Leary, guru of tuned-in generation, turns on RMC

By BARRY KAPLAN
Executive Editorial Staff

Timothy Leary ("Guru? Prophet? Pied Piper?"), Harvard dropout and Public Figure, came to the RMC last night and played a lecture-game. A man whose press coverage induced one to expect horns on his brow (or at least a hint of sulphur) stepped within the hedges to speak in a remarkably unidioctical way of divinity, of games, and of dropping out.

The stage was set by music, familiar music heard in unfamiliar guises, amplified, distorted; and by light; slides projected on a screen, superimposed, colorful, and unsettling. There were galaxies and flowers, mandalas and dots and huge blobs.

Anticipating a large crowd, we arrived early, selecting a good seat, and settling back to watch the influx. We had expected the usual pre-lecture boredom, and were prepared to twiddle the thumbs while the minutes dragged.

After an infinity, Dr. Milburn of the German Department rose to introduce Leary. The music dwindled to a background suggestion and the house lights, which had been wavering, went dead.

Leary, barefoot and wearing the white clothing ("the uniform of the prophet") in which he makes all his public appearances, assumed a cross-legged seat before the microphone and displayed the tumblers of water with which he had been provided, explaining in the gentle, matter-of-fact Saturday-morning-radio-announcer voice that the contents were a sacrament.

The red candle next to him was lit with an explanation that fire, too, was a sacrament whose deliverer was punished with far more than the thirty-year sentence Leary now faces for possessing marijuana.

The lecture was informative both to people familiar and unfamiliar with Leary's works.

The neophyte heard of the history of the mystical experience, getting high. The prophet or holy man of ancient times would fast in desert or mountain solitude, forsaking the city and its comforts and companionship to await the coming of insight.

Leary is a "TV studio" with each of the people playing games in their roles; games they had learned from early childhood at the behest of the prophets, who notoriously censor the action of the show.

Turning on was described as a death and rebirth, a process in which the game-structure imposed by upbringing and education are erased and the totality of sensory information is perceived. It is frightening, Leary said, because one is all alone in the cosmos without the comfort of the blinders imposed by training. It is the prophet beneath his tree in the wilderness, transcending.

The last part of the speech was an appeal from a middle-aged man for understanding of the aging process. The human brain is composed of irreplaceable cells which degenerate after the age of 25. The world is run, said Leary, by dictators, generals, presidents and congresses of advanced age, people whose damaged brains perceive their growing impotence and impose restrictions upon the young, who, with their faculties intact, should be running things.

The overflow crowd (1,100 seats had been set) was attentive and responsive. Leary's delivery was quietly good-humored, contained many quips and asides. The overall effect was of a completely gentle person, thoroughly aware of the limitations and hang-ups brought about by his involvement in the world of verbal communication.

The sadness implicit in his criticism of the social structure, a sadness both for his own personal tragedies and for the withering system itself, was perhaps the keynote of the speech, but the hinted joy of Leary's discoveries and his desire to turn everyone on to them lent an encouraging note to a bewildering chapter of human history unfolding in the RMC.