

LSD Tattoo Transfers: Rumor from North America to France

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Between April and December 1988, flyers warning parents about LSD-laced cartoon stamps and tattoo transfers circulated throughout France. The phenomenon reached such a large part of the population and was featured so prominently in the media that the French Central Administration was forced to denounce the information as unfounded, and even to threaten legal action against those caught circulating or distributing the flyers. Scholars of urban legends quickly saw the similarities between this rumor and the one studied by Jan Harold Brunvand under the name "Mickey Mouse Acid" (Brunvand 1984) which had circulated throughout the United States in 1980. This essay will focus, first, on the origins and evolution of the rumor in North America and its diffusion throughout France; then, it will isolate the sociological and folkloristic aspects of this contemporary legend.

North American Origins, 1980-1987

Brunvand (1984:167-168) discovered a probable source for the rumor in bulletins issued by local police departments describing "blotter acid." When prepared in its liquid state, Lysergic Diethylamide Acid (also called LSD 25, LSD, or "acid") is prepared for sale in two forms: small tablets the size of the head of a match, and "blotters," porous paper soaked with active doses of LSD. Brunvand reprints one such bulletin issued in 1980 by the Narcotics Bureau of the New Jersey State Police after the seizure of some LSD-laced "blotters." This includes four photographs of the "Mickey Mouse stamps" and their packaging. Two show a "blotter" containing 100 stamps representing Mickey Mouse as the Sorcerer's Apprentice from the movie *Fantasia* and an enlargement of a group of nine stamps. Two others

show the packaging, including a foil and clear Ziploc plastic bag (to prevent the evaporation of the drug), and a red cardboard box with another picture of Mickey Mouse on its top.

Illustrations found on real "blotter acid" since then have ranged from geometric shapes to portraits of political figures (LSD blotters bearing the likeness of Mikhail Gorbachev were found in Holland [Associated Press release, 28 September 1989]) to images of Buddha or E.T. Comics and cartoon characters are frequently featured: Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, Batman, the Pink Panther, and Dingo or Astérix (popular French comic characters). The fact that these blotter sheets are stamped with such characters should not come as a surprise. They serve both as a kind of "trademark" for the producers of LSD and as a means of indicating the location and the number of the doses found in the blotter.

The thought process that led to the birth of the rumor may be easily reconstructed: during the transmission of the information found in the police bulletins, one or more individuals mistakenly transformed the accurate fact that one means of preparing LSD *resembled* children's cartoon stamps into the misconception that children's cartoon stamps *did* contain LSD. It should be kept in mind that the police bulletin also includes an unverified piece of information—the alleged circulation of "Superman" cartoon stamps. Nothing else was needed for the emergence of a rumor.

As early as 1980, other flyers appeared that borrowed elements from the New Jersey bulletin. Brunvand also reprints a 1981 flyer that circulated in and around Atlanta, Georgia (1984:164). The drawing in this flyer is a rather coarse rendering of Mickey Mouse as the Sorcerer's Apprentice, visibly inspired by the photograph in the New Jersey bulletin. Some information about those who wrote this flyer or a similar one has also been uncovered. In 1987, while investigating the origin of this rumor, Canadian police investigators followed a lead to an "Office Of Education" located in Berrien Springs, Michigan. There, they discovered a local Seventh-Day Adventist church community whose members claimed to have written and propagated such a flyer in 1980 (Leauthier 1989). Were they the original authors or had they drawn their inspiration from an earlier flyer?

In either case, the flyer was disseminated throughout the Northeast. Newspapers reproduced the information without checking its origins or its authenticity. Several facts, true or imagined, reinforced the rumor. A Columbus, Ohio, drug dealer was arrested in 1981 with LSD-soaked "blotter" marked with "small blue stars" (Brunvand 1984:167). On 13 March 1982, newspapers from Salt Lake City, Utah, published reports about the seizure of "large quantities of so-called Snoopy Acid" by the police, alleging that tattoo transfers were soaked with LSD. However, these reports did not establish that the cartoon character did indeed appear on the materials seized or that these materials were indeed tattoo transfers.

After an apparent eclipse of a few years, the flyer appeared again throughout the northeastern United States in 1987. A version of the flyer circulating in New England by mid-1988 says that the information was brought to the attention of the "Cumberland County Sheriff's Department." However, there are several Cumberland counties in the United States, none of which admitted to being the flyer's source (*FOAFtale News* 12 [February 1989]:2). The content of this flyer was inspired by the 1981 flyers: tattoo transfers (misspelled "tattoo" as in 1981), intended for children and laced with LSD, circulate throughout the United States; they represent Mickey Mouse or other cartoon characters; school children are threatened; parents must be warned; the authorities should be contacted as soon as one encounters such tattoo transfers. Some details in the 1987 flyer were not in the 1981 flyers but are present in their common source, the New Jersey bulletin: the "Superman" images, the red cardboard box and the foil. Finally, over the six-year period, the rumor has been enriched with new details, providing an illustration of the "snowball effect" well-known among specialists. The "Blue Star" paragraph was very likely inspired by the fact that some authentic LSD-laced blotters featured these blue stars; Mickey Mouse, the other Disney characters and Superman are now surrounded by butterflies, clowns, red pyramids, and colored micro dots; the absorption of LSD by a child may cause death, more especially as strychnine has been added to some stamps! This flyer reached a saturation level similar to the one encountered in any oral rumor owing to its dramatic intensity and the number of details.

The 1987 flyer and its variants circulated throughout the Northeast and as far afield as Alaska and Peru (Brunvand 1989:55-63). As late as May 1989, the "Cumberland County" version was still present in Pennsylvania (Ellis 1989). Probably during its diffusion through Michigan, this flyer entered Canada, first in the province of Ontario, then in Québec. Police in Ottawa, Canada, received a copy of the flyer in Spring 1987 and were immediately beset by letters and phone calls. Soon afterwards the rumor reached Québec City, leading to articles in the local press and a phone-in program on *Télé-Métropole*.

The diffusion of the flyer into the Province of Québec led to its translation into French. On 18 November 1987, a memorandum about LSD tattoo transfers was distributed by the Roberval-Saguenay Railroad, signed by its Health-Security Advisor. This company belongs to the Aluminum Company of Canada (a branch of Alcoa, an American multinational company) whose headquarters are located in Jonquière, Province of Québec. The French wording of this memorandum is very similar to that of the American flyer mentioned above: it mentions the blue stars ("des petites étoiles bleues") as in the earlier news story about LSD blotters in Ohio, the warning about LSD being absorbed through the skin, and the images of

Superman, Mickey Mouse, and butterflies. The Canadian memorandum omits the clowns and "red pyramids," as well as the warning about a "fatal trip," the allusion to strychnine, and the symptoms of intoxication.

The description of how the "timbres" ("stamps") are packaged, however, is much closer to that of the New Jersey police bulletin since there are references to the "picture of Mickey Mouse" on the red cardboard box, to "foil and ziploc bag," and to the grouping by series of "100 stamps." Two hypotheses may help explain these differences: the first is that the Canadian bulletin is an accurate translation of an American document produced earlier than those collected; the second is that either the writers of the Canadian memorandum chose not to mention clowns, red pyramids, strychnine, etc., or followed another memorandum in which these details had already been deleted.

Assurances of authenticity frame the central text of the Canadian memorandum: "According to the Police authorities," and, in the postscript, "some of these stars have been found in Windsor and Fort Huron." Here too, the geographical accuracy is illusory since there are several cities named Windsor in the United States and Canada, but only *Port Huron* (not Fort Huron), Michigan, can be found among North American cities. If the city is indeed Port Huron, the city of Windsor could be the nearby city located in Ontario, Canada, close to the United States-Canadian border. The flyer may well have followed the road between those two cities. The Canadian memorandum indicates that the LSD "stars" are "presently marketed in certain parts of the United States" and, in the postscript, that "they may be found here earlier than anticipated."

This memorandum was widely distributed throughout the province of Québec. It plays a key role in the present study since it is undoubtedly the source for the majority of flyers that circulated throughout France.

Diffusion Throughout France, 1988

By April 1988, the Québec memorandum reached the city of Nice, France. Nobody knows the means of transatlantic transmission for the memorandum. It has been surmised that a physician from Nice returned from a congress in Montréal or in the United States with the text in his luggage (*Le Parisien Libéré* [Paris, France], 15 October 1988). During an interview for a French newspaper, an anonymous professor of medicine, accused of being the individual in question, claimed that this was "totally untrue":

I did go to the United States during the year 1987, but I never brought back anything like this. That same year, in Nice, I discovered this flyer among my mail. Since we file everything dealing with drug abuse, I asked that this flyer

be photocopied. That's all. The director of the hospital and, a few months later, the local representative of the National Education system asked for my judgment about the information contained in this flyer. Of course, it does not seem very serious to me. Since then I have not heard anything about it. (Leauthier 1989)

Whatever the means of transmission, several photocopies of the memorandum, similar to the original—with the exception of the deletion of the list of recipients—circulated throughout the city of Nice. One ended up in the mail of this professor of medicine; another was received by the DDASS¹ of the Department of Alpes-Maritimes, which decided to inquire about the origins of this flyer, in association with the Nice public prosecutor and the police; another flyer, sent to the St. Roch Hospital in Nice, was forwarded to the DDASS with the official stamp of the hospital on it. It may then be surmised that one or several individuals transcribed the text of the Canadian flyer, keeping the same paragraph divisions and similar underlinings, but changing two details:

1) The personalizing elements of the Canadian memorandum have been deleted: the letterhead, name of the company, and the signature of the individual in charge of health and security have all disappeared. The title "Family security outside the work place" has been modified into "Family security."

2) The original French Canadian language has been made more French: the "efface de crayon" has become "gomme" [the French word for eraser]; the word "foil" has disappeared (maybe the transcriber did not know the meaning of the word); the cities of Windsor and Fort Huron have simply become "Canada."

There nevertheless remain several Canadianisms in the text of the French flyer (thus providing a strong argument in favor of a Canadian origin). Among those are "présentement" instead of "actuellement" [at the present time], the name "Mickey Mouse" instead of "Mickey" [as the character is called in France], "contenant" instead of "emballage" [packing], the measures given in inches instead of centimeters (the measurements were deleted in later versions), and even the words "Merci de votre attention," the French literal translation of the expression "Thank you for your attention" commonly used in the United States.

By late April/early May 1988, the flyer was circulating throughout the region of Nice with only minor additions before or after the body of the text, such as the following: "Transmitted this day, 25/04/88 by the St. Roch Hospital of Nice," or "Mr. Guy CHAILLÉ, Advisor to the President, has forwarded the following text to us, transmitted on 25.4.1988, by the ST. ROCH Hospital of NICE," or, in most cases, "The school has just received this note transmitted by St. Roch Hospital."

The mention of the name "St. Roch Hospital" may be explained by the fact that an earlier form of the document actually passed through this hospital in Nice. However, there exists a variant of the flyer, found around Paris in June 1988 with the mention, "This note was transmitted by St. Roch Hospital from Montréal, Canada." It is an *a posteriori* interpretation of the reference "St. Roch Hospital"—without any other indication—because a St. Roch Hospital does not exist in Montréal. Many variants of the flyer have kept this reference, either as an authenticating factor or because several hospitals are named after Saint Roch (a healing saint), both in Marseilles and in Montpellier in particular.

Neither the journalists nor the investigators who studied the spread of this rumor were able to identify "Mr. Guy Chaillé, Advisor to the President," although there are so many associations in France that there may well be one of them whose president has an advisor named Chaillé. The mention of a school shows that the world of education was sensitive to this rumor very soon after it gained currency. Local journalists expressed doubt about the flyer's credibility, thinking it was a practical joke (*Nice Matin* [6 May 1988]). Psychiatrists who participated in the International Colloquium on Drug Abuse in Nice, on 13 and 14 May 1988, easily identified the rumor behind the flyer since their Canadian colleagues had mentioned the diffusion of a similar flyer throughout Canada a few months earlier.

By the end of 1988, the flyer had reached areas beyond Provence and was found throughout France. An interesting episode of this diffusion is the so-called Jasmin affair. Among the variants of the flyer that circulated in and around Paris in June 1988, one featured the official stamp of the Dentistry Department of the University of Paris VII, with the following typewritten indication: "Information forwarded by Pr. Jasmin of the Dentistry Department of the University of Nice." This was completed by the handwritten indication "Department of Pedodontics" followed by an illegible signature and the date "30.5.88." Jean Jasmin is indeed a professor of dentistry in Nice. Since letters sent to him were not answered, the interview he gave to a journalist provides his only public reaction:

Yes, I did find this flyer one day on my desk. I was shocked. I thought about the youngsters and the children who are entrusted to me. My spontaneous reaction prevented me from verifying the veracity of this "information." My good faith was abused, and I may have been careless. (Cordier 1988)

In this same interview, Professor Jasmin admits having made sixteen photocopies of the document and sending them to French colleagues of his specializing in child dentistry. The comparison between the Nice flyer and the so-called "Jasmin memorandum" does indeed show that the professor's

office simply photocopied the Nice text (recognizable by its "Greek-style" border coming from an earlier version); but the addendum on top of the page transformed this anonymous flyer into an official memorandum. One of the photocopies ended up at the University of Paris VII, which disseminated it after having duly stamped it. This flyer was photocopied in large quantities and was found in places as diverse as the Hospital Saint Vincent de Paul in Paris, the Jules Ferry school in Montreuil, a pharmacy in Saint-Leu-la-Forêt, and the waiting room of a physician in Villiers-le-Bel (three cities close to Paris).

On 3 June 1988, *Agence France Presse* (AFP) received a copy of the Nice flyer (without the mention of Professor Jasmin) from one of the Parisian town halls where it had been posted. On 4 June 1988, after interviewing the French Anti-Drug Brigade and communicating with Dr. Claude Olievenstein, a French drug specialist, AFP broadcast a dispatch mentioning the flyers, their contents, their diffusion, and claimed that they did not correspond to "any real situation." This dispatch, as well as a statement by Jean-Noël Kapferer, provided the groundwork for an article published without a by-line by many French newspapers beginning in June 1988. The text of this unsigned article incorporates the original AFP dispatch and adds this "new rumor" to existing ones (white slave-trading rumors in Orléans, venomous spiders in tropical fruits, gangs of psychopaths pushing subway travelers in front of oncoming trains, etc.) that are part of the "French collective unconscious." The publication of this article did not slow the spread of the rumor in any way, and flyers circulated with renewed intensity in June, reaching the cities of Aix, Bordeaux, Marseilles, Montpellier, and Toulouse.

By early June 1988, the Nice flyer appeared in Montpellier. It was found in several local, departmental, and regional administrative offices (Regional Direction of Health and Social Services, Departmental Direction for Employment, and Departmental Administration, for example). The flyer also circulated among educators in primary schools, both public and private. On 14 June 1988, the Head of Services of the Center for Postal Checks in Montpellier, wrote a memorandum based on the flyer. This soon appeared in schools, in several local businesses, and in the neighboring Department of the Rhone. In Bollène, Department of Vaucluse, the Chief of the Firemen's School added his own official stamp on the flyer and facilitated its fresh diffusion. By mid-June, the "Guy Chaillé" variant of the flyer appeared in and around Toulouse. The Departmental Bureau of Public Education asked school directors to intervene in order to stop the diffusion of these flyers. On 23 June 1988, Toulouse-based associations helping drug addicts published a message in the local newspaper (*La Dépêche du Midi*) denouncing the rumor and emphasizing their own duty of welcoming and educating anyone concerned about drugs.

The first national reactions to the rumor also appeared in June 1988. On 21 June, Bernard Leroy, Dean of Judges of Evry (near Paris) and General Secretary of the Governmental Anti-Drug Mission, issued a dispatch to AFP denying the rumor. In July, the French Ministry of National Education denounced the "irreality" of the flyers through its Minitel (the French Videotext system) service called EDUTEL. On 12 July, the Minister of Solidarity, Health, and Social Protection forwarded a denial to all DDASS offices and all departmental prefects.

Schools soon closed for the summer, yet the rumor did not slow down. Extensive travelling during vacations allowed for an extended oral diffusion of the rumor. Then the monthly *Enfants Magazine*, a women's magazine with an average circulation of 200,000, devoted one of its August 1988 columns to the contents of the flyer under the heading "Good Things To Know From Kindergarten to High School." The text included several changes; there were no Canadianisms or Americanisms left in this French text, but an important modification was introduced: the final warning about the "stars" that "could reach France earlier than thought" was replaced by "They have been in France since early May!" It is easy to imagine the number of letters to the editor caused by the publication of this text. This is why *Enfants Magazine* printed in its September issue a retraction, slightly shorter than the earlier column, announcing that "the rather worrisome information about the circulation of children's tattoo transfers laced with LSD . . . is in fact erroneous."

The September back-to-school period signaled a new intensity in the diffusion of the rumor. Some Parisian flyers added, next to "St. Roch Hospital informs," a surprising "The Anti-Drug Brigade confirms!" This group's denial thus became a confirmation through a kind of boomerang effect. Some flyers mentioned "The Commandant of the Police Brigade of Montlhéry" (near Paris); the police force of this city claims no involvement whatsoever in this matter. On some of the flyers, the word Montlhéry has been erased and only the mention "The Commandant of the Police Brigade of . . ." remains. In the Department of Tarn (Southwestern France) the flyer had actually been stamped and signed by an adjutant from the Army Police of Tarbes who then posted it on the bulletin board of the Arsenal where some 2,500 workers were employed. Photocopies of this flyer circulated in factories, workshops, schools, and some administrative offices in the cities of Tarbes, Castres, and Mazamet. A copy was even found in Bourges, in the Department of Cher (Central France). In the city of Castres, the hospital received a copy of this flyer and, after having affixed its official stamp, forwarded it to other hospitals. On one of the flyers of this type, the sentence "They [the LSD-laced stars] may reach us earlier than expected" is followed by a handwritten statement, "They have arrived in France."

In the city of Agen (Department of Lot-et-Garonne—Southwestern France), the contents of one flyer were transcribed into a memorandum dated 12 September 1988 by the "Committee on Hygiene, Security and Working Conditions" of the Banque Nationale Populaire (a French bank with branches all over the country). In Lyon, the city's Division of Social and Sanitary Affairs made forty-six copies of the flyer and forwarded them "for your information" to all the heads of kindergarten, daycare nurseries, youth establishments, and other social organizations, who, in turn, posted and distributed it further. In Saint-Laurent d'Agny, in the Department of Rhône (not far from Lyon), the wife of a local physician gave the flyer to the director of the local public school; the latter affixed the school official stamp and distributed 180 copies of the flyer to the students. In Bourg-en-Bresse, Department of Ain (near the Swiss border), several local retailers received a flyer allegedly coming from the "Nanterre (close to Paris) Medical Service."

The magazine *Profils Médico-Sociaux* (Medico-Social Profiles), whose circulation of 25,000 copies targets health professionals, published the entire text of the flyer in its 29 September 1988 issue. The flyer was distributed in the IBM factory in the city of Orléans in October 1988. The postscript includes the statement: "Stars such as these have been found in Canada and the first have been discovered in Paris." During these weeks, the rumor spread throughout western France, particularly Rouen, Saint-Lô, Cherbourg, and Nantes.

By October, another type of flyer seems to have appeared in Paris. A fresh translation of the American flyer, this one omitted references to strychnine and several symptoms, but added a last sentence: "In France, children have already been victims of these products." It thus becomes clear that two types of flyers, each ultimately based on an American text, entered France: the "Québec-Nice" flyer with its primitive or simplified version of the American text, and a "U.S.-Paris" version with a French text closer to the American original. This second type of flyer, whose means of introduction in France are as mysterious as those of the first, was less widely disseminated. This may well be because its text was more complex, or because the rumor seemed already to have reached social saturation; for example, Parisian flyers arrived in Montpellier five months after the city had its first wave of flyers.

Individuals with social and political responsibilities decided that they had to state their position publicly. Worried by the contents of the flyer, Roland Courteau, the Socialist Senator from the Department of Aude, allowed the affair to take on an official status by asking a written question to the French Government (*Journal Officiel*, 1 September 1988). A similar effort was undertaken in mid-October by Jacques Machet, the Centrist Senator from the Department of Marne (*Le Parisien Libéré*, 15-16 October

1988). Following the example of many of his colleagues, the Education Inspector for the Department of Oise informed the heads of the schools under his authority that the flyer was a rumor whose "alleged revelations cannot reflect any reality" and recommended that administrators "make every effort to check the distribution of this flyer, whether in their own schools or in neighboring schools, because it may cause worries among families." The *Bulletin de l'Ordre des Médecins* (9 [October 1988]:8) mentioned the rumor—at a rather late stage—informing its readers that "all these allegations must be strongly denied" and that "parents should be reassured." *L'Express* (21-27 October 1988) reminded its readers that "all this is pure fiction," and *Madame Figaro* (28 October 1988) devoted an entire page to the rumor.

In November 1988, the Ministry of Education asked its officials to inform parents and children that the rumor was unfounded (*Bulletin Officiel de l'Éducation Nationale* 40 [24 November 1988]:2656), while an official statement from Madame Véronique Neiertz, State Secretary for Consumption, dated 29 November 1988, denounced the rumor and warned that "legal action could be launched" against those accused of spreading the rumor. These official statements were widely reproduced in the press. In-depth articles about the LSD-laced tattoo transfers were featured in the most widely distributed French newspapers such as *Le Figaro* (Puyalte 1988) and *Libération* (Leauthier 1989). These articles signaled the end of the diffusion of the flyer in France.

It should be noted that the rumor did not remain within French boundaries but spread all over Europe: flyers (both in French or translated from the French original) were found in Italy as early as June 1988, in Belgium in September, in Switzerland and Greece in October, in Luxembourg and the German Federal Republic in January 1989 (see *FOAFtale News* 16 [December 1989]:1-4), and in Spain and Austria later that year.

The Rumor and Social Beliefs

Some rumors mainly transmitted by word of mouth are also characterized by a material support: the flyer. Before the LSD tattoo transfer affair, similar flyers had already been distributed throughout France, such as the so-called "Villejuif flyer" about alleged carcinogenic food additives (see Kapferer 1989, Kapferer 1990:34-35) or the flyer about signals used by hoboes and burglars allegedly written by the Offices of the French Ministry of the Interior and the French National Police. These flyers are usually made up of a single A-4 size sheet, in most cases a photocopy of a single-side typewritten text. The increase in the use of photocopy

machines during the past fifteen years has led to an easier diffusion of written rumors. On the one hand, the reproductions of a single original may be theoretically infinite; on the other hand, the photocopy of a photocopy usually becomes illegible after the fourth or fifth generation. This technical particularity explains the numerous retypings of the flyer.

As for the credibility of the rumor, it appears that the flyer is more persuasive than oral transmission (Hadjian 1989). The flyer is assimilated to an official circular, a memorandum (sometimes it actually looks like one) similar to those that bureaucratic societies produce in increasing numbers. To distinguish between a true and a false memorandum is often difficult: "We get several memos and brochures from all types of law-enforcement agencies, local, state and federal giving us warnings like that," an American secretary told Bill Ellis while talking about the LSD tattoo transfers (1989:3). Because of the many injunctions found in the text ("Beware," "Very Important," "Read and distribute," "Reproduce," "Distribute," etc.), flyers strongly urge the reader to spread the message they contain. Many readers fail to question the document's veracity because they are shocked by its contents and impressed by the real or imaginary assurances of authenticity; they thus follow the instructions in the flyer in order to help others. "We were caught in the chain of diffusion," lamented a public servant who wanted to justify his diffusion of the flyer.

Is the content of written rumors unique? The information is presented as general, not concerning any particular individual, thus making lawsuits for slander impossible. But the flyer also allows for descriptions of items not easily memorized, such as names of chemical additives or signs used by burglars. In the case of the LSD tattoo transfers, the flyers originated with the rumor itself: the 1980 police memorandum and the first flyer with a drawing. The drawing disappeared rapidly, but details about the appearance of tattoos and even the description of symptoms of intoxication survived and continued the rumor in textual form. For the specialist, flyers offer the advantage of being more stable than oral tales: the researcher may classify successive variants of the texts into lines of transmission according to typographical characteristics, page layout, additions, marks left during the copying process, etc. It is also easier to analyze the transformations the contents have undergone.

Because of its "fixation" through writing, the LSD tattoo transfers rumor shows a larger "snowball effect" (the accumulation of new details added to the original core) than would be the case with an oral rumor. However, "saturation" due to the sheer number of details (such as the descriptions of the tattoos) and to the excessive characteristics of some of them (the mention of strychnine, for example) may lead to a simplification, or reduction, of the message. Nevertheless, the significant stability of the

core of the rumor remains easily identifiable: between 1980 and 1988, the rumor is about LSD-laced tattoo transfers for children.

It is in the dressing up of the contents, and the attribution of sources, that the greatest diversity is observed. The processes of dressing up the rumor follow—*mutatis mutandis*—those described by Arnold Van Gennep (1919), who explained the transformation of a tale into a legend through localization, temporalization, individualization, or reciprocally, the transformation of a legend into a tale through delocalization, detemporalization, and deindividualization.

The localization/delocalization process may be observed as the American variant came to France: the presence of tattoos is mentioned in New England, then in Windsor and Fort Huron, in Canada, then the little blue stars "have arrived in France," and, finally, "the first ones have been discovered in Paris." The sentence "they may arrive here earlier than anticipated" allows the meaning of the word "here" to take a new meaning each time it is read: it may be Québec with respect to the United States or France with regard to Canada. The acknowledged source also tends to follow this localization/delocalization pattern: Cumberland County, St. Roch Hospital, the "Commander of the Brigade" cannot be accurately located, which also means that they may be located in several places at the same time. In Belgium, the acknowledged source could be relocated: the "Dinant Public Prosecutor's Office," the "Bavière Hospital" of Lièges, the "Free University" of Brussels. As for the memoranda, they necessarily feature real places.

The temporalization/detemporalization process accompanies the diffusion of the rumor in time and not in space. For example, the tattoos "have been in France since May." The succession of dates featured in the flyers corresponds to successive recordings of the memorandum in the "received" mailbox or to the time of the various retranscriptions, particularly when dealing with memoranda. In the expression "presently available on the American drug market," the word "presently" (as was the case earlier with the word "here") is reactualized in each new copy of the flyer.

The individualization/deindividualization process concerns only the sources of the flyer, whether alleged or real, personal or institutional. The reference to "Guy Chaillé, Advisor to the President" disappears in Belgium, while there appears a signature identified only by its Belgian likelihood, M. F. Desmette. The expression "According to police authorities" in the Québec flyer was simplified into "According to the authorities," but references to St. Roch Hospital and the Anti-Drug Brigade were added. The flyers are institutionalized into official memoranda (Québec, Montpellier, Agen) and, conversely, official memoranda are deinstitutionalized into flyers (Nice and Montpellier—where the text of the memorandum from the Center

for Postal Checks was cut out to be posted by local retailers). The process of individualization is also evidenced by the accumulation of official stamps on the flyers.

The various "guarantors" of the rumor can thus be arranged according to their degree of identification and, for the researcher, their degree of confirmation:

1) *General guarantor*: "The Authorities"

2) *Obscure particular guarantor*: The "Cumberland County Sheriff," the "St. Roch Hospital," the "Police Authorities," "Mr. Guy Chaillé, Advisor to the President"

3) *Particular guarantor, identified but not confirmed*: "St. Roch Hospital in Nice," the "Anti-Drug Brigade," "The Commandant of the Montlhéry Brigade"

4) *Particular guarantor, identified and confirmed*: Professor Jasmin, Tarbes Army Police, the Lyon City Hall, and all the official memoranda. These processes allow for the adaptation of the rumor during its passage from one region to another, from one country to another, from one social group to another, but, more fundamentally, they constitute the tale's legendary nature by *actualizing* the core of the rumor in the space and time of the society within which it is found.

Officials' Role in Spreading the Rumor

The transmission of the flyer in Saint-Laurent d'Agnay (where the wife of a local physician gave a copy to the school director) appears to summarize perfectly the sociological process of the diffusion of the LSD tattoo transfer rumor. Both in France and in the United States, as Ellis (1989) has shown, the major agents of transmission of the rumor have been officials belonging to the educated strata of the society. We thus cannot see the rumor as a means of communication specific to "irrational and credulous" popular strata. Two social groups are implicated in the rumor: the medico-social professions whose members feel a responsibility toward public health, and members of the primary and secondary school systems who feel threatened. The sentence "The school has just received this memorandum transmitted by St. Roch Hospital" illustrates this dual involvement, even though in the case at hand the hospital reference is in part imaginary. Parents of schoolchildren (mothers in particular), local retailers, and the press channel the flow of information between these two groups.

Many occurrences of the flyer's diffusion illustrate the role played by health professionals in the process; such was the case with the Security and Safety Department of an American bank, the Security Director of an

American college, the Health and Security Advisor of a Québec company, a professor from the Medical School in Nice, physicians and pharmacists who posted the flyer in their shops, the "Committee on Hygiene, Security and Working Conditions" of the Agen branch of the Banque Nationale Populaire, the Castres Hospital, the Radiology Service of the Brugman Hospital in Brussels, Belgium, and so on.

The rumor was also propagated in normal conduits for information concerning children: nuns in American Catholic schools who read the flyer to their pupils (Ellis 1989) and French school directors who actively used their photocopy machines. The pupils, through brotherhood or friendship ties, played a significant role by insuring the diffusion of the flyer from one school to the other. Primary schools were hit the strongest, since the flyer says that young children are most likely to become victims of LSD-laced tattoo transfers. By comparison, slightly more than 50 percent of French secondary school students had heard of the rumor (Hadjian 1989), while only one out of four university students was aware of it, according to a survey given first-year university students. Given the nature of the two environments concerned with the rumor, it is not surprising that the first two public administrations to react were the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health.

In factories and administrative offices, the flyer was posted in hallways, cafeterias, elevators, cloak rooms, entrance halls, with or without the authorization of those in charge. Some employees found the flyer left anonymously on their desks or came to know about it by reading an official memorandum. Local merchants and retailers also participated in the diffusion of the rumor by posting the flyer in their stores.

Rumor researchers and specialists tend to exclude the media from the diffusion of rumors, assuming that their primary function is to publish denials. But through selective reading, denials often contribute to the diffusion of the rumor and even reinforce it, as illustrated by the denial of the Anti-Drug Brigade that turned into a confirmation. In fact, the media play a leading role in diffusing and sometimes even creating contemporary legends. In the case at hand, several newspapers and magazines published the flyer as they received it: *Enfants Magazine*, *La Libre Belgique* (3-4 September 1988, correction on 6 September), and *Profils Médico-Sociaux*. *Enfants Magazine* deals with children and their health, the Belgian daily is associated with the Catholic establishment and private schools, and *Profils Médico-Sociaux* is read by health professionals.

If the press helped stop the rumor, it did so less by its denials or its assimilation with other rumors than by the publication of spectacular items of information working as a counter-rumor. Edgar Morin's work on the Orléans rumor (1971) proved that rumors can only be fought efficiently by

other rumors, the irrational by the irrational. The many rumors *about* the LSD tattoo transfer rumor include one accurate and three inaccurate pieces of information:

1) *The practical joke.* The assumption that the rumor was a joke was suggested by a *Nice Matin* journalist (6 May 1988) and repeated, in particular, by *La Dépêche du Midi* (3 November 1988), which indicated that medical students had started this mystification. The rumor's history shows that none of this was true.

2) *The political maneuver.* In his communique of June 1988, Dr. Olievenstein claimed that the flyer is a "political maneuver attempting to worry parents before the election." Bernard Leroy spoke more generally about "an enterprise of destabilization of public opinion." It is true that the rumor spread throughout France during the presidential (24 April and 8 May 1988) and legislative (5 June and 12 June 1988) elections. It is also true that Nice and the department of Alpes-Maritimes are a hotbed for the National Front (a strongly nationalist party on the far right), whose political propaganda often exploits social concerns (foreigners, immigrants, crime, AIDS, drugs, etc.). One of the interviewees went as far as to interpret the "PEL" reference ("Personnel Service") of the Montpellier memorandum as a hidden allusion to Le Pen, the leader of the National Front. As is the case with many other rumors, the flyer was attributed to supporters of the National Front through the process of scapegoating. The voters most sensitive to the drug problem are those of the Popular Front and the RPR (a Gaullist-inspired party) but also those of the Communist Party (SOFRES/*Actuel*, 1986). One of the two Senators who believed the rumor was a Socialist, the other a Centrist. Moreover, the rumor became largely widespread after the periods of electoral campaigning.

3) *The "antiquity" of the rumor.* In its correction statement of September 1988, *Enfants Magazine* writes, "according to the Central Office for Repression of Illicit Drug Trafficking, this rumor is not new: it has been appearing with regularity in the United States and Canada over the past twenty years and emerged in France in 1981." These two dates are wrong. The "twenty years" indication appears in the denial from the Ministry of National Education, in the memorandum from the State Secretary for Consumption, and in a quote from a Canadian Police Officer in the *Libération* article. The process of relegating an event to the past is frequently found in legends. In the present case, the goal is to discredit the rumor by disputing its novelty.

4) *Credulous authorities.* The press disclosed, accurately in most cases, that authorities (university professors, the Lyon town hall, senators, etc.) had believed in the rumor and had been "trapped."

All this spectacular information changed the image of the rumor: the agent diffusing the flyer was no longer a well-informed person worried about prevention but a naive individual disclosing an old story, or a practical joker, or, worse still, a political manipulator. This is why, in the interview with *L'Humanité*, Professor Jasmin vigorously denied having had "political preoccupations" (Cordier 1988). These negative images of the rumor, however, were too multiple, too incoherent and fragile, so they were not effective in the short term. The true solution was found by the Belgian authorities who demonstrated and publicly denounced both the medical and the social absurdity of the contents of the flyer (Mostin et al. 1988). In France, denials only opposed arguments from so-called authorities and were poorly received for this very reason. When physicians proved the medical inaccuracy of the flyer, the focus of the rumor turned to the health professions, the major source of diffusion, which then stopped verifying and diffusing the flyer for fear of appearing incompetent. What remains to be understood is why educated individuals, educators, physicians, and individuals in charge of health and security first let themselves be fooled by the rumor.

The Folklore of Contamination

Of course, the LSD tattoo transfer rumor is fraught with inaccuracies and improbabilities:

1) LSD is not lethal for humans; there is no overdose. The expression "fatal trip" combines a psychological term (the "trip," the "internal voyage" caused by the hallucinogenic substances) and a physiological term ("deadly," or "fatal") and thus has no meaning. The few cases of death associated with LSD that have been found were caused indirectly by the drug; some individuals suffered fatal accidents or committed suicide under the hallucinogenic effect of the drug.

2) It is impossible to absorb LSD through the pores of the skin from soaked blotters laced with the substance. Even licking the paper would not be enough to absorb an active dose of LSD; users put the entire "blotter" in their mouths. Moreover, as Brunvand indicates, children know that the right way to apply a tattoo transfer is to lick the skin and not the paper (1984:169)!

3) This "new way of selling acid" is ambiguous and, in any case, commercially absurd. Some individuals believed that the product was on sale at local retailers or in supermarkets and even forbade their children to buy tattoo transfers or self-adhesive stickers. But this type of sale is inconceivable: police could easily trace such a line of distribution, and in any case LSD costs much more than children's tattoo transfers. This last reason equally prevents direct sale to children. Finally, if tattoo transfers

were not sold but distributed for free, LSD makers and distributors would lose money in this operation.

4) The idea that LSD consumers may give some of it to children "in order to have fun watching them react to acid" is beyond understanding, considering the mores and customs of LSD users, for whom each "trip" is a serious and voluntary psychic experience. Nor can it be seen as a technique to "hook" youngsters, since LSD does not cause physical dependency, as most other illegal drugs do.

5) The alleged vehicle of the LSD is described by imprecise, changing terms both in the French and American flyers: tattoos, stamps, tattoo stamps, decals, stickers, self-adhesive stickers, transfers, etc. The New Jersey police bulletin uses the word "stamps" to characterize the drawings stamped on the blotters. Since the word may also mean "postage stamps," the word's multiple meanings likely allowed the rumor to focus on children's lick-and-stick images. This inaccuracy, along with the lack of material or photographic proof, naturally reflects these products' nonexistence. Nobody ever wondered why no newspaper reproducing the contents of the flyer ever included a snapshot of these infamous tattoos. The amalgam of different references may help explain the incoherent description of the support: "blue stars" or cartoon images such as Mickey Mouse or Superman. Finally, as Brunvand emphasizes, most children's images, whether stickers or transfers, are not porous enough to absorb LSD (1984:169).

6) None of these tattoo transfers has ever been seized, and not a single LSD poisoning of a child has ever been verified in France or in the United States. The last sentence of the Parisian flyer is thus inaccurate.

7) Finally, it seems paradoxical that this LSD alert takes place at a time when the use of the drug has reached its lowest recorded level. The level of LSD consumption followed the popularity of the hippie ideology of the 1960s and has decreased steadily since then. Today, drug users look for stupefying drugs.

In spite of these inaccuracies and improbabilities, the flyer has convinced numerous individuals, most of them rather well-educated, for as with any rumor, there is a bit of truth in what is alleged. The following information is accurate: LSD or "acid" is an hallucinogenic drug causing a "trip"; it is often packaged in blotters stamped with drawings; the ingestion of the drug happens by placing a piece of laced blotter in the mouth; LSD-laced "blotters" featuring Mickey Mouse or blue star images have been found. If this was the case, then why not red pyramids, butterflies or clowns? All these might seem likely.

The association between postage stamps and LSD does exist: it is a custom among LSD users to send small LSD tablets by concealing them underneath the postage stamps of the letters they send to foreign

correspondents. Similarly, LSD tablets were found concealed beneath tattoo transfers in California. In August 1988, a customs representative told this author: "LSD supports evolve rapidly, and it is is not impossible that the conditioning described in the flyers may be used."

In June 1988, drugs were back in the headlines. In Paris, the Central Anti-Drug Office seized cocaine stashed in pineapple cans that had been hidden among a larger shipment (*Midi Libre*, 16 June 1988). In London, customs officers discovered heroin hidden in confections similar to those found in shops. The 18 June 1988 issue of the *Midi Libre* features the following headline:

Alert in Great Britain. Candies laced with . . . heroin. A new technique used by drug traffickers. If a child were to consume such a confection he would die at once. A general horror has spread all over the land.

This information, published at the same time as the flyer alleging the existence of LSD-laced tattoo transfers, may have considerably reinforced the likelihood of the rumor.

Some published denials look like semiconfirmations. Such is the case with the one found in the 22 June 1988 issue of *La Dépêche du Midi*, which, while denouncing the rumor for being "without foundation," writes that the "text in question may have been copied by its malicious authors from a 1981 article about products found in the United States and Canada published in an American scientific magazine." The 17 October 1988 issue of the *Courrier de l'Ouest* featured the following: "LSD had been used with a similar packaging in the United States in the 1970s, but this type is unknown in France." By allowing its readers to believe that LSD tattoo transfers had really existed in the United States, these newspapers contributed to the grounding of the rumor.

As we know, the major driving force of rumor is fear. In the case of the LSD tattoo transfers, several types of fear overlap, all related in one way or another to the fear of contamination. The theme of the "deceptive mundane" is common to a very large number of rumors. The structure is simple: a menace or a danger lurks behind banal, trivial, everyday occurrences. The effect is the more spectacular since both juxtaposed elements belong to opposite universes of meaning. When stretched to its extreme, this theme reveals the horrible hidden behind the mundane: modified modeling booths leading to white slavery, yucca plants containing venomous spiders, hamburgers made with earthworms, etc. The juxtaposition of the children's world (Mickey Mouse, butterflies, clowns) with the drug world (LSD, addiction, fatal trips) offers a striking contrast between innocence and perversion.

This structure is not specific to rumors; it is also found in everyday news, as in the case of the stuffed candy, and is a force behind fantastic or black humor. A cartoon in the November 1978 issue of (*À Suivre*) [To Be Continued . . .] shows young children going into delirium at communion and a furious priest blurting out, "Who's the son of a gun who put LSD in the wafers?" This image is not far removed from the rumor studied here. What one person sees as humor may inspire fear in another.

The period of diffusion of the flyer throughout France coincides with a climate of fear of drugs. "There is not a single week without a heroin overdose or a seizure of cocaine," printed the magazine *Femme Actuelle* (27 June-3 July 1988). After the cocaine in the pineapple cans and the candy stuffed with heroin, newspapers mentioned the increase in the use of "barbits" (a mixture of alcoholic beverages and barbiturates). In September 1988, the Ministry of Health decided to classify several barbiturates as Schedule B drugs (stupeficient drugs). A SOFRES/*Actuel* poll taken in May 1988 indicates that the two gravest and most condemnable activities, in the opinion of the French, are "the sale of drugs" (98 percent of answers) and "the exploitation of children" (97 percent of answers). These activities are precisely the two that are at the root of the LSD tattoo transfer rumor, which was bound to cause popular indignation.

Thomas Szasz has argued that, in the contemporary popular imagination, drugs have become the scapegoat for the ills of society (1974). The diabolization of drugs explains the symptoms described in the 1987 American flyer: in older times, uncontrolled laughter and rapid mood changes were signs that helped exorcists recognize those possessed by evil spirits. Fears about drugs accurately reflect collective fears (cf. Ettore-Baizieux 1988): drugs impair health (industrial and urban pollution); drugs cause school dropouts and diminish professional output (industrial pollution and economic crisis); drugs are primarily found among the young (youth revolt); and drugs lead to crime (increase in insecurity). Drug abuse is often considered as a contagious illness, an epidemic that must be countered.

It is significant that LSD, not marijuana or heroin, is the drug mentioned in the rumor and in the flyers. For the public at large, LSD is the drug that makes people crazy. An attack against an individual's mind is often thought to be worse than an attack against the individual's body. LSD is also the anti-establishment drug, associated with the numerous American movements of the 1960s when Timothy Leary, Jerry Rubin, and Abbie Hoffman advocated the use of hallucinogenic drugs, rebellion against the authorities, and the establishment of "liberated" communes. It is easy to understand why, in 1966, an American politician (C. W. Sandman, Jr., chairman of the New Jersey Board of Enquiry on Narcotics) declared that

LSD was "the worst plague threatening the country today . . . much more dangerous than the Vietnam war" (Szasz 1974).

It is not coincidental that this politician was from New Jersey, the state where the LSD tattoo transfer rumor would emerge: this state, like most of the northeastern states, represents Puritan and conservative America, in contrast to California with its hippies and new technologies. It has already been indicated that one of the important links in the diffusion of the rumor was a fundamentalist Protestant sect for whom the struggle of Christ against Satan (i.e., sex, drugs, rock music, etc.) is an everyday matter. In North America, religious groups appear to have played a more significant role in the diffusion of the rumor than in France: in November 1989, the American flyer (in its 1987 form) was published in Canada in *The Protestant Challenge*, the bulletin of The Canadian Protestant League. According to Ellis (1989), several individuals spreading the rumor alleged that LSD tattoos were sold at rock concerts.

The fears that a child could become a drug addict, a juvenile delinquent, a mentally disturbed youth, all embody the same fear of the loss of parental authority. Other rumors already express this anxiety: the Orléans white slave trade involved young girls' taste for seductive clothing sold in fashion boutiques; the rumor about the Space Dust candy [the French name for Pop Rocks] that exploded in the stomach protested the attraction that children have for confections instead of healthful foods. Jean-Noël Kapferer's remarks about the Space Dust candies are readily applicable to the LSD tattoo rumor:

The rumors aim less at the product and more at the behavior it symbolizes, a behavior not tolerated among children. Space Dust contributes to the emergence of children heavily engaged in the consumption of gadgets, the purchase of useless frivolities . . . that is to say a behavior in opposition to the values of wisdom, self-control and functionality. (1987:181)²

Parents see the passion that today's youth has for self-adhesive images representing its heroes as proof of the nefarious influence that comics, cartoons, and illustrated albums have over their children. This reaction is evident in the case of the "Garbage Pail Kids," characters who do everything forbidden to children, but it may also be aimed at apparently less offensive heroes. Bill Ellis (1989) observes rightly that LSD users have employed the image of Mickey Mouse as the Sorcerer's Apprentice because of the hallucinatory dimension of the movie *Fantasia* (1940), which, like acid, widens perception and visualizes the music through brightly colored images. The presentation of dream sequences in cartoons may be compared to the visions of drug users. In a sequence from *Dumbo* (1941), the young elephant "hallucinates" after drinking champagne and "flies" like Superman.

Others have gone so far as to interpret Winsor McCay's comic *Dreams of a Rarebit Fiend* (1905) as a work inspired by cocaine or opium. The LSD tattoo transfer rumor thus plays on the ambiguity of signs: the Sorcerer's Apprentice and "Blue Stars" evoke both a fairy world and a hallucinatory one; tattoos evoke children's games as well as delinquency. According to the flyers, LSD tattoo transfers are a "new way of selling acid by appealing to young children." The word appeal suggests desire and seduction, as in "sex appeal." Consequently, the rumor also exploits the theme of the malevolent seducer who contaminates innocents. According to the flyers, young children are given free tattoos by other children who want to have some fun. This is a dark version of the old banquet custom in which children are given small quantities of wine or alcoholic beverages so that adults may have a laugh at the youngster's inebriation. In the present case, the distributor of LSD tattoo transfers joins the sexual pervert and the child snatcher on the list of those detestable characters lurking around schools about whom parents warn their children. The youngsters are ordered not to speak to strangers and not to accept candy or sweets from anyone. Ellis (1989) reminds us that the "poisoned gift" (such as the apple the Wicked Queen offers Snow White) is a frequent motif in folk literature. The distributor of LSD tattoo transfers is not only guilty of leading children to addiction, but he is also responsible for their death, whether indirectly ("fatal trip") or directly (transfers containing violent poisons like strychnine). As sometimes happens, reality catches up with the rumor: in April 1990, several drug addicts died in Marseilles after having used "bad heroin" mixed with deadly substances (rat poison, cement, plaster, or strychnine).

Like stuffed teddy bears allegedly containing snakes (Kapferer 1990:120), the LSD-laced children tattoo transfers are the "Trojan horse" of a foreign contamination: "using this trick, the foreigner gains entrance within the city and annihilates its future: its children" (Kapferer 1987:177). The fear of the foreigner has been added to all the other fears triggered by the rumor as soon as it crossed the border of the United States. The Québec flyer and the derivative French flyers always locate the tattoos in the United States and express the fear that they "may arrive faster than is thought." Many of our society's ills—terrorism, drugs, epidemics—are attributed to foreigners. In one of her chronicles, Claude Sarraute writes that "crack will be like AIDS: make no mistake, it will soon have crossed the Atlantic" (*Le Monde* [16 September 1988]).

By juxtaposing Mickey Mouse and the wonderful world of Disney with LSD and the inferno of drugs, the rumors offer Europeans a two-sided image, positive and negative, that corresponds to the one they have about America, the country of freedom and of urban violence as well.

Conclusions

Earlier rumors associated with drugs opened the way for reports of LSD-laced tattoo transfers. Brunvand mentions several of the anecdotes about outlandish and often exaggerated behaviors resulting from the consumption of drugs: putting a baby in a microwave oven, or even cutting an infant's heart out with a broken soft-drink bottle (1984:162). In 1968, Abbie Hoffman and other members of the YIP (Youth International Party) pretended that they had poured LSD into the drinking water supply of Chicago. Rock singers of the sixties have long been suspected of veiled allusions to drugs in their songs and of bizarre habits in their own drug consumption: thus it is said that "Jimi Hendrix put tabs of LSD under his bandanna before a concert and as he worked up a sweat during the performance, the drug slowly percolated his skin" (Morgan and Tucker 1984:60-61). Here again is the erroneous assumption that LSD may enter the system through the skin's pores. Thomas Szasz (1974) mentions a rumor that started in Pennsylvania in 1968: students under the influence of LSD allegedly became blind after staring at the sun for a very long time. Besides the fact that it is said to have taken place in the Northeast, this rumor anticipated the LSD tattoo transfer rumor. It involved young victims, the same drug, and the drug's negative connotations (it gives "crazy" ideas). And it also implicated authorities because physicians, senators, the media, and even the governor of the state played an active role in the dissemination of the rumor.

Its influence has reached such a level that events are "read" in the light of the rumor, which, in turn, becomes reinforced. For example, on 29 January 1989, a Canadian television program devoted to drugs revealed that it was "possible to find a LSD blotter dose with images of Donald Duck, easily available in a school yard near your residence" (*TV Guide*, Toronto, 28 January 1989). This information, possibly authentic at its root, is still sufficiently ambiguous to spark to a rumor (children's images laced with LSD can be found) or to give an *a posteriori* reinforcement of the LSD tattoo transfer rumor.

Even more significant is the mixture between the real and the imaginary found in the story about "LSD stamps" that circulated in Italy. According to several newspapers, one of them *Le Journal du Dimanche* (23 April 1989), Italian police in Florence had confiscated stamps laced with LSD, featuring the image of a Buddha "in order to make the children who handled them addicts." Besides the fact that, once again, LSD is not addictive and cannot be absorbed through the skin, it is unlikely that these stamps, which sold for about \$80 apiece, were meant for children's consumption. The rumor reached such a pitch in Italy that the Head of

Police in Florence had to issue a denial indicating that *postage* stamps were not involved! In fact, the police had confiscated standard LSD blotters cut into small blue squares with images of Buddha stamped on them. But according to the Reuters news agency, these images were "a type sometimes collected by children."

Once again, the representation of the image had been taken as reality, as in New Jersey in 1980; this time it was reinforced by the more or less conscious remembrance of the flyer. Owing to its persistence over time and its spatial propagation (almost the entire Western Hemisphere), the LSD tattoo transfer rumor is likely to earn its place among the "classic rumors." The book has not yet been closed. Even where the state of alert has passed, the rumor remains latent, ready to reappear.

In August of 1990, French custom officers seized LSD tablets hidden under "Conan the Barbarian" decals. Even though this event differed from the one in the earlier rumor, one newspaper headline declared: "Drugged Decals for Children: It was True" (*France-Soir*, 13 August, 1990). Moreover, this same rumor has influenced television police dramas, in which LSD-laced decals for children are referred to as fact. All of these events gave new credibility to the rumor, explaining its resurgence in France, by way of Switzerland, in November and December of 1990. This version was one of the most alarming, in which strychnine was added to the LSD. Medical and scholarly authorities, who were taken in by the rumor in 1988, no longer disseminated the story in 1991, and this time the rumor was short-lived—until its next comeback.

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Notes

1 Direction Départementale des Affaires Sanitaires et Sociales, or Departmental Service for Health and Social Services.

2 Kapferer's American edition makes a related but slightly different point (1990:143).

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