A Trip Aboard the Goodship

The Goodship Academy of Higher Education Lecture Series Is Upscaling Weed Culture

by Tobias Coughlin–Bogue

Among the benefits of legalizing weed—less arrests, more tax revenue, less drug money in the hands of gangs, etc.—is a less tangible but equally welcome improvement: Weed is becoming kind of classy. Stonedom is no longer exclusively associated with Bob Marley T-shirts, ridiculous bongs, and general scuzziness. Yes, there are still half-naked people covered with psychedelic body paint at Hempfest, but there are also cannabusiness entrepreneurs scrolling through sales spreadsheets on their iPads.
Now there is an even more striking example of this cultural shift: the Goodship Academy of Higher Education lecture series, put on monthly by the Goodship, a manufacturer of elegant edibles founded by Cupcake Royale owner Jody Hall. Their mission? To intellectualize pot culture by discussing "heady ideas under heady influence." They describe the lectures as a "rare opportunity to help change the story on pot culture, away from taboos and toward a more sophisticated way to have good times." (The Stranger is a sponsor of Higher Education.) In more concrete terms, it is a lecture series that asks all attendees, including the speaker, to arrive "pre-boarded" (read: stoned).

The second lecture in the series, which was held on October 14, was a discussion of the concept of infinity with author and self-described "accidental theologian" Lesley Hazleton. Her next book, Agnostic: A Spirited Manifesto, comes out in April.

The lectures take place in the Cloud Room, a hip, well-appointed, and thoroughly modern coworking space on the top floor of Chophouse Row. There is plenty of comfortable seating (including a lusciously shaggy rug), a smattering of low coffee tables, a well-stocked bar, and an outdoor patio with a gas fire pit.

I was expecting a little more "out there" of a crowd, so I was a bit embarrassed to realize that I was fairly underdressed. Sleek dresses and slim-cut button-ups seemed to be the norm.

Upon entry, I was greeted with a gift bag (sadly, sans edibles) and perhaps the most marvelous sight for someone with the munchies to behold: a counter laden with platters of fruit, cheese, charcuterie, and other delectables, curated by none other than Michael Hebb. The whole scene resembled a classy fundraiser, with live piano music and clusters of people exchanging witticisms while attempting to balance their stemware and snacks.

At first, it was nearly impossible to tell that almost everyone in attendance was stoned. Impossible, that is, until I noticed the bartender having to chase down a guest who'd absentmindedly left his change from $100. (It wouldn't surprise me if quite a few tabs were left open at the end of the night.) There was also the crowd's unbridled enthusiasm for the bowls of popcorn brought out just prior to the lecture and the many repeat visits made to the snack counter.

It became even more apparent that this was a weed event when Hazelton took the stage, accompanied by moderator Greg Lundgren, local art star and owner of Vito’s. "Hello, I’m Greg and I’m stoned," he began. "If I mess this up, that’s why." But from there, the conversation was, as promised, heady as hell.

Audience members sketched, murmured appreciatively, and were generally rapt as Hazleton and Lundgren discussed infinity, that thorniest of all questions. Hazleton tripped around barefoot in front of the projector and lost her train of thought on more than one occasion, but she was also razor-sharp, rattling off...
the type of one-liners that manage to glibly sum up our limited understanding of the unlimited. "The thing about infinity is that it goes on forever," she delivered with her signature élan.

A video of British math professors elicited giggles, more for their adorable mannerisms and genuine excitement than for the content of the video, which showed that the sum of all real numbers is -12. Another fun fact: We live the billionth second of our lives at the age of 31. Hazleton also assigned homework ("Get up as high as you can and find the Milky Way").

The event certainly succeeded in changing the idea of marijuana-fueled recreation. I left feeling mentally and gastronomically enriched, with no trace of the usual guilt that comes with eating an entire box of white cheddar Cheez-Its and rewatching skate videos for the 18th time.

As I was passing through the courtyard on my way out, Lundgren, Hazleton, and Hall were talking excitedly about the biological similarities between humans and mushrooms as a potential topic for a future lecture. The first lecture was on machine intelligence, and it involved a photo of Sir Ian McKellen's Gandalf rendered as a Picasso-esque painting by a computer trained in the master's style. I don't know what the next topic will be, but I've already signed up. In the unlikely event it's not wildly fascinating, there will at least be a tableful of prosciutto and fancy olives to justify the $16 ticket.★

UPDATE: The next lecture will be by cell biologist and MacArthur genius winner Mark Roth, called "Altered States: Can We Control Time?" and will take place on November 18.
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1424 11th Ave, 4th Floor, Seattle, WA 98122

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The Cloud Room, Wed., Nov. 18, 7 pm 2015, [Sold Out]

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