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# HOW I FOUND OUT JESUS WAS A MUSHROOM



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(You think you know, but no. Never)  
by Geoffrey Farmer

047



## How I Found Out That Jesus Was A Mushroom. (What I Did On My Summer Vacation)

by Geoffrey Farmer

This summer I found myself in a small village just over the hill from the town of Nevers, France. I had been to France a few times before, but never to Nevers. I spent a few days in Paris before I left for Nevers with a friend of mine, a writer. We stayed up late one night and watched *Hiroshima Mon Amour*. Nevers is repeated like a mantra in the film. Repeated over and over and it slips as a name to become the word; never. In the film there is an affair between a French woman and a Japanese man. The climax of the movie, I think is her confession. It acts to fuse them together, a kind of reverse atomic force, set against the unknowable invisible trauma of a rebuilt Hiroshima. There are the occasional flashbacks to the stark occupied countryside of Nevers during WWII that break the film into two seemingly opposing worlds.

On the train to Nevers I feel uncomfortably fitted between polarities myself somewhere between my preoccupation with the women across from me chewing gum and the cinematic countryside that speeds past my window. I want to feel the movie, and I can when I look at the countryside, but it dissolves as soon as a focus my attention on her chewing. I think about the

word never. Violet, my Grandmother use to scold me; "never say never"! and "don't use the word hate if you don't mean it."! She was always a little grumpy, I thought at six, but I still liked her. I hadn't thought up to that point that words actually meant something. She had lived through WWII though, and my Grandfather going off to war. He had shrapnel in his ear. It is *clichéd* to think of these things when on trains, especially if you're a Canadian in France. I write that down in my notebook.

The train accelerates to an alarming speed and then passes another train traveling in the opposite direction, which creates the effect of someone popping a paper bag behind my head. I put my earphones back in and think back to the movie. Is there something there, for the piece I must make at the Art Centre? It seems slightly depressing to me that I am thinking like this.

When I think of the movie it seems to me that it was shot in green, and not black and white, at least the shots of Nevers. I see the shots of Hiroshima in silver and yellow. It was winter in Nevers and summer in Hiroshima. I can't remember though. Anyway I arrive in Nevers sweating, but I keep my suit jacket on because I want to fit in. I'm a different person now. I'm traveling on business and not with a backpack. I'm proud that I have packed so lightly even though my computer is heavy and my back is slightly sore. I want to think about the movie in a way that is intelligent and insightful. I think back to the

movie. The movie is about the making of a movie. Everything seems inverted, modern and irreconcilable. They both carry the personal wounds of war, which strangely allows them to fall in love in a shocking and unexpected way. It seems something that can only be expressed in a story about falling in love. I don't know why I wrote that. Or I want to write it over again with dusty letters that could mix in with the existing ones and change them into something better. So I entered Nevers thinking of the bomb and carrying a copy of Paul Virilio's, *The Aesthetics of Disappearance* and a slightly tattered copy of his, *War and Cinema*. Some of the notes I wrote on my trip from Paris:

*Ask Mom about Grandpa's hearing aid. Was it shrapnel? War is the art of embellishing death. What is perceived is lost.*

Then I get off the train. I'm rushed off the train. I meet my host. We drive straight out of town. We make small talk about Canada. She seems slightly disinterested, but I am happy that she was shocked that I brought so little. It is starting to get dark by the time we get into the town of Pougues les Eaux. This is a town that is famous for a casino and a mineral water source that has since been closed. This is a town with a new fountain that changes colour at night. This is a town with a plaque of a woman, wearing goggles at a sharp corner on Avenue de Paris before you enter the town. I am told that she died in a famous car race in the 1920's. I'm trying to remember what had

been said to me, as we drove by it. It was too fast. Something about...this was the only road to Paris from Nice, and there was a famous car race in the 1920's. She lost control of her car and died. I made a note to visit it. About ten days later someone in the town gives me a book titled: *Violette Morris la Hyene de la gestap*. A story about a women boxer in the 1920's who became a car racer and then worked in the Parisian Gestapo and also in the awful "rue Lauriston" questioning house. In 1944 she travels by car to Paris and the French Resistance attacked her car on the road killing her. There is an amazing photo of her, dressed like a man. She smoked 3 packs of cigarettes a day, cursed a blue streak and got a mastectomy in order to fit into racecars more easily.

We arrive at the Art Centre. I am shown to my room and left alone. I am told that no one will be there for the weekend. It is a large building in a park. It is near an abandoned hotel from the turn of the century and a wrought iron and glass pavilion. It's a park that you imagine should be inhabited by people dressed in period costumes with white painted faces. Expressionless. Not Zombies but theatre ghosts...cued to freeze as you walk amongst them. There is a pond meant for rowboats, it is a deep stagnant green.

Then the noise...it began at around 2 am. It is an awful fluttering sound accompanied by a guttural moaning coming from somewhere outside. Then

clicking, scratching and more fluttering. It stops, but starts again an hour later. I sleep in the bathroom, which is the only door I can figure out how to lock. Later I find out it is an injured crow named Barnett Newman, that had been shot by a hunter and found by children visiting the Centre. It lives on the balcony with a broken wing. When I visit him for the first time he is lying on his back covered in bird shit. I looked at him and think you poor broken obelisk.

When everyone does finally arrive I have finished the Virilio books. War and speed are the predominate themes. Its destructive capacities imprinted on his psyche as a child that lived through WWII. He anticipates it everywhere; it is his primal scene. When I look through my notes from this time, I am writing about speed, but also I found these:

*Only war can match wars in intensity. Fascinated with archeology of violence. I try to be a kind of periscope of probable catastrophes.*

I have also noted on a separate page:

*Arrived in Paris on Air Canada flight to bad news of another flight that didn't make it from South America. It was suppose to arrive half and hour behind ours. There is some commotion at the airport, news cameras...*

I follow the story for the rest of the trip. There is never any explanation as to why it went down.

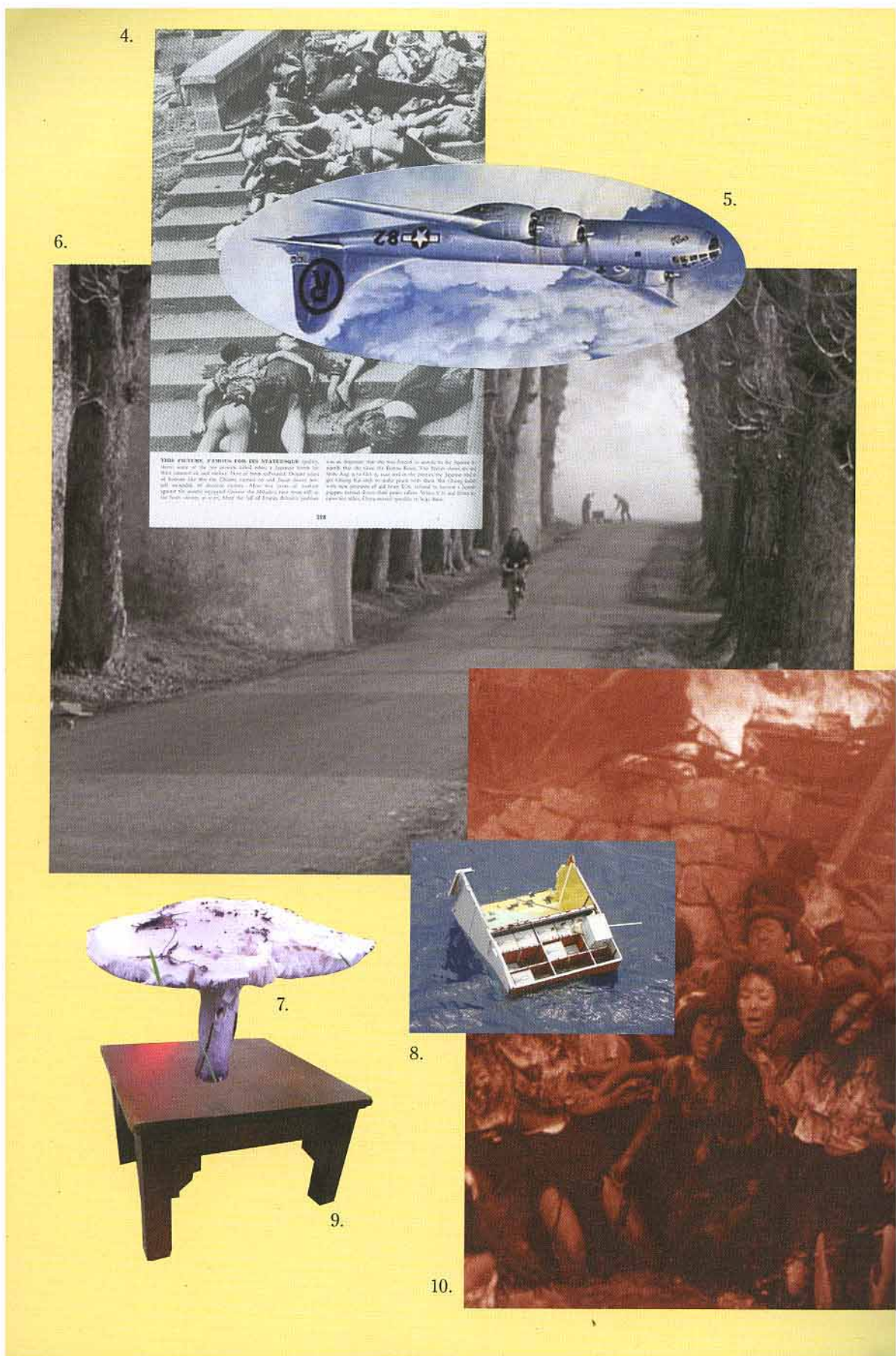
I read some of Virilio's book on the flight, the one that has the image of a pilot on the cover flying a warplane the other if I can remember are eyes looking out of a kind of mist. I remember thinking as I tried to sleep on the flight, what Virilio feels about bunkers, I feel about planes; For me the bunker is a kind of metaphor for suffocation, asphyxiation, both what I fear and what fascinates me.

I am at the Art Centre we are talking about the search for the plane that no longer exists. We use these newspaper headlines to line the pooped smeared balcony of Barnett's enclosure...

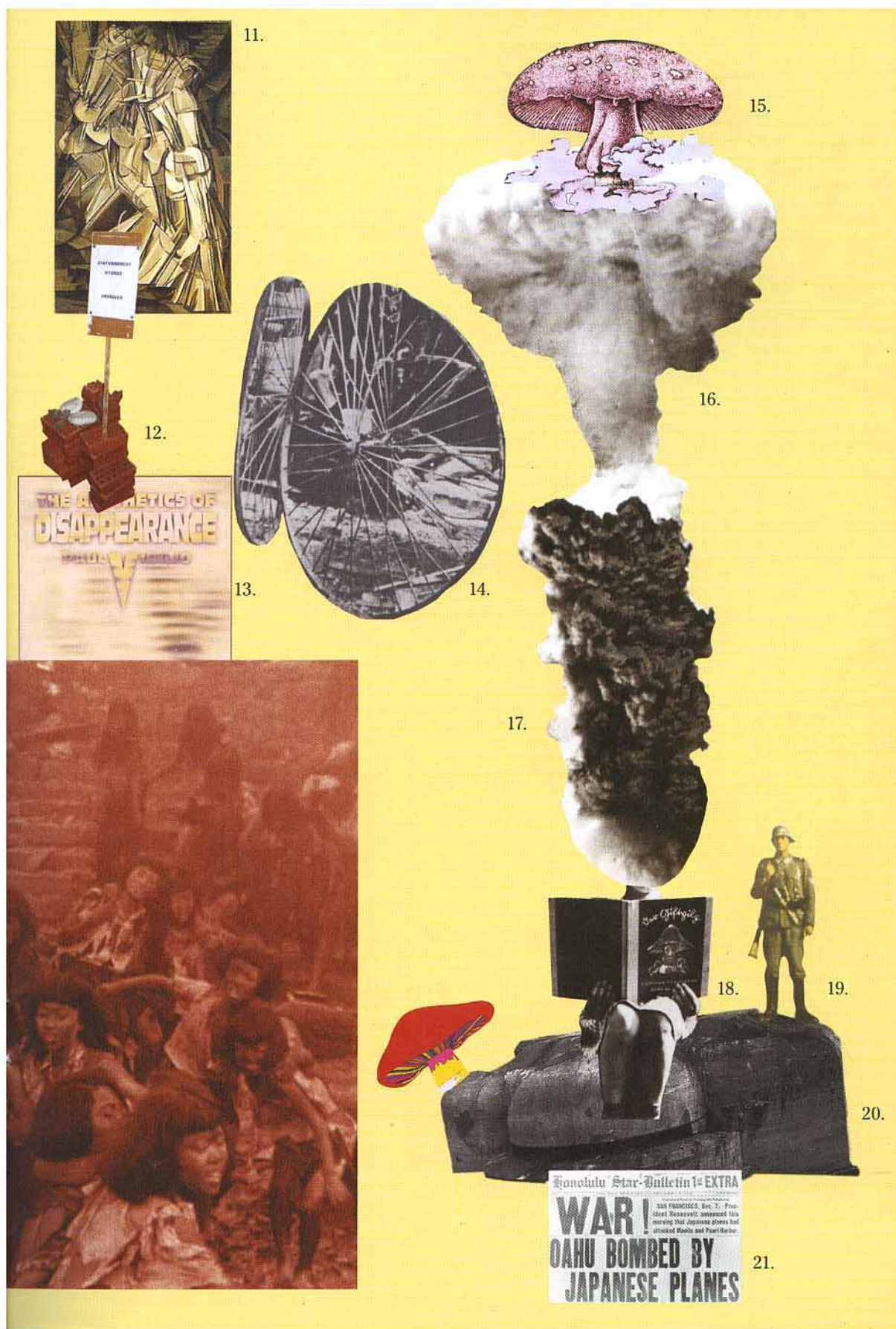
I am ready finally to go and see Paul Virilio and Claude Parent's *Bunker Church* in Nevers. It is in fact the reason I am here, to do a piece for the Art Centre on the Church which is actually called, the *Church for Sainte' Bernadette*, the young women who saw the vision of Virgin Mary at Lourdes in 1885.

We are told to pick up the keys from a nun before we meet the architect. This gives me time to enter alone. It is in the shape of a concrete bunker, very much like the ones that Hitler had constructed to create the infamous Atlantic Wall, and Virilio had documented so carefully in his book, *Bunker Archaeology* which was first published in 1975. The doors are spray painted with some graffiti and it looks as if some bottles have been smashed and something has been burned near the front entrance. I half expect an alarm to sound as I enter, or











maybe I can't quite believe that such a small ordinary frail key could open the door to such a space. It smells like a mushroom on the inside, perhaps how 1966 might smell. I quickly move in and close the door with echoing sounds of the grinding concrete under my shoes. I take a few more steps and just look silently then the architect arrives. There is pointing. Hand gestures. What appear to be two wooden stools have had their legs cut to account for the floors oblique angles. He explains to me that at the first funeral the coffin slid off so they were cut down the next day. He shows me Parents book on oblique functionalism. The building itself is beautifully strange. The architect gives me an interview with Virilio and one of the first things he states is: For me Nevers was *Hiroshima Mon Amour*... It is perhaps then that I am not surprised to find a stain in the concrete of what looks like a mushroom cloud. I point to it and in my terrible French I say *champignon*. He smiles and asks me if I would like to see St. Bernadette body. It is on display close by. As we drive to view it he explains that it was exhumed and found not to have decomposed. Later I read some of the archival documents that describe the examination of the body. Apparently it was in pretty good shape, except that the foot came off, and the face was shrunken, so a wax mask was made. It is a strange sight in a tiny glass casket, with a coiled rope light over her face.

Later that night I am at an art opening in Nevers getting quite

drunk. There is an older man who comes over to speak to me. It is a strange broken conversation about St. Bernadette and I ask him what he thinks about her vision and he tells me that there is a theory that she might have eaten a mushroom that day, that the grotto in Massabielle where she saw the vision was a kind of dump, full of manure. Before I leave he writes down the name of a book title, *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross*.

It isn't until a few days later that I find the note and start to research it. Written by John Allegro in 1970, it came after several other books, which examine the *Dead Sea Scrolls* that he had worked to interpret in the 1950's. Allegro theorizes, well let me just directly quote from my notes which are copied from a website:

*As a philologist, Allegro analyzed the derivations of language. He traced biblical words and phrases back to their roots in Sumerian, and showed how Sumerian phonemes recur in varying but related contexts in many Semitic, classical and other Indo-European languages. Although meanings changed to some extent, Allegro found some basic religious ideas passing on through the genealogy of words. His book The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross relates the development of language on our continent to the development of myths, religions and cultic practices in many cultures. Allegro believed he could prove through etymology that the roots of Christianity, as of many other religions, lay in fertility cults; and that cultic practices, such as ingesting*

*hallucinogenic drugs to perceive the mind of god, persisted into Christian times.*

The reaction to *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross* ruined Allegro's career. The church found his theory so shocking that the book received instant condemnation instead of scholarly appraisal. The hallucinogenic mushroom he speaks about is the *Fly Agaric* mushroom, the classic red mushroom with the white spots. Allegro goes on in the book to suggest that the word used to describe Jesus refers specifically to this mushroom. Yes, Jesus was a mushroom.

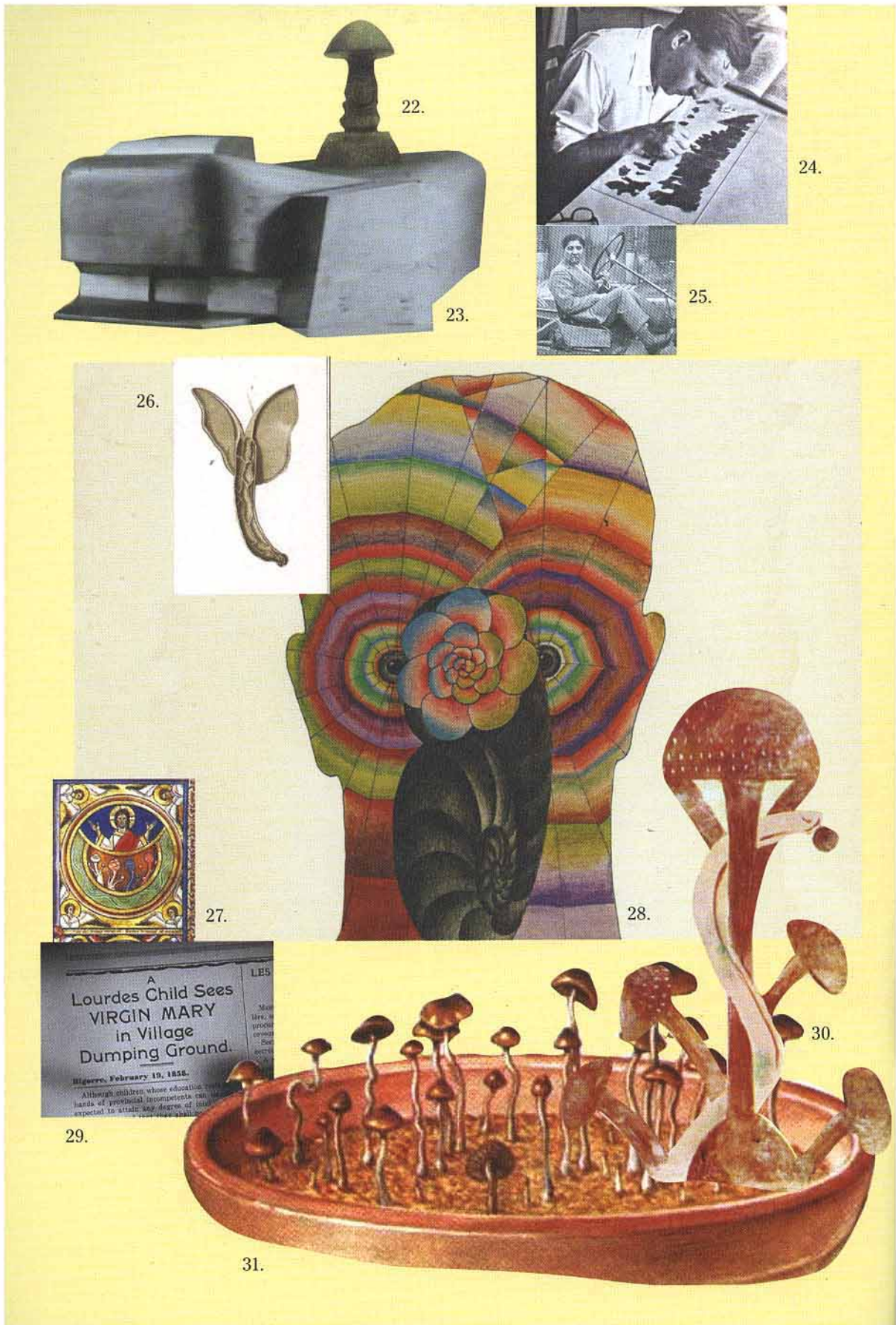
So it is not surprising to me, to find some magic mushrooms in the field outside of my studio, which is verified by a local expert in town. Once they are dry I take them and walk to an area near the Art Centre that they call, the Nazi Swimming Pool. When the Nazi's occupied the area they created a kind of water source to supply the troops. French kids use to swim in after the liberation, and it obtained this name. While sitting reflecting, slightly high, I actually felt perhaps Allegro's theory was not so far fetched. It is hard for me to remember my trip, but it had to do with enlightenment, the atomic bomb, the mushroom cloud and the theory of the beginning of the universe. That love and hate exists as two polarities creating the expansion of everything. I made some terrible sketches that I will never show anyone. The next morning, I found a concrete poem by Gregory Corso, title *Bomb*, that is in

the shape of a mushroom cloud.  
He wrote it in Paris in 1957. I felt  
almost high reading this from  
Wikipedia:

*At 13, Corso stole a toaster and sold it at a junk shop. He used the proceeds to buy a tie, and dressed up to see the film The Song of Bernadette, about the mystical appearance of the Virgin Mary to Bernadette Soubirous at Lourdes. Corso claimed he was seeking a miracle, namely, to find his mother. Instead, on returning from the movie, police were searching for him and he was arrested for petty larceny and incarcerated in the Tombs, New York's infamous jail. Corso, just 13, was celled next to an adult criminally insane murderer who had stabbed his wife repeatedly with a screwdriver. The exposure left Corso traumatized. Neither Corso's stepmother nor his paternal grandmother would post his \$50 bail. With his own mother missing and unable to make his bail, he remained in the Tombs.*

I knew I was well on my way to making the piece for the exhibition. This is where I must end the story even though it continues; right now I am in Mexico City where I am here doing some research on the use of *psilocybin* mushrooms in ritual practice. Early today I listened to a lecture John Cage gave on mushrooms, I believe, who was one of the greatest mushroom experts of all. And that is what I did on my summer vacation.







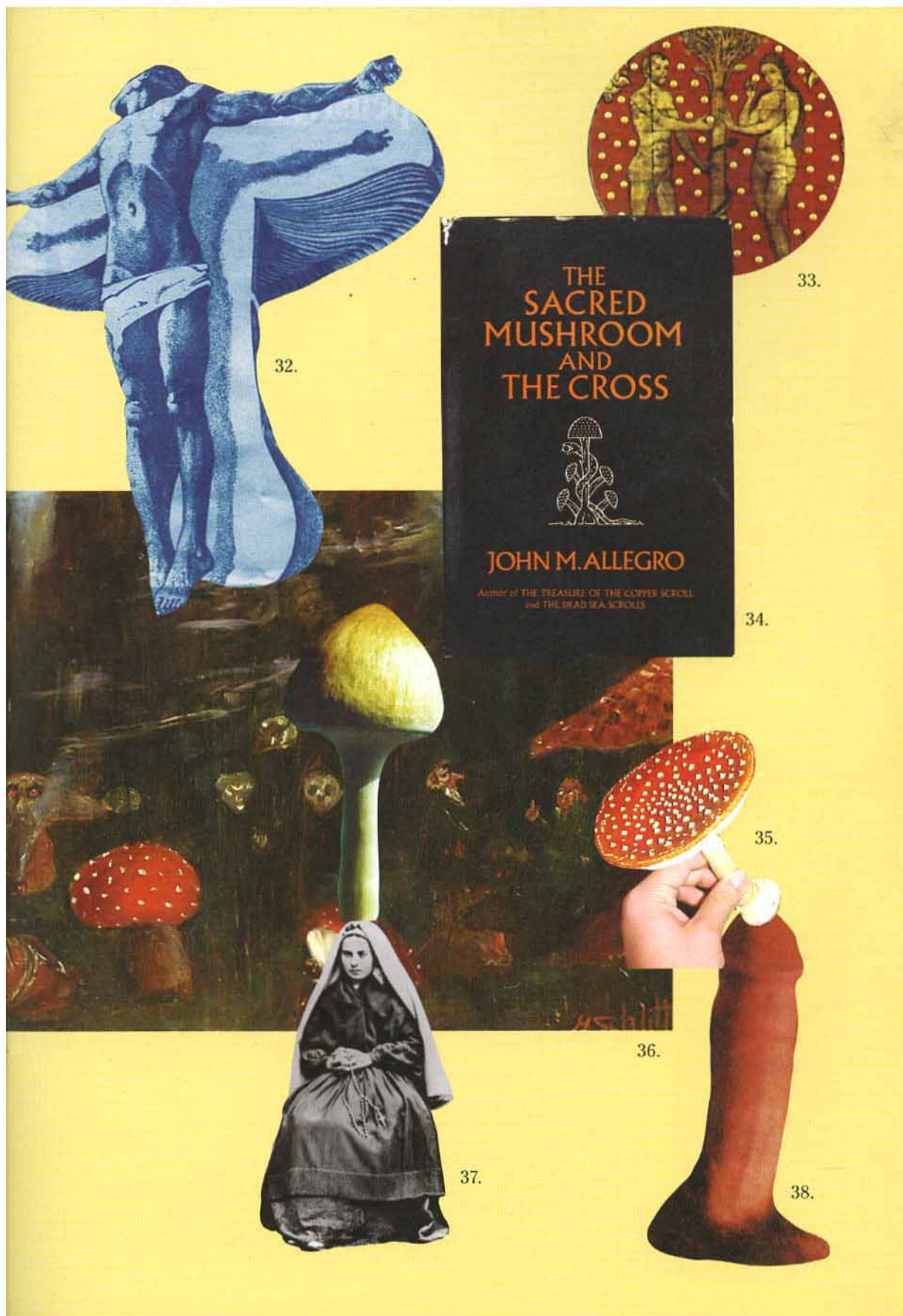




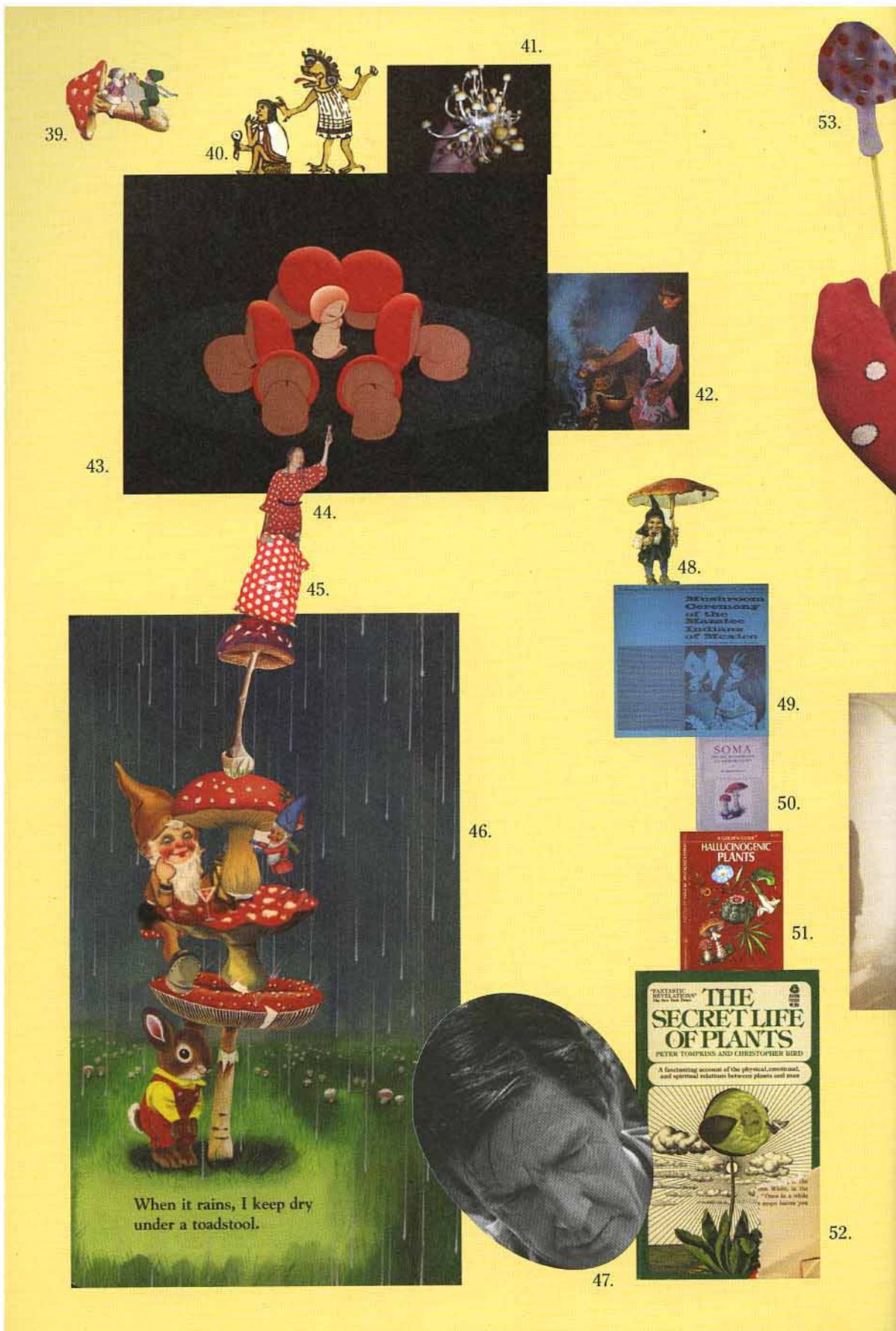
Image information:

01. Cover of *Der Giftpilz*, an anti-Semitic children's book published by Julius Streicher in 1938. The title is German for "the toadstool" or "the poison-mushroom". It was written by Ernst Hiemer and illustrated by Philipp Rupprecht (a.k.a. Fips).
02. Illustration of two *amanita muscaria* mushrooms.
03. Illustration from *Alice's adventures in Wonderland* by Sir John Tenniel.
04. Photo from *War in Our Time* showing a group of Chinese citizens who were killed after their air-raid shelter was bombed during WWII.
05. Photo of the *Enola Gay*, the B-29 Superfortress bomber that dropped the first atomic bomb, code-named "Little Boy, to be used in war, by the United States in the attack on Hiroshima, Japan on August 6th, 1945.
06. Still from *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, depicting the female protagonist cycling through the war-torn landscape of her hometown of Nevers.
07. Photo of a hallucinogenic mushroom near the bog where St. Bernadette saw her vision of the Virgin Mary.
08. Photo of recovered fuselage from Air France flight 447, which crashed into the Atlantic Ocean on June 1st 2009, killing all of the 216 passengers and 12 crew members who were aboard.
09. Photo of a footstool from the bunker church. The legs on one side had to be shortened due to the oblique architecture of the building, designed by Paul Virilio.
10. Still from *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, depicting the fallout of the atomic bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima.
11. Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2*.
12. Sign from Paul Virilio's *Bunker Church*.
13. Cover of *The Aesthetics of Disappearance*, by Paul Virilio.
14. Image of wagon wheels in the aftermath of the atomic bomb.
15. Illustration of hallucinogenic mushroom.
16. Mushroom cloud over Hiroshima.
17. Detail from the illustration, *the Atomic Bomb and the Twenty Six Saints*, by Kiyoshi Awazu.
18. Child reading *Der Giftpilz*.
19. Detail of a German soldier stationed at a *Fernkampfatterie* (distant battle battery) along the Atlantic Wall.
20. A post-war bunker station of the Atlantic Wall, sinking into the sand under its own weight, photographed by Paul Virilio.
21. Front page of the Honolulu Star, December 7th, 1941.
22. Facsimile in granite of a mushroom stone probably representing Méso-American godhead *Tlaloc*. (300–600 AD) (Original in Rietberg Museum-Zurich).
23. Paul Virilio's *Bunker Church*.
24. John Allegro at work translating the *Dead Sea scrolls*.
25. Violette Morris, a French female Gestapo agent.
26. ????
27. Detail from the Paris "Eadwine" Psalter zodiac, depicting Jesus Christ above several different types of mushroom, thought to be psychotropic.
28. Cover of *Surrealism, The Road to the Absolute*, by Anna Balakian.
29. Still from, *The Song of Bernadette*, showing newspaper article which describes St. Bernadette's vision.
30. Detail from an illuminated text, depicting the snake with the fruit of knowledge, wrapped around the stock of a mushroom, rather than the typical staff.
31. Image from a book on mushroom cultivation.
32. Image depicting Jesus Christ crucified on a mushroom.
33. Adam and Eve against a background of the cap of an *amanita muscaria* mushroom.
34. Cover of *The Sacred Mushroom and The Cross*, by John Allegro.
35. An *amanita muscaria*, or fly agaric mushroom.
36. Painting by Heinrich Schlitt.

Geoffrey Farmer Project

37. St. Bernadette.
38. A penis, which resembles a mushroom.
39. Detail of a Dutch Christmas card, depicting children on a flying *amanita muscaria*.
40. Mexican drawing from the 16th Century shows a man, eating hallucinogenic mushrooms and a god behind him, who is speaking through the mushroom.
41. Photo of homegrown *psilocybin* mushrooms.
42. Photo from "Seeking the magic mushroom". *Life* (June 10, 1957) Curandera Eva Mendez ceremonially turns fungus in the smoke of burning aromatic leaves in preparation for author R. Gordon Wasson.
43. Still from Disney's *Fantasia*.
44. First Nations woman wearing an *amanita muscaria* patterned dress holds aloft a mushroom of the same variety.
45. Shopping bag mimicking the *amanita muscaria* markings.
46. Page from Richard Scarry book, *I Am a Bunny*.
47. Detail from a photo of John Cage picking mushrooms.
48. Detail from a happy New Year card, depicting a gnome using a mushroom as an umbrella.
49. LP Cover of *Mushroom Ceremony of the Mazatec Indians of Mexico*, recorded by R. Gordon Wasson.
50. Cover of *Soma, Divine Mushroom of Immortality*, by R. Gordon Wasson.
51. Cover of *Hallucinogenic Plants*, by Richard Evans Schultes.
52. Cover of *The Secret Life of Plants*, by Peter Tompkins and Christopher Bird.
53. Protest sign from a demonstration against the banning of magic mushrooms in the Netherlands.
54. Drinking fountain of natural spring water at Pougues Les Eaux, France.
55. Socks with an *amanita muscaria* pattern.
56. Photograph of an *amanita muscaria* taken by Sergey Prokudin-Gorskii, circa 1910.
57. Still image from *E.T.*
58. Drawing depicting Adam as a plant.
59. Image from the cover of *The Smurfs, True Blue Friends*.
60. Electrum, a mushroom android from *E.T. The Storybook of The Green Planet*, illustration by David Weisner.
61. E.T. from *E.T. The Storybook of The Green Planet*, illustration by David Weisner.
62. A group of people dressed as smurfs.
63. Geoffrey Farmer, as a child, wearing an *amanita muscaria* patterned coat.









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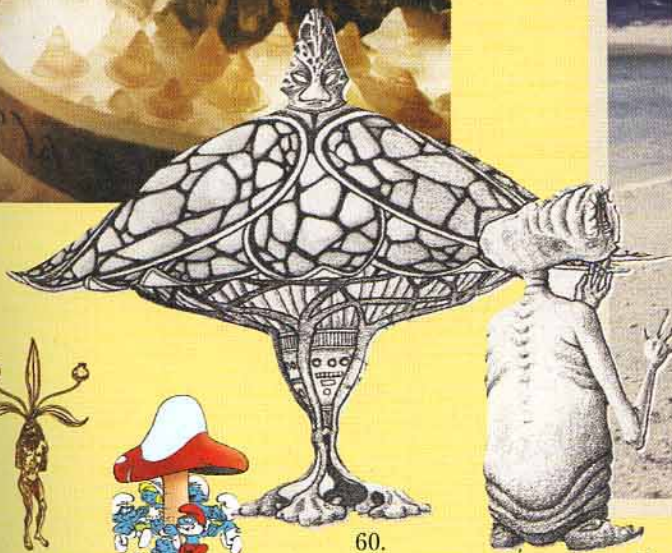
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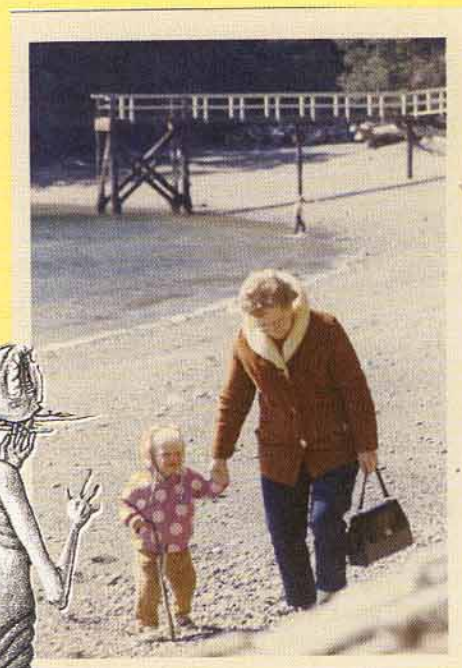
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