

---

# Archived Web Source Code as Evidence in Computer History Research: A Case Study Concerning Digital Computing and Psychedelic Culture

James Hodges\*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>San José State University (SJSU) – One Washington Square San José, CA 95192, United States

## Abstract

Surging social and cultural instability during the early 2020s has prompted a growth in development and adoption of numerous psychological and self-help techniques, including psychedelic therapy, which has recently grown from a criminal subculture to a \$10 billion (USD) industry (Phelps et al 2022). In this paper, I demonstrate a forensic methodology for historical research concerning the web presence of psychedelic therapy practitioners during the field's earlier, criminalized phases.

The paper presents as a case study the personal website of Dr. John C. Lilly, inventor of the sensory deprivation tank and famous advocate of psychological exploration using psychedelic drugs including LSD and ketamine. Reading both the content and the source code from a preserved copy of Lilly's 2001 site as hosted via Wayback Machine, I highlight his technical and social enmeshment within a network of influential figures across both psychedelic culture and digital technologies. This network, which includes representatives from academia, digital gaming, web development, and the arts, exemplifies a multisector collaborative project dedicated to applying technocratic managerial tactics to the cognitive optimization of human subjects.

The figures that I identify within Lilly's milieu include a web designer using the pseudonym "BigTwin," whose participation in the annual Burning Man festival exemplifies the intersection of psychedelic culture and Silicon Valley digital technologies, as well multiple companies co-founded by the entrepreneur Joi Ito, who is perhaps best known today as chair of the Media Lab at Massachusetts Institute of Technology from 2011 to 2019, prior to his resignation following scrutiny regarding his financial ties to convicted pedophile and transhumanist Jeffrey Epstein (Tracy and Hsu, 2019). These connections, I show, exemplify a broader pattern of affiliation between psychedelic culture and Silicon Valley.

My assertions regarding Lilly's position within a network of technocratic self-improvement advocates is based not only on the content of his website, but also its technical construction, as evidenced by such features as ICANN records and HTML source code. Thus in addition to explaining the historical origins of contemporary trends in psychological support, this paper also demonstrates the value in retaining computationally accurate archival copies of historical web content, rather than simply documenting of emulating their contents.

References:

---

\*Speaker

Phelps, J., Shah, R. N., & Lieberman, J. A. (2022). The Rapid Rise in Investment in Psychedelics-Cart Before the Horse. *JAMA Psychiatry*, 79(3), 189–190. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2022.0000>

Tracy, M., & Hsu, T. (2019, September 7). Director of M.I.T.'s Media Lab Resigns After Taking Money From Jeffrey Epstein-The New York Times. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/07/business/mit-media-lab-jeffrey-epstein-joichi-ito.html>

**Keywords:** psychedelic culture, internet history, counterculture, digital forensics, web development