gave reason to and connected the otherworldly phenomena they experienced during their trips with reality; along with LSD and the feeling of synchronicity it invoked, the theory of synchronicity explained the secrets of the universe.

In addition to explaining the paranormal, the Jungian principle of synchronicity also offered a theory of time, namely that all human experience was part of a larger, set pattern. Similarly, the Tralfamadorian belief is that "all moments, past, present, and future, always have existed, always will exist" (27). Therefore, if someone passes away, the Tralfamadorian thing to say is "so it goes," because the person will always exist at some point in time (27). This phrase, "so it goes," occurs repeatedly throughout the novel and parallels a founding philosophy of the psychedelic movement: "every phenomenon, and every person, is a microcosm of the whole pattern of the universe" (Wolfe 140-141). The most effective and best way to live, according to both Billy Pilgrim and the proponents of the psychedelic revolution, is to "go with the flow" – an aphorism much like "so it goes" in its passivity and acceptance of a larger pattern (Wolfe 140-141). According to the psychedelic drug users who spoke to Tom Wolfe for his book on the topic, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, psychedelic drugs reveal the "pattern of the universe" and demonstrate to users that they are only "minutely synched in with it" (141). Since all people are in sync with the larger pattern, they lack free will, according to this belief and the Tralfamadorian philosophy. A prayer on Billy's wall reminds him of this deficiency: "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom always to tell the difference" (*Slaughterhouse-Five* 60). After writing this prayer, Vonnegut quips, "Among the things Billy Pilgrim could

not change were the past, the present, and the future," reminding readers of Billy's lack of free will, as he's learned on Tralfamadore; hippies who learned this same lesson through psychedelic drugs sympathized, as demonstrated by their appreciation of *The Sirens of Titan*, in which the same concepts of time and free will appeared (60).

Instead of feeling remorse at their lack of free will, however, both Billy and the hippies found comfort in the thought that they were part of an existing, unalterable pattern. The serenity prayer "expressed his method for keeping going" (*Slaughterhouse-Five* 60). Since Billy can't control his past, present, or future, the prayer reminds him to accept his fate serenely, "his method for keeping going." Psychedelic drug users maintained a similar attitude toward their lack of free will. Wolfe explains:

> According to this principle, man does not have free will. There is no use in his indulging in a lifelong competition to change the structure of the little environment he seems to be trapped in. But one could see the larger pattern and move with it – Go with the flow! – and accept it and rise above one's immediate environment and even alter it by accepting the larger pattern and grooving with it - Put your good where it will do the most! (141)

The hippies believed they were putting "good" into the world by accepting life as it occurred to them and "moving with it." They didn't protest the war in Vietnam or take up arms with political groups because these groups' activism signified attempts to alter the larger pattern, the world around them, "the flow," which they believed could not be altered. Instead of wasting their energy and efforts trying to redirect the course of the rest

of the world, they "put good" into their own lives. All of the "peace and acceptance" rallying cries of other countercultural groups existed within the hippie movement; they just championed peace and acceptance of the self and the course their lives were on within the larger pattern.

In this way, they believed they could alter a larger environment. If everyone were to "rise above one's immediate environment… by accepting the larger pattern and grooving with it," they'd live peaceful lives of self-acceptance and acceptance of their environments and those around them (Wolfe 141). The peace would spread, and the world would become a better place person by person. This was the goal of the psychedelic revolution: to turn people on to this notion in order to breed a more accepting world aware of a "larger pattern" (Wolfe 141).

Similarly, Billy Pilgrim also felt that he could bring the world more peace by spreading the Tralfamadorian message, "the true nature of time" (*Slaughterhouse-Five* 141). He tells one of his patients, a young boy whose father was killed in Vietnam, "about his adventures on Tralfamadore, assured the fatherless boy that his father was very much alive in moments the boy would see again and again. 'Isn't that comforting?' Billy asked" (135). Although the boy's mother doesn't find the philosophy as comforting and thinks that Billy has gone insane, almost ten years later, moments before Billy's death, "he is in Chicago to address a large crowd on the subject of flying saucers and the true nature of time" (*Slaughterhouse-Five* 141). He tells the "capacity audience in a baseball park" that he will die that night after he speaks, as he has lived it so many times before and knows his unalterable fate. When the crowd protests his death, Billy gives them the same message he gave the boy in his office: "If you protest, if you think that death is a

terrible thing, then you have not understood a word I've said" (142). Billy leaves the crowd with the message that protest will change nothing; he will still die, just as all of them will, despite any motion they might make to alter it. Yet, he will still live in other moments in time and experience them as he has since he first "came unstuck in time" (*Slaughterhouse-Five* 23). What this moment illustrates is that, finally, thousands of people have come to believe what Billy believes: the Tralfamadorian view of time that leads one to accept one's fate and move with it rather than against it is a comforting thought.

Conclusion: Billy and the Hippies "Go with the Flow"

Over the ten years between Billy's encounter with his patient and his death, Billy has managed to collect an enormous amount of followers who want to believe in his philosophy of the acceptance of one's unchangeable lot. Similarly, throughout the 1960s, the hippies also amassed a great number of followers who believed something akin to the Tralfamadorian concepts that Billy spreads: humans are part of a larger, universal pattern that is unalterable, so the best course of action is to "go with the flow" and accept life as it comes without attempting to disrupt the universe's predetermined pattern. In addition to this shared notion of acceptance of one's fate, *Slaughterhouse-Five* contained other elements that appealed to psychedelically-inclined hippie readers, like its fragmented, postmodern style that matched the cut-up or interrupted style of important psychedelic texts like *Naked Lunch* and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. The schizophrenic nature of *Slaughterhouse-Five* and its protagonist are also reminiscent of those texts and the symptoms of psychosis psychedelic drugs often enacted in users' minds. Additionally, psychedelic drug users frequently imagined supernatural entities during their trips like

those Tralfamadorians depicted in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, and they created and appreciated music and art that illustrated similar paranormal experiences.

As the decade turned, though, much of this music and art began to be co-opted by the mainstream culture. Increasingly, toward the end of the 1960s, "business dogged the counterculture with a fake counterculture, a commercial replica that seemed to ape its every move for the titillation of the TV-watching millions and the nation's corporate sponsors" (Frank 7). Advertisers realized that the hippies' "joyous and even glorious cultural flowering" could be used to sell products "against the stultifying demands of mass society" (Frank 4-5). Their colorful, fun, and free world appealed to those living in the "tepid, mechanical, and uniform" mainstream culture (Frank 5). Psychedelic rock music was used in television advertisements, hearts and peace signs covered magazines, and vivid colors and patterns decorated every possible surface, from fashion to furniture. According to Thomas Frank in *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism*, "Hearst launched a psychedelic magazine in 1968," and, even before that, the communal group "the San Francisco Diggers had held a funeral for 'Hippie, devoted son of mass media'" (7). What had once been a revolution with meaning for millions and held the promise of introspection, self-growth, and enlightenment, along with greater peace and heightened compassion and love for others, had been robbed of its depth by mainstream media and advertisers. They stole the surface qualities of the counterculture, particularly, as the Diggers point out, the hippie movement and psychedelic culture, which projected the most outwardly colorful and "joyous" appearances of all the movements, and sold it "to cash in on a particular demographic and subvert the great threat that 'real' counterculture represents" (Frank 7).

The “threat” was effectively subverted. By 1973, when Vonnegut published his next novel, the counterculture had come to a close.

Chapter 4

Introduction: <u>Breakfast of Champions</u> Mirrors the Decaying Counterculture

Roberto Serrai names Kurt Vonnegut's *Breakfast of Champions* as "one of his most 'countercultural' works" in "Landscapes of Destruction: Reading Kurt Vonnegut's *Breakfast of Champions* with an Eye to Walt Whitman" (36). Serrai pulls from Philip Slater's *The Pursuit of Loneliness: American Culture at the Breaking Point* a quotation that characterizes the 1960s counterculture as "a kind of reform movement, trying to revive a decayed tradition once important to our civilization" and compares *Breakfast of Champions* to this idea, writing that Vonnegut's "painful awareness of such a decay" in the novel contributes to its countercultural nature (36). The "decayed tradition" Slater believes the counterculture attempted to revive was what he calls "the drop-out tradition," one that "is not only old but extremely important to our history" (110). He notes that "the New England colonies grew out of utopian communes," so the idea of "dropping out" of traditional society and creating a new culture based upon greater freedom and equality was not a new one, but "a decayed tradition once important to our civilization." The counterculture was merely trying to reform that, according to Slater, but, as with the New England "utopian communes," they "became corrupted by involvement in successful economic enterprise and the communal aspect was eroded away – another example of a system being destroyed by what it attempts to ignore" (110). The co-optation of the counterculture by the mainstream culture, and particularly corporate America, that it not only tried to ignore but actively tried to fight, according to Frank, led to its destruction, so that, by 1973, when *Breakfast of Champions* was published, the counterculture, and

particularly the hippies who had spurred on the psychedelic revolution, had experienced its own decay (7).

Breakfast of Champions, as Serrai mentions, contains a "painful awareness of the decay" of the traditions American society was founded upon (36). Even worse, parts of it explain that the "American Dream" that created the basis for this society, that all men are created equal and endowed with basic rights and freedoms, never existed, and, thus, cannot "decay." Sumner explains that the first chapter of the novel offers "a decidedly impolite history of the United States. Like a grade-school primer with doodle scrawled in the margins, it deconstructs much of the iconography put into his head when he was a boy" (153). Vonnegut explicates the National Anthem and the motto "E pluribus unum," calling them "pure balderdash" and "vacant," and explains that the symbols "might not have mattered much, if it weren't for this: a lot of citizens were so ignored and cheated and insulted that they thought they might be in the wrong country, or even on the wrong planet" (9). The history is meant to make readers aware of the "decay" or even non-existence of the American Dream that, according to Slater, the counterculture attempted to revive. Sumner writes that "its moments of brutality," like this "impolite" beginning, "are meant to jolt the reader into seeing familiar things in new ways, questioning the most mundane words and gestures for the (often toxic) baggage they carry" (150). Vonnegut announces his reasons for "jolting" the audience in the preface:

> I am trying to make my head as empty as it was when I was born onto this damaged planet fifty years ago. I suspect this is something most Americans… should do…. I have no culture, no humane harmony in my brains. I can't live without a culture anymore. (5)

Thus, in the first chapter especially, Vonnegut empties his head “of all the junk in there” and explains to other Americans why they should do the same: because the American tradition they might attempt to revive is “decayed” or never existed in the first place. Only after they’ve let go of the fictitious “American Dream” upon which the country was built might they construct a new culture.

The preface and the first chapter set the tone for the entire novel, “a commentary on the American Dream as the insurgent hopes of the sixties collapsed, a harrowing tour through the anomie the author saw in a country alienated from its own history without a sense of gravity, without a sense of its culture” (Sumner 149-150). Vonnegut intends for the novel to “jolt” readers and himself awake so that they might realize the “decay” and falseness of the “American Dream,” toss out this fiction, and build a culture more “humane” and “harmonious,” rather than attempting to revive the dying and untrue American traditions they’d been taught since childhood. In 1973, Vonnegut saw the counterculture’s hopes to revive that traditional American Dream of equality and freedom dashed for several reasons. *Breakfast of Champions* is his explanation to these lost American citizens of their country’s true history, “impolite” as it may be, and his urging for them to join him in attempting to build a new culture, not based on one unstable at its outset.

In addition to the mainstream culture’s usurping of countercultural effects, the counterculture, and particularly the hippie movement, quickly dismantled for several other reasons. In 1969, “Charles Manson, the illiterate psychopathic leader of the Family commune at the Spahn Ranch, had convinced his followers to engage in a series of killings in order to ferment a war between blacks and whites…. He called the killing

sprees ‘Helter Skelter’ after the McCartney song” (Miles 323-324). The press, Manson’s own lawyers, and even some members of the counterculture blamed “the deleterious effects of hallucinogenic drugs” for Manson and his “hippie” followers’ actions (Lee and Shlain 257). The Weathermen, a radical and violent segment of the counterculture, particularly praised Manson’s killing of “rich honky pigs” just before they embarked on a crime spree of their own throughout the early 1970s that included bombings “of federal and corporate offices” and helping Timothy Leary escape from jail (Lee and Shlain 257; Miles 309-312). Months after Manson’s murders, a rock concert at Altamont Speedway headlined by the Rolling Stones saw four deaths (Lee and Shlain 257). The Hells Angels worked as security for the event, but their overindulgence in alcohol and psychedelic drugs paired with an intense and rowdy crowd led to madness, as Martin A. Lee and Bruce Shlain describe in *Acid Dreams: The Complete Social History of LSD*:

> Fights broke out near the stage while the Angels faced down a crowd of a quarter to half a million. To make matters worse, there was some contaminated LSD circulating among the audience, but the scene was so violent that people were freaking out regardless of what type of acid they took. The paramedics and physicians from the Haight-Ashbury and Berkeley free clinics treated so many bummers that they ran out of Thorazine in half an hour. Thousands of others suffered cut feet, broken bones, head wounds, and worse as the Angels went on a rampage. (256)

The combination of these events, in addition to mounting backlash from the mainstream culture, increased rioting, and violent protesting that culminated in fatalities, like that at Kent State in 1970, almost ensured an end to the entire counterculture movement.

The hippie movement and psychedelic revolution in particular suffered from the events of the late 1960s. In 1968, after the police riots in Chicago, the hippie movement was scorned by more politically active factions of the counterculture for its inactivity in the increasingly violent protests and riots (Miles 10). The mainstream culture, though it had disdained hippie culture since its inception, developed a stronger distaste for the movement after Altamont and the Manson murders because of its close association with psychedelic drugs. These events solidified the indisputable dangers of drug use in the minds of the mainstream, and the hippies who had promoted drug use throughout the 1970s were demonized by traditional society.

The Manson murders especially cast a dark shadow over hippie ideals like psychedelic drugs and communal living and even stigmatized their music, particularly that of The Beatles, whom Manson claimed inspired his crimes and who broke up in 1970, further signifying the end of the hippie era. Hippies faced more prejudice than usual and were subject to stricter policing. The film *Inherent Vice*, based in 1970, depicts this type of heightened police enforcement when an officer pulls over protagonist Doc and his friends, demands all of their IDs, and explains that "any gathering of three or more civilians is now considered a possible cult. Criteria includes referencing the Book of Revelation, males with shoulder length hair or longer, and endangerment through inattentive driving." Doc and friends are let off the hook and luckily manage to escape intense police scrutiny, as they are carrying drugs in their car. These types of crackdowns on those who had the physical characteristics of hippies, "shoulder length hair or longer," and displayed the effects of psychedelic or other illegal substances, such as carefree "endangerment" and "inattentive driving," tainted the hippie lifestyle; the accusations of

cult-like behavior and comparisons to Manson faced by hippies in the early 1970s shattered any illusions they had of leading peaceful, enlightened lives, and the heightened police enforcement meant increased focus on and restriction of the drug activity that had characterized the hippie lifestyle for the better part of a decade.

The early 1970s, then, marked an enormous come-down for the psychedelically-inclined hippies. Their attempt "to revive a decayed tradition once important to our civilization" had itself decayed, leading to "the new depression" for "a generation of sixties burnouts" (Goldman qtd. in Anson; Lee and Shlain 261). Lee and Shlain explain that "when the social fabric starts to unravel, as it did in the late 1960s, the fabric of the psyche also unravels" (262). Many hippies who once used psychedelic drugs in search of enlightenment were now "turning on simply to turn off… others took solace in Jesus Freakery or any number of Eastern swamis who promised blissful panaceas for acid casualties on the rebound," and others, like Kurt Vonnegut's own son Mark, were developing mental illnesses as a result of their 1960s psychedelic drug use (Lee and Shlain 262).

In 1971, Mark Vonnegut, who had been living on a commune in British Columbia, was admitted into a mental hospital and treated for schizophrenia (*Just Like Someone without Mental Illness only More So* 37). He attributes the illness to the intensity of the 1960s and the hippies' unawareness of the dangers of psychedelic drugs, writing, "We truly didn't know that drugs were bad for you. How could we have known for sure that drugs weren't good? For many of us experimenting with drugs was more a matter of covering all the bases in a search for what might be helpful and positive" (*The Eden Express* 15-16). Mark's unraveling allowed Kurt Vonnegut an intense look at the

counterculture's downward spiral and he was at least partly inspired by this decay he so closely witnessed. Sumner writes:

> The chaos in Vonnegut's personal life and the struggle to find a new direction is reflected in *Breakfast of Champions*…. It is a commentary on the American Dream as the insurgent hopes of the sixties collapsed, a harrowing tour through the anomie the author saw in a country alienated from its own history, without a center of gravity, without a sense of its culture…. *Breakfast of Champions* documents a society… in the process of a nervous breakdown. (149-150)

The "chaos," "the struggle to find a new direction," and the lack of center depicted in *Breakfast of Champions* reflects the feelings of the hippies at the time of its publication. The counterculture, especially the oft-scored hippies, sought a new culture as its previous one vanished, so they easily related to Vonnegut's illustration of a quest for culture in the wake of a previous ideology's collapse. Beyond that, and despite the acknowledgement of cultural decay that makes the novel one of his "most countercultural," Vonnegut still provides the "evidence of the dignity of the human spirit and the possibility of free will – even in a wasteland" that characterized earlier works like *The Sirens of Titan* and offers readers a bit of solace (Serrai 36; Sumner 150). The "generation of sixties burnouts" descending from their carefree, psychedelic lifestyles in the early 1970s could relate to *Breakfast of Champions* not only because it describes a disappearance of culture, a feeling of disorientation, and a struggle to maintain composure in a crumbling society, but they could also appreciate the semblance of hope Vonnegut delivers in the midst of the madness (Lee and Shlain 261).

A Man without a Culture and a Lost Generation

Breakfast of Champions begins with an autobiographical preface in which Vonnegut states:

> I think I am trying to clear my head of all the junk in there…. I think I am trying to make my head as empty as it was when I was born onto this damaged planet fifty years ago…. The things other people have put into *my* head, at any rate, do not fit together nicely, are often useless and ugly, are out of proportion with one another, are out of proportion with life as it really is outside my head. I have no culture, no humane harmony in my brains. I can't live without a culture anymore. (5)

The passage sets the tone for the entire novel: Vonnegut is trying to rid himself of the "decayed tradition once important to our civilization" because it doesn't fit anymore, and he advises "most white Americans" to do the same (5). Sumner explains that Vonnegut feels he lost "the world of buoyant civic optimism he learned in grade school during the Great Depression… a dead letter, he feared, in the age of Watergate and the Vietnam War" (152). Though Vonnegut writes about the deterioration of a culture "he learned in grade school," "buoyant civic optimism" also infected the counterculture, especially the hippies who believed that peace and compassion could unite the world. Yet the "American Dream" of equality for all no longer matched up "with life as it really is," as the war in Vietnam raged on, violent, domestic riots and protests increased, and the peace-centered goals of the idealistic counterculture withered away.

While the true aims of the hippies disappeared, physical manifestations of their ethos blossomed, a phenomenon that Vonnegut makes note of in *Breakfast of Champions* through protagonist Dwayne Hoover's insistence that his employee dress in a more colorful and youthful way to more effectively sell cars at his dealership. The psychedelic drug experience, once the means to enlightenment, art, and culture for countercultural hippies, became fodder for mainstream advertising and media. Masters and Houston report in their 1968 book *Psychedelic Art* a sudden and growing onslaught of "psychedelic wallpaper, neckties, shirts, dresses, magazine advertisements, and television commercials. Recently, the *Wall Street Journal* had a front page item headed: 'call it psychedelic and it will sell fast, some merchants say.' The writer of this article remarked that almost anything a merchant might call psychedelic would sell" (87). The controversial psychedelic culture that had set apart a generation in the early to mid-1960s began to characterize mainstream capitalism in the late 1960s, continuing into the 1970s. This signified an enormous blow for the counterculture that had once railed against the same corporate America that now profited off of the symbols of their ideology. The mainstream culture, who still shunned their lifestyles, bought into their style, until only the shallow, surface qualities of the counterculture remained. As Frank explains, "the story ends with the noble idealism of the New Left in ruins and the counterculture sold out to Hollywood and the television networks" (5). It became, as Philip Seymour Hofman's interpretation of rock critic Lester Bangs puts it, ironically enough, in the film *Almost Famous*, set in 1971, "an industry of cool."

It was precisely this counterculture's evolution into an industry that left true members of the counterculture without a culture to call their own. The psychedelic

revolution's art, music, and fashion had been picked up by the mainstream society that scorned their drug use. Thus, they found themselves in a similar situation as Vonnegut in *Breakfast of Champions*: "without a culture" (5). Although the outer manifestations of psychedelic culture could assimilate into mainstream culture, hippies' deeper beliefs in psychedelics were still shirked and demonized, especially as they were blamed for much of the crime and violence sweeping the country at the end of the 1960s. Thus, devoted hippies couldn't fully integrate into the mainstream without sacrificing their ideals, and, even if they remained committed to their cause, the mainstream world's shallow representation of psychedelics in their advertisements, products and media tainted the once-pure psychedelic ideology. Understandably, by 1973, hippies felt as homeless in society as Vonnegut's passage suggests.

For a decade, hippies had elected Vonnegut as a literary guru of their movement. His beliefs aligned with theirs. From 1969, when *Slaughterhouse-Five* had been published, to 1973, at the publication of *Breakfast of Champions*, a lot had changed in Vonnegut's life and for the counterculture. Hippies experiencing these jolting changes found comfort in the fact that their literary hero, Vonnegut, also felt as though his ideas no longer "fit together nicely, are often useless and ugly, are out of proportion with one another, are out of proportion with life as it really is outside my head" (*Breakfast of Champions* 5). Doubtlessly, many of Vonnegut's original followers now turned to him in search of guidance, since both he and they couldn't "live without a culture anymore."

If his countercultural readers looked to *Breakfast of Champions* for support, as the success of the novel suggests they did, they found "relentless honesty about an author and a culture in crisis, the dangers of closed eyes and the debased language of advertising"

(Sumner 169). Indeed, Vonnegut confronts the world of advertising that had commodified the youth counterculture and turned out the committed hippies. One of the novel's protagonists, Dwayne Hoover, owns a Pontiac dealership, where he has employed a World War II veteran named Harry LeSabre for twenty years who knows him "better than did any other man" (*Breakfast of Champions* 41). Dwayne calls Harry into his office one day to inform him:

> The Pontiac has now become a glamorous, youthful adventure for people who want a *kick* out of life! And you dress and act like this was a mortuary…. I have some news for you: modern science has given us a whole lot of wonderful new colors, with strange, exciting names like *red!, orange!, green!, and pink!*, Harry. We're not stuck any more with just black, gray and white! (48)

Dwayne's blunt appraisal of his friend's wardrobe and suggestion he change to fit the new vision of Pontiac – "a glamorous, youthful adventure for people who want a *kick* out of life" – reflects the attitudes of the real advertisers and businessmen preying upon the youth counterculture's ideology for surface symbolism and trends, like the vivid colors that inhabited psychedelic art and fashion. Bright, "wonderful" colors that characterized psychedelic trips and were thus expressed in psychedelic art, music, and culture, found their way into the advertising world, as Dwayne demonstrates. For example, *Newsweek* characterized men's fashion:

> The new styles had arrived with the Beatles, the hippies and the student revolts. In short, when a new era of social expression was born in the

> United States, the dark ages of male fashion began to die…. Hipped on color and cacophony, whether it's psychedelic art or discotheques, young people dress to fit their milieu – and their elders are picking up the beat. (qtd. in Frank 187)

The trends of "color and cacophony" from "psychedelic art or discotheques" also emerged in other markets, such as women's fashion, housewares, furniture, advertisements, and television (Frank 186-187; *Psychedelic Art* 87). *Newsweek* makes no secret of these colorful trends' origins in the youth counterculture and no apologies for its overt theft from meaningful movements like "the hippies and the student revolts" and shallow advertisement of the fashions thereafter. Similarly, Dwayne bluntly puts it to Harry that the styles have changed, and, in order to sell more Pontiacs, his salesmen had to dress in a manner that was hip to the youth movement. He associates the vibrant colors with "glamour" and fun, not recognizing that they originated in interpretations of drug experiences depicted in psychedelic art and hold meaning for many of the "young people" who "dress to fit their milieu."

Vonnegut's depiction of the mainstream representation of youth counterculture in its advertisements and trends is so accurate that the young people of the revolution could easily feel that Vonnegut understood their plight and thus turn to him for advice. In fact, they did. Mark Vonnegut writes in *The Eden Express*, his memoir about his life at the end of the 1960s leading up to his mental breakdown, that, in 1970, "A lot of the principles I was operating on were lifted from my father's stuff…. It wasn't that I was trying to live my life by things my father had said in opposition to other things. It was just that his voice… seemed to be part of the larger voice that was worth tuning in to" (55). Mark

Vonnegut makes clear that he doesn't hear his father's voice guiding him through the turbulent end of the decade just because Kurt Vonnegut is his biological father, but because it seemed "worth tuning in to," a phrase perhaps left over from Timothy Leary's chant "turn on, tune in, drop out." Many young hippies felt the same about Kurt Vonnegut's voice, not only because he demonstrated in *Breakfast of Champions* that he understood the shallow mainstream adoption of their ideology and sudden disappearance of their culture, but also because "his voice was a familiar one." Previous novels like *Sirens of Titan*, *Cat's Cradle*, and *Slaughterhouse-Five* had illustrated that Vonnegut's voice "was worth tuning in to," so, in 1973, his words still resonated with countercultural readers.

Those looking to *Breakfast of Champions* for guidance could find a hopeful message buried beneath Vonnegut's descriptions of cultural decay. Vonnegut announces the arrival of this message clearly: "And now comes the spiritual climax of this book, for it is at this point that I, the author, am suddenly transformed by what I have done so far. This is why I had gone to Midland City: to be born again" (224). At this point in the novel, Vonnegut has written himself in as a character at the Midland City Festival of the Arts, where Rabo Karabekian, a "minimal painter," is displaying his painting "entitled *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*" (201; 212). Vonnegut provides a sketch of the painting (Fig. 9) and describes it:

> The original was twenty feet wide and sixteen feet high. The field was *Hawaiian Avocado*, a green wall paint manufactured by the O'Hare Paint and Varnish Company in Hellertown, Pennsylvania. The vertical stripe was dayglow orange reflecting tape. This was the most expensive piece of

> art…. It was a scandal what the painting cost…. Midland City was outraged. (213)

The citizens of Midland City can't understand why such a seemingly simple piece of art should be priced more steeply than any other, "fifty thousand dollars," to be exact (225). One woman tells Karabekian plainly, "We don't think much of your painting. I've seen better pictures done by a five-year-old" (226). Karabekian replies:

> It is a picture of the awareness of every animal. It is the immaterial core of every animal – the 'I am' to which all messages are sent. It is all that is alive in any of us…. It is unwavering and pure, no matter what preposterous adventure may befall us. A sacred picture of Saint Anthony alone is one vertical, unwavering band of light. If a cockroach were near him, or a cocktail waitress, the picture would show two such bands of light. Our awareness is all that is alive and maybe sacred in any of us. (226)

This explanation helps Vonnegut to be "reborn" (*Breakfast of Champions* 224). He had previously "come to the conclusion that there was nothing sacred about myself or about any human being, that we were all machines, doomed to collide and collide and collide…. It is Rabo Karabekian who made me the serene Earthling which I am this day" (225).

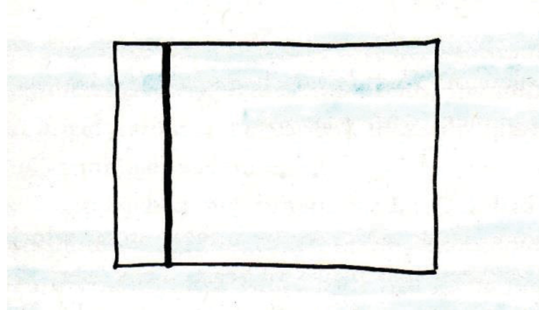

Fig. 9. "Vonnegut's miniature of Rabo Karabekian's *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*." Source: Vonnegut, Kurt. *Breakfast of Champions*. New York: Dial Press, 2011. 213. Print.

Returning to that idea of "decay" that Slater presents in *The Pursuit of Loneliness* and Vonnegut confronts in *Breakfast of Champions* through his deconstruction of American traditions, minimalist art like Karabekian's presents a type of deconstruction similar to what Vonnegut hoped to achieve in the novel. It strips away all of the details of traditional art, leaving only the minimum. Ruhrberg recalls a F.N. Mennemeir statement regarding minimalist art, "Deconstruction is always, or should always be, a construction as well" (349). By throwing out all of the decoration, symbols, and minutiae other art provides, minimalists create art that "stands only for itself," just as Vonnegut hoped to stand only for himself by clearing his head of "the things other people have put" into it that "do not fit together nicely, are often useless and ugly, often out of proportion with one another, are out of proportion with life as it really is" (Ruhrberg 350; *Breakfast of Champions* 5). Minimalist art, like Karebekian's in Figure 9 and that in Figure 10, does just that: it rids the picture of anything that "does not fit together nicely," could be construed as "useless and ugly, out of proportion, or out of proportion with life as it really is." It presents the simplest, most deconstructed form of art.

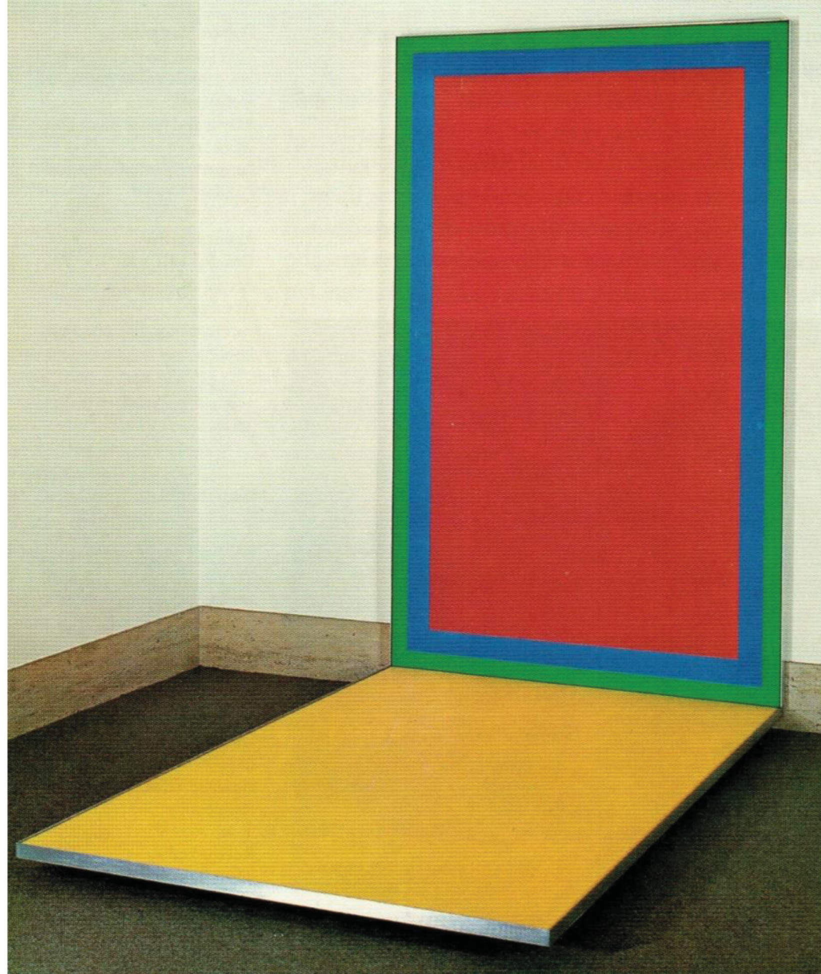

Fig. 10. “Red Blue Green Yellow” (1965). Source: Kelly, Ellsworth. *Red Blue Green Yellow*. 1965. *Art of the 20th Century*. Ed. Ingo F. Walther. Los Angeles: TASCHEN, 2013. 350. Print.

Minimalist art like that in Figure 10 shared some characteristics with the psychedelic art of the time. Its vibrant colors and the blocked, patterned trait of the upright canvas resemble op art and the op art home décor pictured in Figure 6. “A key trait” of Figure 10, however, Ruhrberg explains, “is its waiver of all referential content. The picture, reduced to a painted surface and its support, stands only for itself” (350). Like Karebekian’s work, without any background information, the painting appears to have no meaning. “A five-year-old” with the talent to paint within the lines could paint the green and blue bands around the red canvas and certainly paint the yellow canvas

below it (*Breakfast of Champions* 226). It appears devoid of any meaning, to symbolize nothing. It is deconstructed, but, as Mennemeier says, it "should be a construction as well." On this minimal painting, viewers can construct any meaning they want. After they "clear their heads of the things other people have put" into them, according to Vonnegut, humans can similarly rebuild them with any meaning they want (*Breakfast of Champions* 5). This is symbolized in the novel through Karebekian's minimalist painting. Though its viewers do not initially understand its meaning, Karebekian's painting represents "the immaterial core of every animal," the thing that every animal then builds upon (*Breakfast of Champions* 226). Strip down any animal, and, according to Karebekian, what is left is "the awareness… the immaterial core… the 'I am' to which all messages are sent" (226). If we discard all of the "inhumane, inharmonious culture" that's been impressed upon us, as Vonnegut suggests we should, we will be left with that basic "unwavering band of light" that Karebekian paints and that is our awareness. Then, on top of that awareness, we construct whatever new meaning we want.

Karabekian provides Vonnegut, and thus, Vonnegut provides readers, with the comforting thought that all beings are, at their most pared down, "unwavering bands of light." Despite the seeming meaninglessness of human action and interaction, the basic awareness at the core of every "Earthling" makes them "alive and maybe sacred" (*Breakfast of Champions* 226). With this illuminating idea in mind, the lack of culture and the outward machination of human activity that were Vonnegut's initial concerns become less worrisome, because the core of every being, its awareness, cannot be bought and sold as mainstream advertisers dispensed the counterculture, and is not subject to the disappointing decay of a "tradition once important to our civilization" (Slater 110). The

"band of unwavering light" is just that: unwavering. Although the outside world might be crumbling and, externally, humanity seemed to falter, internally, every being was still "sacred" (*Breakfast of Champions* 226). Counterculture youths had the power to deconstruct themselves, tear off all the pieces of culture that society had imposed upon them, to that bare minimum, awareness, and reconstruct from there.

Conclusion: Awareness is Sacred to the Hippies and Vonnegut

The notion of awareness being sacred was not a new one to hippies or even to Vonnegut. Many of the ideals of the psychedelic revolution revolved around self-knowledge and achieving heightened self-awareness, oftentimes through psychedelic drugs, but also through meditation, artistic expression, and communing with nature and others. *The Sirens of Titan*, *Cat's Cradle*, and *Slaughterhouse-Five* all offer messages that, although life might seem purposeless and uncontrollable, self-love and awareness could help combat such feelings of hopelessness. Thus, the idea Vonnegut offered them through Karabekian's painting, that "awareness is all that is alive and maybe sacred in all of us," read as reassurance that their previous attempts at self-growth and heightened awareness weren't all for naught (*Breakfast of Champions* 226). Awareness, as the hippies and members of the psychedelic revolution had once suspected and Vonnegut implied, is what humans need to locate within themselves first in order to construct a culture after theirs has "decayed" or been proven false.

Beyond its implications of cultural de- and reconstruction, the idea that every being is composed of "an unwavering band of light," regardless of their stature, their outward appearance, their culture, their beliefs, and others' opinions of them, among

other things, is immensely reassuring, even in present day. For the hippies especially, the thought that nothing, save from death, perhaps, could alter that "band of light," no co-optation or decay of their culture, ignorance of their beliefs, or disdain of their appearance, offered some comfort, especially when coming from an author they'd adopted as their mentor for a decade. Vonnegut admitted that he found hope in this idea:

> This book is being written by a meat machine in cooperation with a machine made of metal and plastic…. And at the core of the writing meat machine is something sacred, which is an unwavering band of light. At the core of each person who reads this book is an unwavering band of light…. God bless Rabo Karabekian! (231)

Vonnegut indicates that this idea that he is, at his core, an unwavering band of light, has helped him to become "reborn," to create a new culture and new beliefs that sustain him more than those that society had previously imposed upon him (*Breakfast of Champions* 224). Even if he is unable to build a new culture and must exist within America's as a "writing meat machine," working mechanically as he has previously refused to do, his knowledge that there is "something sacred" operating inside of him throughout his machinations is enough to sustain him. If this idea were enough to calm their literary guru, chances are that countercultural readers found a similar reassurance in the faith that, despite the external world and their places within it, they were filled with "something sacred, which is an unwavering band of light." Moreover, Vonnegut seems to actively take part in the encouragement: "At the core of each person who reads this book is an unwavering band of light." He seems to reach out to any readers who, at the novel's outset, shared his doubts about society and humanity and impress upon them that there is

something “alive and sacred” and within each of them, despite their fears, something that cannot be co-opted or decayed: “an unwavering band of light.”

Conclusion

In 1973, when the entire counterculture faced extinction outside of its co-option by the opposing mainstream culture and corporate America, members of every crumbling movement appreciated Vonnegut's reassurance that, despite their culture's decay, their opposition's theft, rebranding, and marketing of its shallower qualities, and society's unrelenting imposition of ideals with which they disagreed, at each of his reader's cores was "an unwavering band of light." Similarly, before the counterculture reached its end, the members of every group composing it also appreciated the strong antiwar sentiments Vonnegut professed as his beliefs and offered in his writing. As I've detailed, however, Vonnegut expounds upon more than his pacifism in his works, and the counterculture was composed of more movements than antiwar activists and protestors. The less politically involved hippies enjoyed Vonnegut's novels for reasons other than his antiwar messages, namely his details that resemble the psychedelic experiences, art, and music embraced by most members of their revolution and his emphasis on self-growth and awareness as key factors to peace and enlightenment.

Cat's Cradle, The Sirens of Titan, Slaughterhouse-Five, and *Breakfast of Champions* especially contained these elements that appealed to psychedelically-inclined hippies, and, not coincidentally, were the most popular novels in the countercultural heyday. Their focus on awareness and self-knowledge as central to understanding and enlightenment aligned with the hippies' goals of self-growth and heightened awareness through psychedelic drugs to attain peace. Additionally, particular details of the novels especially resounded with a psychedelically-inclined audience. The apocalyptic descriptions in *Cat's Cradle* resembled apocalyptic visions psychedelic drug users

encountered, and its sensory imagery matches sensory trends in 1960s psychedelic art and music. Similarly, Vonnegut's illustration of the harmoniums in *The Sirens of Titan* parallels the vivid hallucinations, rife with bright colors and patterns, that psychedelic drug users imagined during their trips and psychedelic artists and musicians recreated in their works. The paranormal experiences Billy Pilgrim has with the Tralfamadorians in *Slaughterhouse-Five* also mirror those that psychedelic drug users report having while under the influence and depict in their art and music. Even *Breakfast of Champions*, rooted more in reality than the three earlier works, has a message of hope that emerges from a work of art similar to 1960s minimalist paintings that easily compared to the psychedelic art and trends at the time. Moreover, *Cat's Cradle, The Sirens of Titan*, and *Slaughterhouse-Five* bear resemblance to seminal works for the hippie movement and psychedelic revolution. Vonnegut presents an exploration of good and evil through Bokononism in *Cat's Cradle* like that in Aldous Huxley's *The Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell*. The journey to self-awareness that Malachi Constant endures in *The Sirens of Titan* follows a path comparable to that prescribed for trippers by Timothy Leary in his guide to tripping, *The Psychedelic Experience*. Stylistically, *Slaughterhouse-Five* bears resemblance to Ken Kesey's *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, and, thematically, its assessment of time and free will matches the Jungian theories of synchronicity that Kesey promotes and Tom Wolfe details in his report of the Merry Pranksters and the psychedelic hippie lifestyle, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*.

Not only did Vonnegut's works contain elements that specifically appealed to them, but the hippies' enormous involvement in the counterculture and the wide-reaching influence of the psychedelic revolution, despite the disdain with which more politically

active groups regarded them, imply that members of each and both, as more often than not the two were intertwined, comprised Vonnegut's ever-growing, loyal countercultural audience throughout the 1960s. Scholars have noted that Vonnegut's initial readership was composed of college-aged youth, the same people who made up the counterculture, and, as the counterculture grew, so did Vonnegut's popularity, indicating a sustained connection between the two. It should be noted in particular that the hippie movement and Vonnegut's readership peaked simultaneously, in terms of participation. It should also be noted that, in 1969, the success of two of these novels, *The Sirens of Titan* and *Slaughterhouse-Five*, crested alongside the psychedelic revolution and the hippie movement. Still, most scholars have focused upon the study of the antiwar movement in association with Vonnegut's novels, specifically *Slaughterhouse-Five*. The theory that all of Vonnegut's novels leading up to *Slaughterhouse-Five* contained elements of the "war story" he wanted to tell after his survival of the Dresden firestorm during WWII sometimes causes scholars to "exaggerate the importance of Dresden" in Vonnegut's life, as he tells it, and forego the study of other elements of his work (Sumner 18; Standish 94). Thus, when it comes to Vonnegut's connections with the 1960s counterculture, the chief focus for many scholars is the antiwar movement because of its clear link to this accepted theory. As I have argued, however, the hippie movement and the psychedelic revolution, often intertwined, appreciated Vonnegut's works for reasons other than his antiwar messages, and, because of their intrinsic importance to the counterculture as a whole, the links between these groups and Vonnegut's works during this time should not be ignored.

Moreover, this topic should be explored because of the many facets of the hippie movement that have experienced resurgence today. The movement and even its usurpation by the mainstream culture has reappeared in blockbuster, star-studded movies like *Almost Famous*, *Inherent Vice*, *Across the Universe*, and *Taking Woodstock*, to name only a few. The critically acclaimed television series *Mad Men* shows several characters who live communal lifestyles and enjoy psychedelic drugs, and it illustrates the process of mainstream advertisers picking elements of the counterculture for their advertisements in order to more effectively sell their products. These psychedelically-influenced advertisements and co-opted fashions and trends have almost never disappeared since the initial takeover of the counterculture by the mainstream at the end of the 1960s and still have their place in today's culture (Frank). Additionally, music and art festivals with their roots in the hippie be-ins and Woodstock festival have become increasingly popular since the beginning of the century, when they first appeared annually. Though the festivals ask a hefty entry fee, barrage those in attendance with advertisements, and are often supported by corporate ventures, unlike their 1960s ancestors, the organizers' thought to attract enormous and often diverse populations and bring them together through music and art is there, as is the participants' belief that they are uniting with fellow fans and appreciators to celebrate what makes them alike and to experience life together for a brief moment. Also, to be fair, advertisements have become so commonplace and integrated into modern life that most festival-goers and non-attendees alike sometimes aren't even aware an advertisement is taking place.

Perhaps this is why it is so important to bring up Vonnegut in connection with the hippie movement today more than ever. His emphasis on awareness and self-knowledge

as key to enlightenment and understanding not only matches those ideals the 1960s hippies and psychedelic wanderers held, but clarifies their importance for all readers. Since the hippie movement in particular is experiencing a revival via festivals, advertisements, and fashion, it could be the optimal time to demonstrate the deeper meaning of the initial revolution, heightened awareness and self-understanding, to the youths invested in its resurgence. The best way to approach this, though, is to connect the information with a familiar source.

Vonnegut's readership experienced a similar renewal with the 2005 publication of his book *A Man without a Country*, a collection of essays regarding the current state of political affairs. Because of the topical nature of the book, many young people found it relatable, and it served as a gateway text to Vonnegut's full body of work. Though *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *Cat's Cradle* have had a place in high school and college courses since the early 1970s, the rebirth of interest in Vonnegut following the publication of *A Man without a Country* makes the books more appealing to present-day young readers; just as their 20th century counterparts appreciated Vonnegut because of his political and ideological beliefs that matched theirs, 21st century youths find Vonnegut enjoyable for the same reasons. If they can enter Vonnegut's world through *A Man without a Country* and are already open to the surface of hippie culture because of advertising, fashion, and a slow, corporatized resurgence of the lifestyle, perhaps the deeper meanings of the hippie movement for former counterculture youths like Mark Vonnegut would also resonate with the young people of today. Maybe, by using Vonnegut and the hippie movement as a starting point, teachers could more easily inform students about the counterculture's deeper meanings and the usurpation and reselling of

the movement by the mainstream; we could teach history and literature in a manner that more effectively appeals to students' current interests.

Most importantly, the messages in Vonnegut's novels and of the hippie movement offer some comfort in a turbulent world. Our nation might not be experiencing the same upheavals it did in the 1960s, but it still endures domestic political and social unrest and conflict abroad. We are not living in a world deplete of chaos. While at times it is important to take action against the world's many injustices, at other times, the best thing to do is step outside of the conflict and "look at it objectively" (Miles 10). Barry Miles asks the question in *Hippie*, "Why are hippies important?" (10). He answers, "Because it was only by stepping outside society that people were able to look at it objectively – to see what was wrong with it, to see how they'd like to change it" (10). The lessons of the hippie movement that teach us to slow down, center ourselves, and examine an issue before leaping into action are lessons we should keep; they might help us to avoid unnecessary conflict in an already unstable world. Vonnegut offers this same advice: we may not be able to control the world around us, but we can control the worlds within ourselves. "Put your good where it will do the most," urged Tom Wolfe (141). He and Vonnegut both believed that we could do the most good by becoming more in tune with ourselves; in this fast-paced, chaotic world, self-introspection, self-growth, and self-peace might do more good than we know. It might be the optimal time to take heed of this facet of Vonnegut's and the hippies' argument and become more in tune with that which is "alive and maybe sacred" in all of us: "an unwavering band of light."

Notes

1. See Abele's "The Journey Home in Kurt Vonnegut's World War II Novels," McCoppin's "'God Damn It, You've Got to Be Kind': War and Altruism in the Works of Kurt Vonnegut," and Freese's "Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* or, How to Storify an Atrocity" for more analyses of the antiwar aspects of Vonnegut's novels. Additionally, the political implications of *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* are also often explored by scholars. See McCammack's "A Fading Old Left Vision: Gospel-Inspired Socialism in Vonnegut's *Rosewater*" and Giannone's "Violence in the Fiction of Kurt Vonnegut" for examples of this type of scholarship.

2. On the PTSD debate, see Vees-Gulani's "Diagnosing Billy Pilgrim: A Psychiatric Approach to Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*" and Brown's "The Psychiatrists were Right: Anomic Alienation in Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*."

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