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Book review

Mystic Chemist: The Life of Albert Hofmann and his Discovery of LSD

Dieter Hagenbach, Lucius Werthmüller, with a foreword by Stanislav Grof (translated from the German original: *Albert Hofmann und sein LSD*. AT Verlag, Aarau, München (2011)). First English Edition. 440 b&w and colour photos, index of names (no general index) UK £34, USA \$38.95. Synergetic Press, Santa Fe, NM, USA (2013). 400 pp., Paperback, ISBN: 978-0-907791-46-1

The reasons why scientists have a wider impact beyond their core discipline, and even a wider societal impact, vary. Albert Hofmann from Baden, Switzerland (11.01.1906 to 29.04.2008) is among those unique and highly influential, but certainly also controversial, personalities. He trained as a chemist and his fame is largely based on him being the first to synthesise, ingest and learn of the psychedelic effects of lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD). This was done as part of his research at the Swiss pharmaceutical company Sandoz (1938). Hofmann authored more than 100 scientific articles and had a wide outreach into Western societies, maybe most famously through his book *LSD: My Problem Child*. He had an impact both on a range of scientific disciplines and on the emerging and very diverse alternative scenes fascinated by 'mind-altering' drugs. In the 1960s he was instrumental in chemical aspects of the research on hallucinogenic plants and fungi driven mostly by Richard E. Schultes (1915–2001) and Gordon Wasson (1898–1986)/Valentina Pavlovna Guercken (1901–1958). In this context, Albert Hofmann's contributions during the early years of modern ethnopharmacology have been instrumental.

The architect Dieter Hagenbach (* 1943, Basel, Switzerland) had known A. Hofmann for over 30 years, and both remained close friends until A. Hofmann's death at the age of 102 years. In 1986, he published Albert Hofmann's book *Einsichten Ausblicke (Insight*

Outlook). Lucius Werthmüller (*1958), also from Basel, has an interest in the field of the paranormal and the spiritual and he, too, has had a very long and close association with Albert Hofmann.

So, most certainly this book cannot be a biography of a scientist in a strict sense; instead, it is a mix of personal accounts and a richly illustrated description of A. Hofmann's achievements and his personal, and to a lesser extent, scientific interests. His links to the various stakeholders fascinated by mind-altering drugs are explored in great detail. The great strength of the book is the authors' personal knowledge of many of the personalities involved and their long association with Albert Hofmann's activities. The chemical and other scientific aspects certainly are a sideline. In the context of ethnopharmacology, the book paints an interesting picture of the multidisciplinary links of researchers. So, this is a very personal account of A. Hofmann's life and at the same time, certainly strongly flavoured by the authors' personal fascination with the field of psychedelic substances. It makes interesting reading about Albert Hofmann's 'medicine for the soul'. It certainly sheds colourful prisms on a period which already today seems far removed history, and on one of the scientists who shaped the field.

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