

ALDOUS HUXLEY'S *ISLAND* REVISITED:
PSYCHEDELICS AND THE SEMANTICS OF
PERCEPTION AND BELIEF

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is primarily concerned with the ideologies that structure Western narratives about psychedelic experiences. We are in a moment of unprecedented change regarding the legal, medical, and social status of psychedelic substances—what some refer to as the ‘Psychedelic Renaissance’. But there are numerous incompatibilities between current psychedelic platitudes (and the dominant discourses of the West more generally) and the idea of ‘altered’ states of consciousness as an asset.

Western psychedelic rhetoric is saturated with conceptualisations of personal growth and healing, part of a larger paradigm in which health—especially mental health—is pitched as the responsibility of the individual. This thesis questions the meaning of ‘psychedelic integration’ in a hyper-individualistic context in which wellness is being increasingly commodified; it explores why medicalisation ought to be just one of many socially sanctioned applications of psychedelics.

Aldous Huxley’s *Island* exemplifies radical agnosticism (among other things) through a pluralistic approach to psychedelics. Pala’s psychoactive toadstool, *moksha*, is embedded within a pedagogical system that continuously questions the ideologies woven into the fabric of language and culture.

With the conviction that a similar system could exist as yet undelineated outside Huxley’s imagination, I use a combination of literary archival research and extensive linguistic, historical, philosophical, cultural, and scientific analysis to critique the contemporary psychedelic moment. With equal import, I also turn that critical lens back onto the imbalances of modern Western society, with a view to rekindling the neglected reciprocities between language, perception, and belief systems. I conclude that flexible semantic practises and adaptable philosophies are indispensable to the sustainability of any system—ideological or practical—that endorses perceptual modulations.

I question not only the implications of corporatizing psychedelics, but also the implications of quantifying reality. I show how a greater understanding of one’s own linguistic, perceptual, and philosophical predispositions can serve as a prophylactic against capitalist dogmas. In this way, the project has not only been about the role of semantics and metaphor in psychedelic preparation and integration, but about their role in the meaning of our lives.

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CHAPTER 1: OVERTURE

I would think that there should be simultaneously a training of the mind-body in perception, in imagination, and in the use of language. All of these seem to me to go together in an essential way—Aldous Huxley.¹

1.1: OUTLINE

This thesis tells the story of a trio. It showcases the harmonies and the discords between Language, Perception, and Philosophy—three foundational elements of human experience, whose entanglements have been eschewed by schismatic Western paradigms. Over seven chapters, I will show how excessive abstraction and objectivism have caused these systems to calcify, but, more importantly, I seek to resensitise them to one another. Language, Perception, and Philosophy are inconceivably complex systems which affect virtually all human encounters. However, as I will demonstrate, with no stable physical counterparts, they are particularly amenable to ‘metaphorical intervention’—this will be demonstrated in the final chapter.

This investigation will develop through the lens of psychedelics—their phenomenologies, rhetoric, and current cultural ‘integration’ (see 1.4.1 for a discussion of this term). Akin to many others in the prospering field of psychedelic research, I understand consciousness-altering practices as a means of repatterning and diversifying not only individual cognition, but cultural customs more generally. For most people, ingesting a psychedelic substance will invoke a significant modulation in their perception. However, most people—particularly monolingual adults educated in the West—cannot attest to a comparable facility to modulate their beliefs systems or language patterns. These somewhat sweeping statements will crystallise over the course of this introduction, but my distinct contribution with this thesis is an exploration of why sustainable change—whether at the scale of the

¹ Aldous Huxley, *Latent Human Potentialities Part II* (7 December 1959), in Digital Collections: Aldous Huxley, <<http://digital2.library.ucla.edu/viewItem.do?ark=21198/zz002b11bb>> [accessed 27 September 2021].

individual, the community, or the environment—is contingent upon linguistic and ontological flexibility.

The second lens that will contextualise this endeavour is a critical commentary on Aldous Huxley’s last novel, *Island*, composed between 1956 and 1961, and published in 1962. *Island* recounts the observations of British journalist Will Farnaby, who purposely shipwrecks himself in Pala—an imaginary island between Sri Lanka and Sumatra.² However, Pala is not pure fantasy. Huxley wanted to show how humanity might realise its potentialities by making the best of both Eastern and Western worlds—the socio-cultural frames with which he was most familiar.³ As such, the ‘fiction’ is set in the twentieth century and situated in the real world. Structurally, Pala is a pacifist country whose economic system precludes anyone from becoming more than four or five times richer than the average citizen. As such, it has no military, no industrialists, and no alliances with either communist or capitalist countries.⁴ Its education system is also unique in that it does not herald scientific reason as the pinnacle of human progress; alongside the physical sciences, Palanese educators equally represent holistic and subjective approaches to knowledge. There is no intellectual hierarchy between physics and poetry, and the capacity to learn is just as important as the capacity to unlearn, the latter of which is assisted by an initiation ceremony with *moksha*, the island’s homegrown psychedelic toadstool.

As Pala was conceived to be materially realisable, it also had to be materially vulnerable; as Huxley explained in an interview prior to the book’s completion, ‘I’m afraid it must end with paradise lost—if one is to be realistic’.⁵ The action of the plot revolves around Murugan, Pala’s tyrannical young Raja, and his mother, the Rani. With the help of Will, they conspire to allow Colonel Dipa, the military dictator of Rendang (a neighbouring country) to incorporate Pala into ‘Greater Rendeng’, thus granting them to access to Pala’s oil reserves and a share in its royalties (p. 48). I do not include either Murugan nor the Rani in my classification of ‘Palanese’; they were neither educated in Pala, nor do they reflect its values.

For Pala to constitute an alternative to existing social structures, it could not yield the same tools that were threatening its sovereignty—the same tools that have been facilitating imperialism for centuries. Indeed, beyond passive resistance and

² Aldous Huxley, ‘The Art of Fiction No. 24’, *The Paris Review*, Spring 1960, <<https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/4698/the-art-of-fiction-no-24-aldous-huxley>> [accessed 4 November 2021].

³ Ibid..

⁴ Aldous Huxley, *Island* (London: Vintage, 2005), Kindle edition, p. 178. Further references to *Island* are from this addition and are given in parentheses after quotations in the text.

⁵ Huxley, ‘Fiction No. 24’.

peaceful remonstrations, the islanders have no means of defence, and they are under no illusions about their impending dispossession. As Dr Robert MacPhail, the Palanese doctor who functions as the novel's primary representative of Pala, explains to Will; 'whether we shall even be able to preserve our tiny oasis of humanity in the midst of your world-wide wilderness of monkeys [...] is another question. One's justified in feeling extremely pessimistic about the current situation' (p. 141).⁶ In the following section I indicate the troubling parallels between the colonisation of Pala, and the contemporary corporatisation of psychedelics.

To clarify, *Island* is not a renunciation of Western civilisation, but an attempt to equalise the excesses of capitalism. As such, the novel's relevance has only augmented since its publication. I use the text as a tool for navigating a series of blind spots in the realm of psychedelic research, all of which, I argue, are iterations of sociocultural imbalances that call for urgent intervention.

1.2: CONTEXT & SCHOLARLY CONTRIBUTIONS

When I began this project in 2017, mainstream UK media platforms such as the *BBC* and the *Guardian* were just beginning to comment on the psilocybin trials taking place at Imperial College London.⁷ Although their rhetoric was reassuringly neutral, I was nonetheless troubled by the potential for psychedelic treatments to be discredited by lingering countercultural clichés. Now, over four years on, media sensationalism is no longer my primary concern regarding the future of these plants, fungi, and compounds.

For many people, the term 'psychedelic' signals Love (with a capital 'L'), pacifism, and social revolution, yet for many others, it signals a gold rush. In a profit-based healthcare model, 'medical legitimacy' is tantamount to 'investment opportunity'. At the current pace of change, any snapshot of the psychedelic resurgence will be outdated within a matter of days or weeks. However, as of January 2022, there are over thirty publicly-traded companies in the nascent psychedelic industry, the majority of which are biopharmaceutical companies competing to

⁶ Dr Robert MacPhail is named after a 'charming and saint-like old Scotsman' whom Huxley met in Quirigua (Guatemala) in 1933, who ran a hospital for the United Fruit Company. *Letters of Aldous Huxley*, ed. by Grover Smith (London: Chatto & Windus, 1969), p. 367.

⁷ James Gallagher, 'Magic Mushrooms Can 'Reset' Depressed Brain', *BBC News*, 14 October 2017, <<https://www.bbc.com/news/health-41608984>> [accessed 2 February 2021]; Sarah Boseley, 'Magic Mushrooms Lift Severe Depression in Clinical Trial', *Guardian*, 17 May 2016, <<https://www.theguardian.com/science/2016/may/17/magic-mushrooms-lift-severe-depression-in-clinical-trial>> [accessed 27 September 2021].

synthesise molecules that can be patented.⁸ By 2027, the psychedelic pharmaceutical industry is forecast to be worth over ten billion dollars.⁹

For many investors, getting in early on an emerging market is a challenge, with new companies going public or about to IPO, and other companies shifting to the space to try and capitalize on the latest trend. That's where *Psychedelic Stock Watch* is here to help.¹⁰

Psychedelic Stock Watch is a media platform that focuses on the profit margins of psychedelic biopharmaceutical and biotechnological companies, such as ATAI Life Sciences, MindMed, and COMPASS Pathways, as well as the billionaire venture capitalists with investments in the industry, such as Peter Thiel and Christian Angermayer. One article on the website explains that 'psychedelic drugs are positioned to address a healthcare crisis that affects (far) more people than COVID-19', and therefore 'investors have an obvious get-in-early opportunity staring them in the face'.¹¹ Here, human suffering is framed as a financial tipoff—a nonchalant reminder that our society treats health as a commodity, and that we continue to live under the tyranny of an imperialistic value system in which maximising profit is more important than protecting people. In no uncertain terms, Pala still wouldn't stand a chance.

The unpredictable effects of psychedelics once rendered them incompatible with pharmaceutical paradigms. However, this calls for some context: in the last century there has also been little coherent (Western) cultural consensus on what psychedelics *are*, let alone what they do, or what they are 'for'. With the expansion of digital media and profit-based healthcare systems, there is unprecedented potential for monopolies to manipulate public discourse in favour of large corporations. It would be heedless to assume that psychedelics (even with their rich history of polyvalence) are immune to these forces. There has never been a moment in which so much of our communication and data exchange is mediated by

⁸ Psilocybin Alpha, 'Psychedelic Stocks and Companies', *Psilocybin Alpha*, <<https://psilocybinalpha.com/psilocybin-stocks-shroom-stocks>> [accessed 9 November 2021]; Ellen Chang, 'More Psychedelic Companies are Going Public', *US News*, 2 February 2021, <<https://money.usnews.com/investing/stock-market-news/articles/more-psychedelic-companies-are-going-public>> [accessed 9 November 2021].

⁹ Wayne Duggan, '5 Psychedelic Stocks to Watch', *US News*, 2 July 2021, <<https://money.usnews.com/investing/stock-market-news/articles/psychedelic-stocks-to-watch>> [accessed 4 July 2021].

¹⁰ Psychedelic Stock Watch, 'About', *Psychedelic Stock Watch*, <<https://psychedelicstockwatch.com/about>> [accessed 27 September 2021].

¹¹ Jeff Nielson, 'The 8 Best Reasons to Invest In Psychedelic Stocks', *Psychedelic Stock Watch*, 15 October 2020, <<https://psychedelicstockwatch.com/psychedelic-stock-news/the-8-best-reasons-to-invest-in-psychedelic-stocks>> [accessed 15 October 2020].

incentivised third parties; like Pala's occupation, the corporate takeover of psychedelic research was almost certainly inevitable. My main interest now is the diversification of discourse—how we might protect the narrative multidimensionality of psychedelics in the face of pharmaceutical monetisation. As I will show, *Island* is in a unique position to support such an endeavour.

The Doors of Perception (henceforth, *Doors*) was Huxley's first publication about 'psychedelics'.¹² The essay immortalised his first experience with mescaline, under the supervision of British psychiatrist Humphry Osmond in May 1953. Its publication the following year marked the beginning of a psychedelic literary canon (which later involved figures such as Timothy Leary, Ram Dass, Alan Watts, and Terence McKenna) and to this day its imprints on psychedelic rhetoric remain tangible. However, only after *Doors* did Huxley and Osmond realise the extent to which the effects of these compounds vary according to the recipient and the environment—the individual, the immediate physical surroundings, and the wider cultural contexts. These realisations are elaborated in *Island*, which has lamentably never received the same approbation as its predecessor. With the benefit of hindsight, however, we can use the shortcomings of *Doors* to resituate *Island*.

The scale of this thesis, in combination with my use of *Island* as a constant thematic anchor, has also presented an abundance of opportunities to make original contributions to Huxley scholarship. The first of these, elaborated in Chapter 2, is a commentary on the evolution of Huxley's panpsychist inclinations; I compare a series of Huxley's references to Alfred North Whitehead in his essays, novels, and correspondence between 1927 and 1962, including archival material which has not been fully documented elsewhere (see footnote 200). Mark Taylor's article 'Aldous Huxley's Late Turn to Bergson and *Island* as Bergsonian Utopia' uses a similar expository structure, selectively comparing Huxley's references to the philosopher Henri Bergson across four decades. Although Bergson's work has been recognised as defending a form of panpsychism, he is not generally included in the canon of panpsychist philosophers.¹³ While I am not the only commentator to mention panpsychism in conjunction with Huxley,¹⁴ this is the first publication to trace and

¹² 'To fathom Hell or go angelic / Just take a pinch of PSYCHEDELIC', Osmond wrote in a letter to Huxley in April 1956. Aldous Huxley and Humphry Osmond, *Psychedelic Prophets: The Letters of Aldous Huxley and Humphrey Osmond*, ed. by Cynthia Carson Bisbee and others (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2018), p. 267. 'Psychedelics' (punctuated here because *Doors* was written and published before the word had been coined).

¹³ See, for example, Joël Dolbeault's 'Bergson's panpsychism', *Continental Philosophy Review*, 51 (2018), 549-64.

¹⁴ Dana Sawyer, 'What Is the 'Unitive Mystical Experience' Triggered by Psychedelic Medicines an Experience of? An Exploration of Aldous Huxley's Viewpoint in Light of Current Data', *Religions*, 13.1061 (2022), 1-14 (p. 4).

elaborate on Whitehead's appearances in Huxley's oeuvre.

Aside from a handful of conference papers by Huxley scholar Bernfried Nugel,¹⁵ the critical literature on *Island* does not incorporate close readings of its manuscript (held in the Aldous and Laura Huxley Papers at UCLA library), which preserves valuable insights into the progression of Huxley's ideas during a pivotal phase of Western psychedelic history. Transcribing—line by line—the differences between the typescript version and the published version yielded a rich repertoire of divergences, and I will elaborate on how a portion of these reflect the challenges of harmonising English language patterns with flexible modes of perception—the fundamental tension at the heart of this thesis. I reapplied this process to two drafts (and a series of handwritten notes) for the opening chapter of the *Hypothetical Novel*, (also held at UCLA)—the final book that Huxley began before his death in 1963. As an incomplete draft, there are (understandably) fewer divergences between the versions than we find with *Island*. Nevertheless, the material is teeming with ideas, poetry, humour, and experiments that indicate the maturation of several strands of Palanese philosophy and pedagogy, and my commentary on this in Chapter 4 represents the most comprehensive academic discussion of the *Hypothetical Novel* to date.

The first year of this project included hundreds of hours of closely comparing thousands of pages of draft material, or deciphering journal entries and letters of correspondence, equating to many months of psychic immersion in the world of the Huxleys. As such, my analyses are interspersed with domestic details that hope to treat Huxley and his intellectual community as more than simply sources for cultural inquiry. As a result of the same research context, I also incorporate material from *Island*'s manuscript in every chapter of this thesis. Several instances of this are in the service of original commentaries on two of the book's central characters, Dr Andrew MacPhail (Dr Robert's grandfather) and the Rani, in Chapters 5 and 6, respectively.

Regarding the former, it is well-documented that Dr Andrew, one of modern Pala's founders, is based on the Scottish surgeon and mesmerist James Esdaile.¹⁶ Indeed, this is one of *Island*'s most conspicuous historical tributes. My analysis, however, emphasises the way in which mesmeric practices in Pala deviate from those

¹⁵ Bernfried Nugel, 'Aldous Huxley's Revisions in the Final Typescript of *Island*', in *Now More Than Ever: Proceedings of the Aldous Huxley Centenary Symposium, Münster, 1994*, ed. by Bernfried Nugel (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), pp. 225-45; Bernfried Nugel, 'Aldous Huxley's Revisions of the Old Raja's *Notes on What's What* in his Final Typescript of *Island*' in *Aldous Huxley Annual – Volume 9*, ed. by Bernfried Nugel and Jerome Meckier (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2011), pp. 69-90.

¹⁶ Jake Poller, *Aldous Huxley and Alternative Spirituality* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), p. 4.

of Esdaile, but correspond with those of Laura Archera—a former violin virtuoso whom Huxley married in 1956, the same year that he began writing *Island*.¹⁷

Archera worked primarily as a psychotherapist and hypnotherapist during her eight years with Huxley (until his death in 1963), and in the late 1950s she began to incorporate LSD into her treatment, thus placing her among the first female psychedelic psychotherapists in history. After considerable study in the Aldous and Laura Huxley archives, I credit her as an indispensable inspiration behind some of *Island*'s most prolific pedagogies and will show why her contributions deserve more recognition. This is an overdue accolade that I hope will encourage others to continue seeking and amplifying the muted and mantled female voices of psychedelic history.

In 1963, Archera published a bestselling self-help book entitled *You Are Not the Target*, which is devoted to different means of interrupting the patterns of perception, language, and belief that exacerbate suffering.¹⁸ Many of the 'recipes' (a term that she used to augment the accessibility of her work) are designed to help people to dismantle and renovate the 'basic' metaphors of their inner monologues, which are simultaneously the roots on which cultures rest (elaborated in Chapter 5).¹⁹ Although Archera's manual contains no explicit references to psychedelics, I read it as an indispensable supplement to *Island* in terms of illuminating the oversights of the contemporary movement.

This topic is followed by a reconsideration of *Island*'s primary 'villain', the Rani. Through close readings of: the novel's manuscript; Huxley's 1955 short story 'Voices'; and *Below the Equator* (an unpublished screenplay written in collaboration with Christopher Isherwood), I trace Huxley's development of a deplorable female psychic caricature. To my knowledge, these texts have never been examined as a satirical succession. This grouping has several useful outcomes; firstly, it challenges a misleading association between the Rani and Huxley's long-time friend Eileen Garrett—one of the most renowned mediums and parapsychologists of the last century; secondly, and more vitally, my analysis contextualises the motivations behind this recurring satirical trope in a way that sheds light on several contentions within the current psychedelic resurgence, especially those pertaining to the dangers of dogma and the ethics of commodifying extraordinary experiences.

Rick Doblin, the founder and director of MAPS (the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies) has presented psychedelics and the sense of

¹⁷ Although she wrote and published under the name 'Laura Huxley', I refer to her as 'Archera'.

¹⁸ Reanne Crane, 'Laura Huxley's Metaphors in Mind', delivered at *Breaking Convention V* (University of Greenwich, 16-18 August 2019), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eoj0eOzB2l0>> [accessed 14 January 2022].

¹⁹ 'Author Compiles Recipes for Living', *Washington DC News*, 7 June 1963.

connection that they can invoke as an ‘antidote to genocide, fundamentalism, racism [and] environmental destruction’.²⁰ This noble ambition is widespread among psychedelic and plant medicine communities. Indeed, psychedelics may be unprecedented in their potential to help the Western world to transform its unsustainable orthodoxies; however, without a collective understanding that even the most basic aspects of human experience are mediated by narrative, this potential is compromised.

Beyond the debates around psychedelic decriminalisation, medicalisation, and corporatisation, I contend that there are much deeper ideological frictions between Western culture and (any iteration of) perceptual diversity. Huxley’s final decade of work not only exposes many of these frictions, but also proffers a series of potential solutions, particularly at the levels of language, metaphor, and education. Compounded by the legacy and limitations of *Doors*, *Island* is uniquely equipped to help people to notice, understand, and even disrupt some of the more troubling trajectories of contemporary psychedelic research.

Alongside a critique of Huxley and Archera’s work, I also offer several of my own rhetorical frameworks for psychedelics. In Chapter 5, for example, I present an original metaphor that strives to reframe the concept of perceptual amplifications; I use the image of an hourglass to represent complimentary amplifications of projection and reception. Alongside the platitudes that psychedelics ‘cleanse filters’ and ‘dissolve boundaries’ (elaborated in 1.6), it may be useful to have a visual counterpart to the narrative that psychedelics can redistribute the attention that is normally tuned to the nouns in our immediate environment—the scale at which categorisation/attention is the most automated, and thus more likely to congeal into certainties. Through this model I show how even the most rudimentary understanding of labels and categories can mitigate the blind spots of Western psychedelic discourse and reveal the roots of the association between extraordinary experiences and ‘ineffability’.

This tapestry of literary analysis, psychedelic cultural critique, and wider speculations on the entanglements between language, perception, and belief systems distinguishes this thesis from existing Huxley scholarship, and (probably) most literature-based doctoral work. Rather than seeking a ‘better’ representational rhetoric for the variety of psychedelic experiences, I explore why these states of consciousness resist conventional taxonomies, espouse the richness of the

²⁰ Jeff Schechtman, ‘Are Psychedelics the Cutting Edge Treatment for Mental Illness?’, *Who What Why*, podcast, 24 September 2021, <<https://whowhatwhy.org/podcast/are-psychedelics-the-cutting-edge-treatment-for-mental-illness/>> [accessed 9 December 2021].

‘untranslatable’, and experiment with novel metaphors—all of which can help to remould the percepts that humans are wont to mistake for immutable fixtures of our experiential landscapes.

1.3: PHILOSOPHY-PERCEPTION-LANGUAGE

Philosophy, Perception, and Language can be understood as three (of the many) connected pillars of human experience. To clarify, I am not suggesting that human experience can be reduced to quantifiable constituents, and I will depart from this image as my own metaphors for this nexus develop. In concert with the pragmatic approach to knowledge that Huxley elaborates in *Island*, my interest is in the *practical applications of particular metaphorical models*—that is, I will dramatise *particular* connections between these three elements that will be useful in *some* situations—namely, those that call for the *re categorisation* of a concept. To this end, I have elected to leave Philosophy, Perception, and Language largely undefined, but will intermittently use majuscule starting letters to signal the pertinence of a more panoptic interpretation. It is essential that these three categories remain moveable, but as a measure of assurance that I am not approaching this with absolute relativism or extending the meanings beyond semantic convention, I present the following list of terms that will be used as either synonyms or hyponyms:

- ◆ Philosophy: beliefs; metaphysics; ontology; epistemology; cosmology; worldview; personal/cultural assumptions about reality.
- ◆ Perception: attention; states of consciousness (including psychedelics); awareness; prehension; projection & reception; sensing; cognition.
- ◆ Language: speech patterns; grammar; lexicon; linguistic customs; semantic habits; rhetoric; syntax.

Paradoxically, I have isolated the three aspects of this trio in order to showcase their inseparability, but any statement that expresses an iteration of the *inseparability of belief, attention, and linguistic customs* is not meant as an exhaustive declaration; in some contexts it is useful to view a single category, and in others it is useful to see multiple categories. This calls for a kind of categorical code-switching that may not be intuitive to most Westerners.

Western categorisation customs largely reflect binomial nomenclature, the

globalised taxonomical system by which organisms are assigned to each of the following: kingdom; phylum; class; order; suborder; family; genus; species. These eight levels of classification are based on common descent, rather than local interactions.²¹ In this case, however, the category that Philosophy, Perception, and Language occupy is predominantly based on their symbiosis. However, they do share the fact that they are all, in themselves, means of categorising sensory input—as such, the ‘pillars of human experience’ might equally be stated as ‘modes of categorising’. Linguist George Lakoff outlines the fundamental importance of this:

Categorisation is not a matter to be taken lightly. There is nothing more basic than categorisation to our thought, perception, action and speech. Every time we see something as a *kind* of thing, for example, a tree, we are categorising.²²

Following this characterisation, my ambition to cultivate more diverse semantic, perceptual, and ontological patterns may also be expressed as an ambition to animate more *context-based categorisation*. In either mode of expression, my desired outcome is the urgent alleviation of the dogmatic and abstractive ways of being that continue to compromise the equilibrium of all life on earth.

As a caveat, this project places me in several contradictory positions: i) emphasising context-dependence through allegories that can be generalised and summarised; ii) extolling multilingualism in a monolingual study; iii) urging varied and disruptive language practices via the conventions of academic writing. This is only fitting given that the project grew from *Island*, whose incongruities were similarly troubling for Huxley (see 1.5). I ultimately concluded that i) and ii) were unavoidable in the context of a literary thesis—however, iii) was more ambiguous. A call for linguistic, cognitive, and philosophical pluralism would ideally be reflected by a corresponding distribution of metaphors that denote a variety of worldviews. However, as I will discuss, the ‘basic’ metaphors and foundational grammatical structures of the English language are biased towards dualist and objectivist ontologies. Since semantic conventions are so immersed in these assumptions, it would be stylistically inappropriate to produce an 80,000-word document with such an ambitious diversity criterion. At the same time, with 80,000 words it would be rhetorically inconsistent to insist on the apocalyptic importance of metaphorical and metaphysical code-switching, only to demonstrate no divergence

²¹ George Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal About the Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), Kindle edition, p. 186.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 5.

from the conventions of a doctoral thesis. This is acutely addressed in Chapter 7.

1.4: A PRELUDE TO PSYCHEDELICS

The category of ‘psychedelic substance’ claims a vast membership; LSD, psilocybin, mescaline, ayahuasca, ibogaine, DMT, represent only some of the most well-known of its ‘classic’ associates.²³ During the final decade of his life, Huxley encountered three of these: mescaline, LSD, and psilocybin. I take the liberty of generalising between these in my discussions of Huxley’s psychedelic experiences, for the simple reason that he himself felt little distinction between their effects. In a letter to Osmond, with whom he formed a deep friendship after his first mescaline session, Huxley describes the psychological effects of LSD as ‘identical’ with those of mescaline.²⁴ This is, however, an unusual perspective, and one that does not reflect the complex of comparative discourses surrounding psychedelic compounds and the degree to which molecular likeness may (or may not) predict experiential likeness.

Between the quantity of different compounds, the variability in their effects, and a convoluted social history, ‘psychedelic’ is an elusive term to define. In their landmark book series, *PiHKAL: A Chemical Love Story* (1991) and *TiHKAL: The Continuation* (1997), Alexander and Ann Shulgin give detailed instructions for synthesising two hundred and thirty-four psychedelic substances (one hundred and seventy-nine phenethylamines and fifty-five tryptamines), along with commentaries on their subjective effects. In the introduction to *PiHKAL*, Alexander (better known as ‘Sasha’) suggests that psychedelics ‘might be best defined as physically non-addictive compounds which temporarily alter the state of one’s consciousness’ and which may ‘allow for increased personal insight and expansion of one’s mental and emotional horizons’.²⁵ However, even a concept as all-encompassing as ‘personal insight’ is conditional; even personal insights are contingent upon the ‘set and setting’ of the individual, where ‘set’ refers to the personality, mood, expectations, and preparations of the person, and ‘setting’ refers to the wider environmental conditions. Indeed, sensitivity to set and setting is among the most ubiquitous narratives concerning psychedelics.

²³ There is some disagreement over whether MDMA and ketamine qualify as ‘true’ psychedelics, hence their exclusion from this list.

²⁴ Huxley and Osmond, p. 237.

²⁵ Alexander Shulgin and Ann Shulgin, *PiHKAL: A Chemical Love Story* (Berkeley: Transform Press, 2016), Kindle edition, p. xiv.

Ido Hartogssohn's *American Trip: Set, Setting, and the Psychedelic Experience in the Twentieth Century* (2020) provides an insightful sociocultural analysis of the role of set and setting in seven different domains of LSD research: CIA; military; psychotherapeutic; spiritual; creative; technological innovation; and politics.²⁶ With a clear disclaimer about the difficulties of asking 'what are psychedelics and what do they do?', Hartogssohn offers a description of LSD as a 'psychopharmacological chameleon', that is able to 'magnify and amplify the content of one's experience'.²⁷ However, he sees a tension in this characterisation: how can one extol the virtues of a psychedelic while simultaneously suggesting that its effects are a cultural construct? In my view, this is only a tension if the value of a compound is assessed according to the probability of a particular outcome; or, if virtues are assumed to be inherent, rather than interactional.

Hartogssohn takes a different approach, suggesting that it would be 'ludicrous to deny the existence of a psychedelic experience wholesale', and that there are observable 'common elements of the hallucinogenic experience that recur across the spectrum'.²⁸ Once again with the disclaimer that these are not universal, he identifies three 'fundamentals' of psychedelic experiences: the amplification of meaning; hyper-associative tendencies; and the dissolution of boundaries.²⁹ I agree with the first two and will return to their implications in chapters 3 and 4, respectively. The 'dissolution of boundaries', on the other hand, calls for closer consideration.

In their groundbreaking *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), Lakoff and his colleague Mark Johnson explain how through our senses, particularly sight and touch, we experience most objects as having borderlines, and that this occurs to such a degree that 'when things have no distinct boundaries, we often project boundaries upon them—conceptualising them as entities and often as containers (for example, forests, clearings, clouds, etc.)'.³⁰ A phrase such as 'the forest *contains* thousands of trees' emphasises a distinction between the trees and the forest; the forest is a container for things that are not the forest. Categorical demarcations like this simplify our perceptions enough to orient ourselves and communicate with one another. As such, the concept of categories, or categorisation, is saturated with cultural assumptions. Many of these assumptions, however, can be encapsulated by

²⁶ Ido Hartogssohn, *American Trip: Set, Setting, and the Psychedelic Experience in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2020), p. 14.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 7, 10.

²⁸ Hartogssohn, *American Trip*, p. 11.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

³⁰ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 58.

the ‘myth of objectivism’. Lakoff and Johnson outline the basic tenets of this myth:

[T]he world is made up of objects; they have well-defined inherent properties, independent of any being who experiences them, and there are fixed relations holding among them at any given point in time.³¹

Objects are assumed to host a stable set of intrinsic properties that constitute their ‘essence’—a view that is also referred to as ‘essentialism’. In this paradigm, categories have an objective level of existence that transcends human cognition. This perspective can be felt in the misguided view of language as a modular system which can be abstracted from cognition.³² If language is reduced to a repository of symbols that correspond with a set of absolute categories, then the ‘dissolution of boundaries’ relegates language to redundancy in the context of psychedelic states. I explore this more comprehensively in 1.7, but for now it serves as the first inclinations of how discourse may be undermining the ‘integration’ of altered states of awareness.

1.4.1: INTEGRATION & THE FALLACY OF NEUTRAL

That ‘the integration component of a psychedelic experience is just as important as the experience itself’ has become something of a proverb in psychedelic wellness communities.³³ The goal of integration is to create meaningful narratives and practices that help the individual to merge the insights of a psychedelic experience into their daily life.³⁴ In therapeutic settings, this usually takes place in the form of reflections, workshops or group circles shortly following the session. Guided by this model, more and more community-led ‘integration circles’ are being established around the world for those who choose to take psychedelics outside of a ‘controlled’ setting.³⁵ These are invaluable services that offer support and solidarity to people who may be distressed or disorientated, but there are several indirect implications worth considering. Firstly, spotlighting the individual’s personal context may somewhat conceal the systemic sources of their suffering. Secondly, these

³¹ Ibid., p. 202.

³² Lakoff, p. 58.

³³ Nicholas Levich, ‘How to Use Psychedelics for Stress Relief: 5 Actionable Tips’, *Psychedelic Passage*, 17 September 2020, <<https://www.psychedelicpassage.com/how-to-use-psychedelics-for-stress-relief-5-actionable-tips/>> [accessed 10 December 2021].

³⁴ Ingmar Gorman and others, ‘Psychedelic Harm Reduction and Integration: A Trans-theoretical Model for Clinical Practice’, *Hypothesis and Theory*, 2 (2021), 1-16 (p. 5).

³⁵ Sherree M. Godasi, ‘A Guide to Starting a Community Psychedelic Integration Circle’, *Psychedelic.Support*, 26 April 2019, <<https://psychedelic.support/resources/guide-community-psychedelic-integration-circle/>> [accessed 1 October 2021].

integration practices are disproportionately subsequential; the process is weighted towards the period that *follows* a psychedelic experience. As I will unpack, this is emblematic of a culture-wide underestimation of the mutual exchange between narrative and experience. This underestimation can be seen in the many psychedelic organisations who stress that they do not endorse any ideologies, purportedly leaving their patients or customers free to find their own models of meaning.

Lars Wilde, co-founder of COMPASS Pathways, a UK-based pharmaceutical company, insists that their therapists ‘are not superimposing their worldviews on whatever the patient experiences’.³⁶ Likewise, Justin Townsend, CEO of MycoMeditations, a psilocybin-based retreat centre in Jamaica, also reassures potential customers that they do not subject their guests to any top-down frameworks or belief systems; rather, they have numerous frames that they use selectively after the individual’s psychedelic session.³⁷ However, not subscribing to a tradition of knowledge is not the same as an absence of ideology. Throughout this interview Townsend uses the metaphor of a neurological ‘reset’ to encapsulate psilocybin’s potential to deliver insights, emotional breakthroughs, and mystical experiences. These comments are not ideologically inert (see 1.7.1 for a discussion of the neurological ‘reset’). I refer to this ontological oversight as ‘the fallacy of neutral’.

This is Townsend’s (clearly well-intentioned) way of countering any associations that potential customers may have made between psychedelics, remote locations, and cults. However, Townsend proceeds to frame these aspects of the ‘reset’ as evidence that psilocybin ‘delivers’ on more fronts than alternative psychedelic treatments, such as ketamine therapy, which ‘only seems to deliver neurologically’.³⁸ This does not align with either scientific or anecdotal evidence,³⁹ and he confesses that he has no personal experience with ketamine therapy. This may be an honest misunderstanding of metaphors but—knowingly or not—it is capitalising on the fact that the ‘reset’ is most readily associated with psilocybin. Social platforms and the fallacy of neutral together allow psychedelic industry leaders to inconspicuously deploy metaphorical frameworks towards their own

³⁶ Rebel Wisdom, ‘Psychedelic Capitalism: Debate with Compass Pathways Founder’, *Rebel Wisdom*, 30 May 2021, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FdOzSHkyLIQ>> [accessed 19 October 2021].

³⁷ Justin Townsend, ‘The Many Modalities of Mushrooms Retreats’, *Psychedelic Therapy Podcast*, podcast, 11 May 2021, <<https://open.spotify.com/episode/2KB8bp7buQ1A1mrpDja2wu?si=c7617a0a5e10475d>> [accessed 1 October 2021].

³⁸ *Ibid.*.

³⁹ Rebecca L. Rothburg and others, ‘Mystical-type Experiences Occasioned by Ketamine Mediate its Impact on At-Risk Drinking: Results from a Randomized, Controlled Trial’, *Journal of Psychopharmacology*, 35.2 (2021), 150-58.

product promotion. To clarify, both Wilde and Townsend’s comments were made in the context of interviews—they are not company mission statements, and I do not mean to discount the work of either individual. I spotlight them only as examples of a culture-wide narrative trend that, ironically, overlooks the impact of narratives.

By virtue of the circumstances, any customer at a psychedelic retreat will have encountered representations of the relevant substance prior to its ingestion, either via media (scientific publications, press coverage, books, films, television, music), or social contact. Even if this were avoided, there would still be communication with whomever was involved in the session itself. In a discussion about his time conducting field research at the Temple of the Way of the Light, a plant-medicine healing centre in Iquitos (Peru), medical anthropologist Adam Aronovich explains that during interviews it was almost always possible to guess which staff members had facilitated whose sessions, based on the language through which guests framed their psychedelic experiences.⁴⁰ Any exchange of meaningful information communicates a particular perspective—even the most basic linguistic components and grammatical structures transmit the assumptions of the cultural landscape out of which they emerged, and these affect not only how experiences are interpreted but also how they are perceived in the first place. Bias is an indispensable feature of verbal communication, and the idea is not to try and eliminate it, but to simply to be more aware of it; the problem is when bias is unseen or underestimated.

My use of ‘psychedelic integration’, therefore, is intended to encapsulate areas that are not implied by the therapeutic use of the term. Integration will be used to discuss meaning-making at the individual level, but also to refer to how psychedelics interact with cultural praxis. As it stands, psychedelics are being made more amenable to Western cultural paradigms, discussed in the following section. My use of the term implies a kind of transference, or reciprocal adaptation, whereby Western cultural paradigms concurrently become more amenable to ‘altered’ ways of being and knowing.

1.4.2: MAINSTREAMING & REBRANDING

Jerónimo Mazarrasa, filmmaker, activist, and researcher with ICEERS (International Centre of Ethnobotanical Education Research and Services) has highlighted a trend

⁴⁰ Adam Aronovich, ‘Ayahuasca, Medical Anthropology, Research & Meaning’, *Universe Within*, podcast, 30 June 2021, <<https://open.spotify.com/episode/18Yj6MyI9sKhOWWMshqJRb?si=66fa2186899146ee>> [accessed 19 October 2021].

in Western cultural importation that pertains to psychedelics, which he describes as ‘amputation’.⁴¹ Amputation is conspicuous in Western iterations of yoga; unlike India, its country of origin, the modern West has no established category for movement-based prayer. Since the late nineteenth century, yoga’s philosophical roots have been sidelined and its physical components inflated, correlating the practice with a pre-existing category of activity: exercise. Tenuous resemblances are magnified and distorted to corroborate crude categorical accommodations; to use Mazarrasa’s metaphor, ancient practices that reflect complex alternative cosmologies are being ‘hammered into the boxes that we have, instead of fitted into the boxes where they belong’.⁴² Examples like this exhibit a tapestry of missed opportunities to engage with other modes of experience.

Many contemporary psychedelic practices and iterations of ‘mainstreaming’ reproduce these dynamics. A good example of this is ‘microdosing’, which involves regularly taking low, or ‘non-hallucinogenic’, doses of a psychedelic substance, usually LSD or psilocybin, often for the self-treatment of anxiety or mood disorders, or for cognitive enhancement.⁴³ Although there is no standardised protocol, many microdosers claim to follow some iteration of the process outlined by psychologist James Fadiman, which involves dosing every three days for cycles of one to two months, detailed in his book *The Psychedelic Explorer’s Guide: Safe, Therapeutic, and Sacred Journeys* (2011).⁴⁴

Now a global trend, microdosing has been gaining momentum for the last decade—catalysed by Andrew Leonard’s 2015 *Rolling Stone* article ‘How LSD Microdosing Became the Hot New Business Trip’, about the ‘übersmart twentysomething’ tech workers in Silicon Valley taking low doses of LSD as an alternative to Adderall,⁴⁵ along with the release of Ayelet Waldman’s *A Really Good Day: How Microdosing Made a Mega Difference in My Mood, My Marriage, and My Life* (2017), a first-person account of how LSD helped a mother with depression.⁴⁶ In the prologue of Waldman’s book, she sets up a contrast between ‘recreational’ LSD users and herself, ‘totally basic’ and cynical about ‘all things

⁴¹ Jerónimo Mazarrasa, ‘After the Psychedelic Renaissance: Looking at a Post-Prohibition World’, *Association for Psychedelic Education & Culture*, podcast, 7 May 2021, <<https://sivistysliitto.fi/indexen>> [accessed 1 October 2021].

⁴² Ibid..

⁴³ Daniel Rosenbaum and others, ‘Microdosing Psychedelics: Demographics, Practices, and Psychiatric Comorbidities’, *Journal of Psychopharmacology*, 34.6 (2020), 612-22 (p. 616).

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 616.

⁴⁵ Andrew Leonard, ‘How LSD Microdosing Became the Hot New Business Trip’, *Rolling Stone*, 20 November 2015, <<https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-news/how-bsd-microdosing-became-the-hot-new-business-trip-64961/>> [accessed 19 October 2021].

⁴⁶ Ayelet Waldman, *A Really Good Day: How Microdosing Made a Mega Difference in My Mood, My Marriage, and My Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017), Kindle edition.

countercultural’; ‘I am the mom surreptitiously checking her phone at Back to School Night’.⁴⁷ Microdosing has been fundamental to the ‘normalisation’ of psychedelics so far, and people cite multitudes of motivations for participating in the practice. Thus, to taper this discussion, I will focus on one of the trend’s dominant discourses: optimisation.

Paul Austin, founder of *The Third Wave*, a psychedelic education platform, describes himself as a coach for people who want to use microdosing for ‘improved leadership’ and ‘enhanced creativity’.⁴⁸ In his book, *Microdosing Psychedelics: A Practical Guide to Upgrade Your Life* (2018), Austin hypothesises that microdosing ‘will imbue mainstream society with the values of the psychedelic experience without requiring a complete and total disconnect’, insisting that the ‘real failure is when we adjust and adapt to a culture that is built on consumerism’.⁴⁹ However, he then proceeds to suggest that the ‘hippie vibe’ associated with the movement needs to be ‘stripped away and replaced by an aesthetic and brand with which mainstream culture could identify’.⁵⁰ Indeed, even *Forbes* has published an article on LSD as a ‘job enhancer’.⁵¹ In contexts like this, psychedelic discourse becomes virtually indistinguishable from that of nootropics, or ‘smart drugs’, such as Adderall, Ritalin and Modafinil, which are often used off-label to give people a competitive advantage in high-pressure academic or professional environments.⁵² In other words, psychedelics become tools through which to enhance performance within a system that is already built on exclusion and inequality.

As psychologist Jae Sevelius has outlined, ‘[p]sychedelics can potentially be powerful tools for overcoming oppressive social programming, yet the psychedelic science framework has, so far, been replicating existing power structures’ and many people in the community ‘hesitate to critique the paradigm that psychedelic science is replicating because [they] are invested in its success’.⁵³ In her book, *Acid Revival: The Psychedelic Renaissance and the Quest for Medical*

⁴⁷ Waldman, loc. 259, 111, 260.

⁴⁸ Paul Austin, ‘1-on-1 Coaching for Microdosing’, <<https://www.paulaustin.co/>> [accessed 19 October 2021].

⁴⁹ Paul Austin, *Microdosing Psychedelics: A Practical Guide to Upgrade Your Life* (New York: Independently published, 2018), pp. 9, 15.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-19.

⁵¹ Robert Glatter, ‘LSD Microdosing: The New Job Enhancer in Silicon Valley And Beyond?’, *Forbes*, 27 November 2015, <<https://www.forbes.com/sites/robertglatter/2015/11/27/lsd-microdosing-the-new-job-enhancer-in-silicon-valley-and-beyond/?sh=483c4d4b188a>> [accessed 19 October 2021].

⁵² Olivia Solon, ‘Under Pressure, Silicon Valley Workers Turn to LSD Microdosing’, *Wired*, 24 August 2016, <<https://www.wired.co.uk/article/lsd-microdosing-drugs-silicon-valley>> [accessed 12 October 2020].

⁵³ Jae Sevelius, ‘How Psychedelic Science Privileges Some, Neglects Others, and Limits Us All’, *Chacruna*, 25 July 2017, <<https://chacruna.net/how-psychedelic-science-privileges-some-neglects-others/>> [accessed 19 October 2021].

Legitimacy (2020), Danielle Giffort similarly explores the phenomena of ‘professional performance’ in contemporary psychedelic research communities. Decorated with snapshots of the tensions at psychedelic conferences and memos about volunteer dress codes, Giffort offers a detailed breakdown of the measures that some individuals have taken in order to preserve an image of professionalism.⁵⁴ Like Sevelius, she understands the problem as being that the ‘sober scientist performance of detached, clinical rationality is determined along categories of race, gender, and class, although these lines are often obscured and unacknowledged’.⁵⁵ Thus, gently easing psychedelics into the public domain in this way risks ‘reproducing existing class, gender, and racial inequalities within both mainstream culture and the psychedelic counterculture’.⁵⁶ Oppression is not an unfortunate side effect of capitalism, but one of its central techniques of power, relentlessly reinforced through socioeconomic hierarchies. In a context like this, psychedelics are at risk of becoming another pharmaceutical tool for fortifying hierarchies and preserving the status quo.

1.5: THE HALLMARK OF INTELLECTUAL LEGITIMACY

Another landmark in psychedelic mainstreaming was the release of Michael Pollan’s *How to Change Your Mind: What the New Science of Psychedelics Teaches Us About Consciousness, Dying, Addiction, Depression, and Transcendence*, which reached #1 on the *New York Times* non-fiction bestseller list in June 2018. In this investigative memoir, Pollan discusses the magnitude of Huxley’s influence on modern psychedelic experiences; ‘even if you have *never* read Huxley, his construction of the experience has probably influenced your own’.⁵⁷ In a follow-up article he reiterated his sense that ‘Huxley’s metaphors have influenced all who have followed him; it’s hard to find a trip report written after 1955 that is completely innocent of his interpretation’.⁵⁸ On these grounds, Pollan raises the question of whether Huxley ‘made sense’ of the modern psychedelic experience, ‘or did he in

⁵⁴ Danielle Giffort, *Acid Revival: The Psychedelic Renaissance and the Quest for Medical Legitimacy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), Kindle edition, p. 82.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

⁵⁶ Giffort, p. 185.

⁵⁷ Michael Pollan, *How to Change Your Mind: What the New Science of Psychedelics Teaches Us About Consciousness, Dying, Addiction, Depression, and Transcendence* (London: Penguin Books, 2019), p. 143.

⁵⁸ Michael Pollan, ‘How Does a Writer Put a Drug Trip into Words?’, *New York Times*, 24 December 2018, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/24/books/review/psychedelics-how-to-change-your-mind.html>> [accessed 18 November 2020].

some sense invent it?'.⁵⁹ This is a grandiose claim, and there may be some bias here, possibly rooted in the curious resonance between Pollan and Huxley—both upper-middle class, successful, respected authors who, in their sixties, embark upon an intellectual and spiritual investigation into psychoactive substances and become psychedelic torchbearers for their respective eras.

Even if these accolades are overstated, Huxley's imprint on Western psychedelic culture is immeasurable, and has no doubt been reinvigorated by the dissemination of Pollan's perspective. Indeed, for almost seventy years Huxley has been a hallmark of intellectual legitimacy within Western psychedelia. He is one of the most quoted (or, at least, name-dropped) figures across the spectrum of research, and his application of the 'brain as a filter' (or 'reducing valve') metaphor has shaped some of the most significant neuroscientific studies in this generation of psychedelic science.⁶⁰ In 2012, Robin Carhart-Harris and his team at Imperial College London used fMRI technology to observe how psilocybin interrupts neural connectivity in the brain's Default Mode Network. The authors state that their findings were 'consistent with Aldous Huxley's "reducing valve" metaphor [...] which propose[s] that the mind/brain works to constrain its experience of the world'.⁶¹

With something of a 'sober' reputation, Huxley's name is often used as a touchstone for the importance of controlled psychedelic investigation. However, although Huxley both exercised and expressed reasonable caution towards psychoactive substances, his views on their social integration have been widely misrepresented. Part of Giffort's analysis of psychedelic professionalism examines how these performances tend to rest on a series of historical distortions—in particular, narratives that parade Leary as psychedelia's 'bad example'. In these invocations, Huxley is often summoned as Leary's counterpoint, whose cautions about the perils of mass psychedelic distribution should have been heeded. Giffort exposes the hypocrisies of Leary's legacy and makes a convincing call for more nuanced characterisations in cultural references. However, as a more peripheral figure in the book, there are some (forgivable) historical abbreviations of Huxley, one of which is worth addressing here due to its implications regarding psychedelic accessibility.

⁵⁹ Pollan, *How to Change Your Mind*, p. 144.

⁶⁰ This concept had several articulations prior to Huxley, notably by Henri Bergson and C.D. Broad. It is rooted in William Blake's idea that 'if the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is, infinite'. 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell', *Bartleby*, <<https://www.bartleby.com/235/253.html>> [accessed 1 October 2021], l. 115.

⁶¹ Robin Carhart-Harris and others, 'Neural Correlates of the Psychedelic State as Determined by fMRI Studies with Psilocybin', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 109.6 (2012), 2138-43 (p. 2142).

Giffort describes Huxley as an ally of the medical professionals ‘who wanted the psychedelic experience to remain the stuff of elites’.⁶² This characterisation is not incorrect, per se; Huxley was invested in the idea of reserving psychedelics for a limited number of influential people. However, this is often overstated and decontextualised, neatly cohering with a wider discourse that narrates Western psychedelic history as a rupture between elitism and egalitarianism.⁶³ While this dichotomy may be a useful frame for navigating the convoluted history of counterculture, it obscures both the origin and the contingencies of Huxley’s perspective.⁶⁴

In correspondence with Huxley, Osmond was forthcoming about his view that ‘[t]o study psychedelics on immature, inadequate or sick people is to lose most if not all of their great and indeed extraordinary possibilities’.⁶⁵ In 1953, Osmond and his colleague John Smythies initiated a project called ‘Outsight’, which intended to administer mescaline or LSD to between fifty and one hundred highly accomplished professionals across the fields of literature, philosophy, and the sciences.⁶⁶ Several weeks after Osmond guided the mescaline session that became *Doors*, he wrote to Huxley elaborating on the ‘Number One project [...] which I outlined to you in Los Angeles’.⁶⁷ The context and chronology here is significant, as it shows how this paradigm predates Huxley’s personal involvement with either Osmond or mescaline. My objective is not to deny his support, but to emphasise that the concept of prioritising an exclusive group in psychedelic research was not originally Huxley’s, but part of the framework through which he was introduced to these compounds.

It is telling that, after nine years of psychedelic inquiry, elite access was *not* the distribution model that Huxley selected for *Island*; *moksha* is not simply accessible to everyone in Pala—it is a rite of passage when children are ready to learn the ‘deepest truths’:

⁶² Giffort, p. 134.

⁶³ See for example Lana Cook, ‘Altered States: The American Psychedelic Aesthetic’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, Northeastern University, 2014) in DRS <<https://repository.library.northeastern.edu/files/neu:336751/fulltext.pdf>> [accessed 25 August 2020], p. 103; Robert Dickins, ‘Aldous Huxley’s Hands by Allene Symons’, *Psychedelic Press*, 12 April 2016, <<https://psypressuk.com/2016/04/12/aldous-huxleys-hands-allene-symons/>> [accessed 25 August 2020].

⁶⁴ Morgan Shipley, *Psychedelic Mysticism: Transforming Consciousness, Religious Experiences, and Voluntary Peasants in Postwar America* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015), p. 62.

⁶⁵ Huxley and Osmond, pp. 275-76.

⁶⁶ Allene Symons, *Aldous Huxley’s Hands: Quest for Perception and the Origin and Return of Psychedelic Science* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2015), Kindle edition, p. 135. For a detailed history of the Outsight project see pp. 135-49.

⁶⁷ Huxley and Osmond, p. 15.

We don't teach our children creeds or get them worked up over emotionally charged symbols. When it's time for them to learn the deepest truths of religion, we set them to climb a precipice and then give them four hundred milligrammes of revelation. (p. 195)

Huxley's reservations about psychedelic populism were clearly tethered to his pessimistic view of Western culture, and not to a general principle of best practice—a detail that is largely neglected in his contemporary characterisations. In the forthcoming chapters I wish to rehabilitate Huxley's reputation towards one of inclusivity and social engagement.

1.5.1: RETRACTING DOORS

Richard Doyle has written extensively on how rhetorical practices constitute a crucial vector in psychedelic experiences; his book, *Darwin's Pharmacy: Sex, Plants, and the Evolution of the Noosphere* (2011) offers a probing and original critique of Huxley's *Doors*, tracing its narrative ripples all the way to the twenty first century.⁶⁸ I will continue Doyle's work by discussing some of the aspects of psychedelic discourse that have become platitudinous in recent years, along with how *Island* can serve as their counterpoint.

Huxley's psychedelic legacy has been disproportionately shaped by *Doors*, written after a single session with a single substance, at a time when set and setting were scarcely acknowledged. Archera estimates that Huxley had somewhere between ten and twelve psychedelic experiences in total.⁶⁹ Huxley historian David Dunaway surmises that there were in fact more, counting almost a dozen before the release of *Door's* sequel *Heaven and Hell* in 1956 (henceforth, *Heaven*).⁷⁰ Regardless of the numerical total, I maintain that Huxley's most compelling insights about alternate states of consciousness were realised and expressed after the iconic essays. Between the vast dissemination of *Doors* and the relative obscurity of *Island*, Huxley has left a remedy for the very oversights that he helped to propagate.

The level of public interest in *Doors* was not anticipated. Huxley and his editors Cass Canfield (Harper & Brothers) and Harold Raymonds (Chatto & Windus)

⁶⁸ Richard Doyle, *Darwin's Pharmacy: Sex, Plants and the Evolution of the Noosphere* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011), Kindle edition, p. 97.

⁶⁹ Laura Archera, 'Interview on LSD and Aldous Huxley'. Los Angeles, Charles E. Young Research Library (UCLA), Aldous and Laura Huxley papers 1925-2007, box 29, fol. 7.

⁷⁰ David K. Dunaway, *Huxley in Hollywood: The Great British Writer's American Years* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1989), Kindle edition, loc. 6957.

all agreed that the essay ought to be published as a standalone piece in order to maximise its visibility. Before it went to press, Canfield wrote to a colleague expressing some trepidation about publishing a text that ‘extols the virtues of a drug which presumably cannot be sold legally’; however, he concluded that since Huxley’s ideas were so entrenched in philosophy and aesthetics, ‘[a]ccordingly this book will appeal only to a rather highly educated and sophisticated audience’.⁷¹ Raymonds, who was dubious about its sales potential, postponed the release date from December 1953 to February 1954; ‘Our idea is that a work of this sort would be lost sight of in the press and in the book shops if published in the Christmas season’.⁷² Based on this forecast, their strategy was to buttress the sales of *Heaven* by publishing it with a reissue of *Doors*—this was ultimately unnecessary and the sequel was distributed as a freestanding essay.⁷³ Huxley’s satisfaction with the work, however, was not so abiding.

In Jay Steven’s landmark history of counterculture, *Storming Heaven: LSD and the American Dream* (1987), he remarks that Huxley’s subsequent psychedelic experiences led him to the view that the observations recorded in *Doors* and *Heaven* had been ‘nothing but entertaining sideshows’.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, the two texts (now published as a single volume) remain central pillars of the psychedelic literary canon, and their shortcomings are rarely signalled. This is not to suggest that the essays contain ‘errors’ (they appear to be true to what Huxley experienced) only that there are moments of philosophical negligence which do not align with his later work. I will outline two tropes that have potentially adverse implications, ‘the Other World’ and ‘How Things Really Are’, which, ultimately, both endorse forms of escapism and essentialism.

‘The Other World’

In one of Huxley’s first correspondences with Osmond—before their mescaline session was immortalised by *Doors*—he describes alternate states of consciousness (such as disease, mescaline, and mystical enlightenment) as inhibiting the functions of ordinary brain activity ‘thus permitting the “other world” to rise into consciousness’.⁷⁵ Osmond uses the metaphor three more times in response to Huxley

⁷¹ Cass Canfield, Letter to A. J. Katz (28 August 1953). Huxley papers, box 5.

⁷² Harold Raymonds, Letter to Canfield (31 August 1953). Huxley papers, box 5.

⁷³ Ian Parsons, Letter to Canfield (7 March 1955). Huxley papers, box 5.

⁷⁴ Jay Stevens, *Storming Heaven: LSD and the American Dream* (New York: Perennial library, 1988), p. 47.

⁷⁵ Huxley and Osmond, p. 6.

before their first meeting. Then, in *Doors*, Huxley recounts a feeling of bliss that was conspicuously detached from the human world.

Compelled by the investigator to analyse and report on what I was doing (and how I longed to be left alone with Eternity in a flower, Infinity in four chair legs and the Absolute in the folds of a pair of flannel trousers!) I realised that I was deliberately avoiding the eyes of those who were with me in the room, deliberately refraining from being too much aware of them.⁷⁶

He recognised that he ‘ought’ to be able to ‘see these trousers as infinitely important and human beings as still more infinitely important’, but on this occasion ‘it seemed to be impossible’.⁷⁷ It would be several years before he reconciled this partition.

After this session, Huxley began to capitalise ‘Other World’ more frequently in his correspondence with Osmond, and also use it with more spatial emphasis, writing about being ‘carried out of bounds into the totally Other World’.⁷⁸ Then, in January 1955 Huxley participated in a group mescaline session with Al Hubbard, Gerald Heard, and Bill Forthman (see 6.5). Recounting the day to Osmond, he describes having a ‘transcendental experience within *this* world and with human references’ as opposed to the ‘remote Other Worlds of the previous experiments’.⁷⁹ A single encounter with a more terrestrial and imminent ‘divine’, however, was not sufficient for him to retire the Other World as one of his principal psychedelic metaphors.

The Other World is the central allegory of *Heaven*, which was originally titled *Heaven and Hell: Reflections on Art and the Other World*, until Canfield requested that the subtitle be removed from the cover in July 1955.⁸⁰ In this piece, Huxley situates ‘the World of Visionary Experience’ in a ‘mental equivalent of Australia’ where ‘you will encounter all sorts of creatures at least as odd as kangaroos’, and elucidates that this allegory is meant to forcibly express ‘the essential otherness of the mind’s far continents, [and] the complete autonomy and self-sufficiency of their inhabitants’.⁸¹ Likewise, during a roundtable at the annual meeting of the American Psychiatric Association in May 1955, he elaborated on the ‘the Antipodes of the Mind’ to which one may be wafted ‘on the wings of

⁷⁶ Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception* (London: Vintage, 2004), Kindle edition, p. 15.

⁷⁷ Huxley, *Doors*, p. 15.

⁷⁸ Huxley and Osmond, p. 137.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

⁸⁰ Canfield, Letter to Huxley (29 July 1955). Huxley papers, box 5.

⁸¹ Huxley, *Doors*, pp. 42-43.

mescaline’.⁸² The Palanese, on the other hand, do not use remote lands to frame any aspects of their experience; in *Island*, ‘Other World’ is used only in reference to Will’s adulterous escapades in London, and to Adolf Hitler’s delusions of artistic grandeur (pp. 4, 184).

I suggest that the shift away from this metaphor was consolidated by an experience with Archera, who accompanied another mescaline session with Huxley later that year. This occasion, he tells Osmond, was marked by revelations about ‘Love’:

The result was that I did not, as in the first experiment, feel cut off from the human world. I was intensely aware of it, but from the standpoint of the living, primordial cosmic fact of Love. And the things which had entirely occupied my attention on that first occasion I now perceived to be temptations—temptations to escape from the central reality into false, or at least imperfect and partial Nirvanas of beauty and mere knowledge.⁸³

After 1955 there is a discernible shift in Huxley’s psychedelic rhetoric; his references to the Other World are fewer, and often punctuated to signal their imprecision.⁸⁴ In a letter to Albert Hofmann in 1962, for example, he praises Leary for helping individuals ‘to get the most of out of their transcendental experience and to make use of the insights from the “Other World” in the affairs of “this world”’.⁸⁵

The Other World is a narrative vestige that became extraneous to Huxley’s philosophy over sixty years ago. Nevertheless, it remains one of his most sampled metaphors in the psychedelic research movement. As a vivid and relatable trope, this longevity is understandable, particularly among people who may not have read beyond the essays. However, Huxley’s association with a solitary iteration of spiritual experience has also extended to *Island* in some literary criticisms. Mark Taylor, for instance, declares that ‘transcendence is rendered in the novel as solitary rather than collective’, albeit with no qualifying textual evidence.⁸⁶ This serves as a basis from which to redress an expired caricature of Huxley, but also as an entry point into a wider analysis of psychedelic discourse and its abundance of dualistic metaphors—especially those which evoke long-distance travel. From ‘tripping’,

⁸² Aldous Huxley, ‘Mescaline and the “Other World”’, in *Proceedings of the Round Table on Lysergic Acid Diethylamide and Mescaline in Experimental Psychiatry*, ed. by Louis Cholden (New York: Grune & Stratton, 1956), pp. 46-50.

⁸³ Huxley and Osmond, p. 217.

⁸⁴ *Letters of Aldous Huxley*, p. 786.

⁸⁵ Aldous Huxley, Letter to Albert Hofmann (29 February 1962). Huxley papers, box 27.

⁸⁶ Mark Taylor, ‘Aldous Huxley’s Late Turn to Bergson and *Island* as Bergsonian Utopia’, *Utopian Studies*, 29.3 (2018), 362-79 (p. 370).

coined by army scientists investigating LSD in the 1950s, to Terence McKenna's extensive allegories of the naturalist explorer in the 'realm' of DMT, psychedelic narratives almost always take the participant elsewhere.⁸⁷

'How Things Really Are'

Another potentially problematic aspect of *Doors* is its latent adherence to the myth of objectivism. Huxley quotes verbatim from his utterances under the influence of mescaline:

'This is how one ought to see,' I kept saying as I looked down at my trousers, or glanced at the jewelled books in the shelves, at the legs of my infinitely more than Van-Goghian chair. "This is how one ought to see, how things really are".⁸⁸

In the commentary that follows he partially rescinds this declaration, but only on the basis that such a mode of vision would compromise human connection—not on the basis of any ontological oversights.

That psychedelics might reveal 'how things really are' coheres with one of the basic principles of perennialism—that there is some 'core' or 'essence' to mystical experience that is not mediated by factors such as language and culture. Huxley's perspectives on the psychedelic experience are often conflated with misconceptions of his interest in perennialism, thus constituting another persistent site of misrepresentation. In his monograph, *Aldous Huxley and Alternative Spirituality* (2019), Jake Poller rues the tendency for critics to mistake Huxley's study of perennialism for an endorsement of universalism.⁸⁹ This line of inquiry has been developed by Dana Sawyer, scholar of religion and author of Huxley's spiritual biography, whose recent article 'Redressing a Straw Man: Correcting Critical Misunderstandings of Aldous Huxley's Perennial Philosophy' traces sixty years of erroneous perennialist conclusions; 'Huxley's focus was on a cross-cultural mystical experience he believed we can discern if we compare traditional accounts, and that was all'.⁹⁰ Huxley was a (dedicated) agnostic who did not subscribe to essentialism, and his comment in *Doors* about psychedelics revealing 'how things really are' will

⁸⁷ Martin A. Lee and Bruce Shlain, *The Complete Social History of LSD: The CIA, the Sixties, and Beyond* (New York: Grove Press, 1992), p. 40.

⁸⁸ Huxley, *Doors*, p. 15.

⁸⁹ Poller, *Alternative*, p. 11.

⁹⁰ Dana Sawyer, 'Redressing a Straw Man: Correcting Critical Misunderstandings of Aldous Huxley's Perennial Philosophy,' *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 61 (2021), 1-29 (p. 7).

be more usefully contextualised as an animated outburst, rather than an asseveration.

‘More real than reality’ is still a prevalent psychedelic trope. In *DMT Dialogues: Encounters with the Spirit Molecule* (a book of transcriptions from the Entheogenic Plant Sentience Symposium 2015—a gathering of the world’s leading luminaries on dimethyltryptamine), ethnobotanist Dennis McKenna suggests that psychedelics induce ‘a direct observation of the way the world is’, and in a follow-up discussion, parapsychologist David Luke questions what ‘core’ experiences we might find ‘if we could somehow peel back the linguistic bits where there was a mediation through language that gives us cultural overlay’.⁹¹ Even the most progressive researchers in the most speculative discussions tend to default to the schemas of objectivism.

On the one hand, ‘more real’ than normal waking consciousness usefully counterpoints any associations that psychedelics may have with delusion and delirium. On the other hand, it merely replaces one hierarchy of perception with another, thus reproducing the oppressive paradigms that invalidate anomalous experiences. As I will discuss, essentialism has inundated Western culture such that its detection and exposure require active effort. The contrast between *Doors*’ objectivist impulses and *Island*’s ontological pluralism articulates this issue.

1.5.2: THE EVOLUTION OF ISLAND

According to Huxley, *Island* was only incidentally a novel—it was intended as an ‘exposition of what ought to be, what could be perhaps, and what has been and what actually is’.⁹² For this reason, my analyses are largely contextualised by the present day, rather than the exposition’s contemporaneous milieu. Huxley’s stylistic choice was part of a (possibly misguided) strategy to maximise the dissemination of a message. In *This Timeless Moment* (1968), Archera’s memoir about her years with Huxley, she explains that he persisted with the novel format because he felt that ‘by fusing the message with a story, he would reach a larger and more varied audience’.⁹³

The dissonance between the medium and the message was a source of disquietude for Huxley; as he expressed to Osmond in 1958, ‘I don’t know yet if I have a satisfactory fable, or how much of a fable will be necessary, or, on the other

⁹¹ Dennis McKenna, ‘Is DMT a Chemical Messenger from an Extraterrestrial Civilisation?’, in *DMT Dialogues: Encounters with the Spirit Molecule*, eds. David Luke and Rory Spowers (Rochester: Park Street Press, 2018), Kindle edition, pp. 38-68 (p. 57); Jeremy Narby, ‘Amazonian Perspectives on Invisible Entities’, in *DMT Dialogues*, pp. 69-94 (pp. 87-88).

⁹² *Letters of Aldous Huxley*, p. 792.

⁹³ Laura Archera, *This Timeless Moment* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1969), p. 273.

hand, how reluctant people will be to read material which isn't straight story telling'.⁹⁴ Through an extensive collation of correspondences with family, friends, and editors during this period, Bernfried Nugel has charted Huxley's concerns about *Island*'s didacticism, including a letter to Ian Parsons (Chatto & Windus) about having enlisted Christopher Isherwood to assist with its 'low ratio of story to exposition'.⁹⁵

These concerns were not unfounded. After its release, *Island*'s reception was polarised;⁹⁶ while many critics commended its social and political relevance, Huxley was equally criticised for sermonising.⁹⁷ An assemblage of the more damning reviews reveals a prescriptive echo chamber in which critics compare the book to *Brave New World* (1932), before slighting it for a scarcity of satire and plot.⁹⁸ Alan Watts pithily summarised the situation as a case of people having 'very fixed ideas of what a novel is supposed to be'.⁹⁹ Archera recounts Huxley's disappointment that *Island* was not taken more seriously:

It was treated as a work of science fiction, when it was not fiction, because each one of the ways of living he describes in *Island* was not a product of his fantasy, but something that had been tried in one place or another, some of them in our own everyday life.¹⁰⁰

To align with Huxley's original vision, I will not read *Island* as an example of science fiction, or any other literary genre. Despite an abundance of topical references, the novel principally pertains to the longstanding patterns of Western thought, whose ramifications have only intensified in the last six decades. Instead, I read it as a pedagogical proposal.

As a note on terminology, by 'pedagogy' I mean to evoke learning in the

⁹⁴ Huxley and Osmond, p. 386.

⁹⁵ Bernfried Nugel, 'Aldous Huxley's "Introduction of a Brand-New Personage" in *Island*: Abdul Pierre Bahu, Ambassador of Rendang', in *Aldous Huxley Between East and West*, ed. by C. C. Barfoot (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001), pp. 131-50 (p. 132).

⁹⁶ Richard Deese, 'Twilight of Utopias: Julian and Aldous Huxley in the Twentieth Century', *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*, 5.2 (2011), 210-40 (p. 234).

⁹⁷ Cyril Northcote Parkinson, 'East Plus West Equals Utopia', *The Saturday Review*, 31 March 1962; Van Allen Bradley, 'A New Utopia', *Chicago Daily News*, 26 March 1962; Hoke Norris, 'Huxley's Near-Miss', *Chicago Sun Times*, 8 April 1962; Nancy Schwieder, 'Pala...Huxley's Idyll of Paradise', *Lincoln Star*, 1 April 1962.

⁹⁸ Chad Walsh, 'Can Man Save Himself?', *New York Times Book Review*, 1 April 1962, pp. 4, 46; John Hutchens, 'Island', *New York Herald Tribune*, 28 March 1962; Thorpe Menn, 'Books of the Day', *Kansas City Star*, 31 March 1962.

⁹⁹ Laura Archera and Alan Watts, 'This Timeless Moment: Laura Huxley interviewed by Alan Watts', *Something's Happening*, KPFA Radio, 6 November 1968, <<http://digital2.library.ucla.edu/viewItem.do?ark=21198/zz002b1th1>> [accessed 8 October 2021].

¹⁰⁰ Archera, *Timeless*, p. 308.

traditional sense, but also the art of *unlearning*. In his book, *Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World* (2019), Australian Aboriginal scholar Tyson Yunkaporta gives an incendiary history of modern teaching, which, he claims, grew from a nineteenth-century Prussian indoctrination scheme in which boredom was weaponised in order to instil uniformity and compliance.¹⁰¹ This scheme, he explains, was based on horse domestication:

1. Separate the young from their parents in the daylight hours.
2. Confine them in an enclosed space with limited stimulation or access to natural habitat.
3. Use rewards and punishments to force them to comply with purposeless tasks.¹⁰²

However, somewhat uniquely for an academic, Yunkaporta tirelessly foregrounds the partiality of his perspective. He reiterates that the evidence presented was carefully selected to support a specific interpretation of a particular narrative, which is inevitably informed by his own life experiences and his position as an academic with an indigenous upbringing. In other words, Yunkaporta makes no attempt to disguise the distortion in his viewpoint, thereby minimising what might easily have become an insurmountable rhetorical contradiction; *Sand Talk* is targeted towards Westerners seeking a better understanding of indigenous ways of knowing and learning, and watertight presentations of unassailable arguments are simply not among these ways. With this, Yunkaporta sidesteps the hubris of certainty without compromising academic rigour—a balance that is also valued in Pala. Like *Island*, *Sand Talk* seeks to stimulate more connective, as opposed to abstractive, modes of thought.¹⁰³ This is the strain of scholarship to which I hope to contribute.

Thus, I use ‘pedagogies’ to refer to the transmission of practices that have the potential to vitalise flexible ways of being and knowing. As I will discuss, this begins with the willingness and capacity to recognise one’s own semantic, perceptual, and philosophical predispositions.

From this perspective, one of *Island*’s pivotal pedagogical devices is the Old Raja, the deceased grandson of one of modern Pala’s founders. The incidental novel is interspersed with fragments of his puzzling poetry and excerpts from ‘Notes on What’s What, and on What it Might be Reasonable to Do About What’s What’, an

¹⁰¹ Tyson Yunkaporta, *Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2020), Kindle edition, p. 140.

¹⁰² Yunkaporta, p. 139.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

introduction to Palanese culture that Dr Robert presents to Will during his second day on the island. This handbook is perhaps the most comprehensive and creative reflection on Western cultural biases that Huxley produced during his final years. While this is, of course, a subjective matter, it is pertinent that (as of November 2021), six of the eight most ‘Popular Highlights’ in the Kindle edition of *Island* are from the Old Raja’s handbook, despite it constituting just over 1 per cent of the book’s total word count (1396 of the 109,385 words—1.27 per cent). This was not the original distribution of this material; Canfield and Parsons, Huxley’s publishers, colluded to convince him to cut most of the content that he had written for the Old Raja. On 19 June 1961, before he had finished reading the draft, Canfield wrote the following to Parsons:

It would seem to me that some cutting would improve the manuscript. What I think could be spared most easily are excerpts from the imaginary book by the old Rajah [sic] entitled NOTES ON WHAT IS WHAT [...] I know you won’t show this letter to Aldous and merely hope that if you are of the same opinion as I am you will suggest cutting and perhaps indicate to him that you and I are of the same opinion on the matter. It’s tricky business to tamper with the work of such a very distinguished writer and thinker.¹⁰⁴

Three days later (having now finished reading the text) he reiterated his view in a follow-up letter:

I would say that, assuming Aldous is open to suggestions, the most important cut would be the excerpts from the old Raja’s Notes on What’s What. Both the other editor who read the book and I were frankly bored in reading the excerpts and had difficulty keeping our minds on these passages [...] Perhaps in conversation Will could bring out some of the points in these writings.¹⁰⁵

Parsons shared Canfield’s opinion and devised a way of presenting it persuasively:

I read the book over the weekend and Aldous is coming to talk about it in about an hour’s time. I agree with every word you say and will do my best to persuade Aldous to make the necessary cuts and revisions. But as a matter of both tact and tactics I think it would be inadvisable for me to quote to Aldous any part of

¹⁰⁴ Canfield, Letter to Parsons (19 July 1961). Huxley papers, box 5.

¹⁰⁵ Canfield, Letter to Parsons (22 July 1961). Huxley papers, box 5.

either of your letters. He might so easily ask to see them and that could be embarrassing all round. So I propose to put our suggestions forward, pro tem, as if they were wholly my own and Norah's, merely mentioning in passant that I had reason to believe you might feel the same way [...] then I think you should write at once, quite independently, giving him your views.¹⁰⁶

Canfield and Parsons' objective was to turn *Island* into a more conventional novel, whereas Huxley's objective was to deliver a message. Ultimately, external pressure exacerbated doubts that had been percolating since *Island*'s inception, and Huxley agreed to make major cuts to the Old Raja's material. Fortunately, the complete 'Notes on What's What' can be found in the manuscripts held at UCLA.

These cuts may have contributed to the retention of *Island*'s rather inconsonant classification as a work of fiction. The majority of these edits were made to the sections that least resembled a conventional novel; 'Notes on What's What' uses a more ambiguous and experimental rhetorical style than the rest of the book, which is predominantly based on dialogue. Huxley had long been convinced that this was unavoidable in certain contexts, once describing Alfred Korzybski's *Science and Sanity* as 'an absolutely maddening book, owing to its repetitiousness and its wanderings, but necessary [...] if one wants to grasp the significance of semantics to all fields of human activity'.¹⁰⁷

I read the 'Notes on What's What' as Huxley's most concentrated articulation of the reciprocities between language, philosophy, and attention. Its attenuation in the published version of *Island* has detracted from the importance of this idea. Understanding the synergies between these elements of experience is the key to Pala's radical agnosticism (radical in the sense of 'roots')—a prophylactic against the immoderations of its surrounding nations. Palanese pedagogies are geared towards a generative uncertainty in each and every facet of reality; 'Give us this daily Faith, but deliver us, dear God, from Belief' (p. 43).

1.5.3: POLYPHASIA

Polyphasia and its converse, monophasia, will be important expository adjuncts to my exploration of Pala's paradoxes and pluralities. A polyphasic culture is one in which worldviews and identities are informed by multiple states of consciousness, such as dreaming, visions, or psychoactive substances. However—and this is the

¹⁰⁶ Parsons, Letter to Canfield (22 July 1961). Huxley papers, box 5.

¹⁰⁷ *Letters of Aldous Huxley*, p. 505.

crux—the experiences that occur in these states are deemed no more or less real than those of normal waking consciousness.¹⁰⁸ This is a critical detail—polyphasia is not simply a case of validating another mode of awareness, but validating another mode of awareness without imposing an ontological hierarchy.

Daniel Everett, a linguistic anthropologist who has spent over three decades studying the Pirahã, an isolated community in the Brazilian Amazon, describes his realisation of this distinction:

I came eventually to understand that ‘*xaipípai*’ is dreaming, but with a twist: it is classified as a real experience. You are an eyewitness to your dreams. Dreams are not fiction to the Pirahãs. You see one way awake and another way while asleep, but both ways of seeing are real experiences.¹⁰⁹

This indicates the difficulty of translating information pertaining to alternate states between polyphasic and monophasic cultures—the lexicon of the source and the target languages will have discordant connotations that must be adequately signalled. Mainstream Western culture is resolutely monophasic; while many Westerners may take note of their dreams, for instance, their degree of importance generally depends on whether the dream content coheres with the individual’s pre-existing belief system.¹¹⁰

I will elaborate on why polyphasia serves as a useful framing device for Pala’s psychedelic and pedagogical practices in Chapter 3. However, this calls for some contextual clarification of the word ‘real’ and its connotations in Pala. *Moksha* is referred to as a ‘reality-revealer’ on three occasions. Murugan, Pala’s adolescent Raja who comes of age during the course of the book, vehemently disapproves of *moksha*; he refers to it as ‘dope’ and, despite having never ingested it, insists that the experience ‘isn’t real’ (p. 166). Dr Robert, having just shared *moksha* with his terminally ill wife Lakshmi for the last time, challenges Murugan’s comment:

[I]f you’d experienced what Lakshmi and I went through yesterday, you’d know better. You’d know it was much more real than what you call reality. More real than what you’re thinking and feeling at this moment. More real than the world

¹⁰⁸ Charles Laughlin, ‘The Ethno-Epistemology of Transpersonal Experience: The View from Transpersonal Anthropology’, *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 32.1 (2003), 43-50 (p. 43).

¹⁰⁹ Daniel Everett, *Don’t Sleep, There are Snakes: Life and Language in the Amazonian Jungle* (London: Profile Books, 2009), Kindle edition, pp. 130-31.

¹¹⁰ Carey K. Morewedge and Michael I. Norton, ‘When Dreaming is Believing: The (Motivated) Interpretation of Dreams’, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 96.2 (2009), 249-64 (p. 251).

before your eyes. (p. 170)

On the surface this appears to duplicate *Doors* and its objectivist reflex towards ‘how things really are’. However, the exchange follows a conversation in which Dr Robert concedes that the *moksha* experience could indeed be a neurological event with no external references; ‘Maybe it *is* private and there’s no unitive knowledge of anything but one’s own physiology. Who cares? The fact remains that the experience can open one’s eyes and make one blessed and transform one’s whole life’ (p. 169). Dr Robert’s measure of ‘real’ is epistemological—a perspective that the Palanese are encouraged to inhabit from their first years of elementary school. This is only one of many possible examples that support a polyphasic characterisation of the Palanese (elaborated in Chapter 3).

This is not an arbitrary comparison. Polyphasia is a useful way of offsetting the countless discourses that centralise the ‘qualities’ of any given state of consciousness; polyphasia explicitly emphasises multimodality. I contend that, in some contexts, the value of psychedelics is nothing more (or rather, nothing less) than their capacity to induce a mode of awareness that is markedly different from its predecessor.

1.6: DIVERSIFYING PSYCHEDELIC DISCOURSE

In this section I introduce how Huxley’s work can be used to reframe several of the platitudes of contemporary psychedelic discourse:

- ◆ Psychedelics reset the brain.
- ◆ Psychedelics dissolve boundaries.
- ◆ Psychedelic experiences are ineffable.

I am not attempting to falsify or exile any of these metaphors; their prevalence attests to their relatability and they clearly hold positive significance for a considerable number of people. The issues arise when abundance meets an absence of alternatives, and, as I will elaborate over the course of the chapters, these particular examples do little to stimulate experiential sovereignty. As an aside, if this seems overly analytical for an introductory chapter, I reiterate that it is principally intended to demonstrate an approach to narrative.

1.6.1: ‘PSYCHEDELICS RESET THE BRAIN’

Following their first psilocybin trials, the team at Imperial College London, recorded a series of testimonials from their participants, several of whom compared aspects of their experiences to a brain ‘reboot’ or ‘reset’.¹¹¹ The team used this metaphor in a subsequent publication on the neural mechanisms involved in psilocybin treatment to describe a process in which ‘acute modular disintegration (e.g. in the DMN) enables a subsequent re-integration and resumption of normal functioning’.¹¹² This context was neglected in the press coverage of the trials; the metaphor was extended to refer to a more general resetting of the brain or neurological activity.¹¹³ Since then, the neurological ‘reset’ has been adopted by other leading scientists in the field, such as David Nichols, and has become one of the most ubiquitous metaphors in psychedelic publicity.¹¹⁴ Indeed, in a Western cultural context, the ‘reset’ is highly palatable as it is related to the ‘basic’ metaphors, *the brain is a machine* and (even more foundational) *the mind is a container*, which also align with the paradigm that medical treatment predominantly consists of surgical procedures, targeted drugs, and passive patients.¹¹⁵ In the context of psychedelic therapy, this can set unrealistic expectations.

In a workshop for psychedelic practitioners, Rosalind Watts, the lead psychologist on Imperial’s psilocybin trials, commented on the proliferation of the reset metaphor and its potential to generate complications; ‘I don’t think we really understood the importance of very careful expectation setting [...] and developing a shared language together’.¹¹⁶ In a subsequent trial, she explained, one of the participants was a medical doctor with a staunchly mechanistic understanding of the brain. He had read numerous articles and reports on the psychedelic reset and entered

¹¹¹ Gallagher, ‘Magic Mushrooms Can ‘Reset’ Depressed Brain’.

¹¹² Robin-Carhart Harris and others, ‘Psilocybin for Treatment-Resistant Depression: fMRI-Measured Brain Mechanisms’, *Scientific Reports*, 7.1 (2017), 1-11 (p. 5).

¹¹³ Gallagher; Ryan O’Hare, ‘Magic Mushrooms May ‘Reset’ the Brains of Depressed Patients’, *Imperial College London*, 13 October 2017, <<https://www.imperial.ac.uk/news/182410/magic-mushrooms-reset-brains-depressed-patients/>> [accessed 4 December 2021].

¹¹⁴ Tim Adams, ‘Amanda Feilding: ‘LSD Can Get Deep Down and Reset the Brain—Like Shaking Up a Snow Globe’’, *Guardian*, 10 Feb 2019, <<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/feb/10/amanda-feilding-ldc-can-reset-the-brain-interview>> [accessed 2 February 2021]; David Nichols, Matthew Johnson and Charles Nichols, ‘Psychedelics as Medicines: An Emerging New Paradigm’, *Clinical Pharmacology & Therapeutics*, 101.2 (2017), 209-19 (p. 209).

¹¹⁵ Lakoff and Johnson, p. 27. Where Lakoff and Johnson’ capitalise basic metaphors, I will italicise them, in order to better cohere with the formatting of the rest of the thesis.

¹¹⁶ Rosalind Watts, ‘Guiding the Unbound Mind: What Every Practitioner Must Know About Working with Psychedelics’, *Synthesis Institute*, 14 October 2020, <<https://www.synthesisinstitute.com/guiding-the-unbound-mind>> [accessed 5 March 2021].

the study with high expectations. During his session he experienced severe physical tension and feelings of anger, which he suppressed, supposing that they were side effects of the psilocybin and therefore extraneous to the treatment process. Following the trial his depression was unchanged, an outcome that Watts ascribes to his very resistance of these bodily sensations.

The reset also gives the misleading impression that one psychedelic session will be sufficient to treat something as complex as depression, which is very rarely the case. In a discussion at the California College of Medicine in April 1956, Huxley commented that ‘the mescaline and LSD experience seems to be progressive. If you take it more than once, you learn to handle the drug better and go further’.¹¹⁷ Likewise, in the manuscript of *Island*, Dr Robert explains the following about *moksha*:

And remember this. The second time you take a reality revealer, you’ll find as a rule, that your world is transfigured more completely and in more ways than it was the first time. And the completer transfiguration will help to sharpen and deepen your awareness of the world at ordinary times. Which means that the next transfiguration will be better still. And so on in a virtuous circle.¹¹⁸

Although this refers to spiritual heuristics rather than therapeutic treatment, the important aspect is that of recurrence—that Huxley understood psychedelics as a pedagogical practice.

1.6.2: ‘PSYCHEDELICS DISSOLVE BOUNDARIES’

The term ‘boundary’, in its primary use, signifies the point of demarcation between what is within and what is beyond a particular category. For this discussion, I have merged the concepts of ‘boundary dissolution’ and ‘category dissolution’, using the terms interchangeably unless otherwise stated. This does not reflect my personal understanding of categories, nor does it capture the ambiguity that my main argument supports. This coalescence is rather the logical conclusion of essentialism (see 1.4)—in Chapter 2 I discuss panpsychism as an answer to this pattern of philosophical presupposition.

Hartogsohn, as discussed, names ‘boundary dissolution’ among the

¹¹⁷ Aldous Huxley, Transcript of discussion ‘On Consciousness Altering Drugs’ given at California College of Medicine (18 April 1956). Huxley papers, box 27, fol. 13, p. 6.

¹¹⁸ Aldous Huxley, *Island* MS. Huxley papers, box 59, fol. 1, p. 227.

phenomenological fundamentals of psychedelics.¹¹⁹ It is indeed one of the most pervasive tropes in psychedelia, and thus, rarely a point of contention. Giffort is one of the few researchers to even mention that the concept of ‘boundary dissolution’ warrants careful handling; she comments on its propensity to evoke anxiety (especially among scientists and federal regulators) by threatening the frontiers between patient and therapist, or research and recreation.¹²⁰ My unique interest, however, does not pertain to cultural corollaries, but rather to how the concept is almost always unqualified, along with the particular inconveniences of the term ‘dissolve’.

Like most non-technical English words, ‘dissolve’ is polysemic. In the context of categories, it may plausibly pertain to either liquification, disappearance, or some amalgamation of the two. The acute meaning of a polysemic word is either determined by context, or, in the case of more figurative language, the varieties will be close enough that specification is superfluous to most communicative impulses.¹²¹ For example, there are many iterations of ‘broken’, but if a friend were seeking consolation for their ‘broken heart’ it would (probably) be redundant to ask whether they intended to evoke the characteristics of a splinter, a fracture, a tear, a crushing, or some other iteration of discomfort. Likewise, in most subjective accounts of a psychedelic experience, whether categorical boundaries ‘melted’ or ‘vanished’ is likely to be superfluous. However, the two senses of ‘dissolve’ denote distinct ontologies. Additionally, English grammar permits the omission of quantifiers, such that ‘boundaries dissolve’ could mean any combination of a *few/some/many/most/all* boundaries *liquify/terminate*. We can refer to this as its semantic spectrum.

In his essay ‘Culture and the Individual’ (1963) Huxley suggests that psychedelics may be a way of reminding the individual that they exist in a ‘misshapen universe’ of their own cultural prejudices—that psychedelics may help people to ‘cut holes in the verbalised fence of symbols’ in which they are enclosed.¹²² Poller cites this in his monograph, and paraphrases Huxley’s argument as being that ‘one of the great benefits of psychedelic substances is their ability to remove this conceptual mesh’.¹²³ Although the metaphors of ‘mesh removal’ and ‘fence perforation’ may indicate parallel subjective sensations, on the semantic spectrum

¹¹⁹ Hartogsohn, *American Trip*, pp. 12-13.

¹²⁰ Giffort, p. 11.

¹²¹ Caitlin A. Rice and others, ‘A Comparison of Homonym Meaning Frequency Estimates Derived from Movie and Television Subtitles, Free Association, and Explicit Ratings’, *Behaviour Research Methods*, 51 (2019), 1399-1425 (p. 1399).

¹²² Aldous Huxley, *Moksha: Writings on Psychedelics and the Visionary Experience (1931-1963)*, ed. by Michael Horowitz and Cynthia Palmer (New York: Stonehill Publishing Company, 1977), pp. 255, 253.

¹²³ Poller, *Alternative*, p. 315.

under discussion ‘mesh removal’ is closer to ‘*all boundaries disappear*’, whereas ‘fence perforation’ is closer to ‘*some boundaries liquify*’, which has different ontological undertones. ‘*All boundaries disappear*’ has the most resonance with the paradigm that psychedelics show things ‘as they really are’, which relies on some degree of conviction that it is possible to have experience without linguistic or cultural mediation. This is not a pedantic critique of Poller’s rhetorical inclinations—paraphrasing inevitably modifies metaphors. I use this example because it encapsulates the elusiveness of these ontological implications when one considers only the surface levels of words and meaning.

‘*All boundaries disappear*’ does not harmonise well with the radical agnosticism and semantic solicitude of the Palanese. During Will’s tour of the school, Mrs Nayaran, one of Pala’s schoolteachers, explains that *moksha* does not put the children in a state of pure receptivity—‘All one can say is that they learn to go easy on names and notions. For a little while they’re taking in a lot more than they give out’ (p. 270). There are dangerous cultural deficiencies that could be avoided by a more polyvalent approach to categories, and more sensitivity to the semantic spectrums of our statements. These levels of nuance, however, are difficult to entice when one’s culture is steeped in the assumption that language is, first and foremost, a set of local symbols for a set of universal categories. I develop this in Chapter 5, which uses Pala and the handful of studies that have been conducted on psychedelics and semantic/category processing to explain why it may be useful to supplement ‘psychedelics dissolve boundaries’ with a narrative such as ‘psychedelics modify the categorical intervals that we are accustomed to’. Social and environmental transformation will not evolve from the belief that we are the passive recipients of an objective reality.

1.6.3: ‘PSYCHEDELIC EXPERIENCES ARE INEFFABLE’

If categories are universal and words are their arbitrary markers, then the ‘dissolution of boundaries’ renders language redundant, inadvertently potentiating the narrative that psychedelic experiences are ‘ineffable’. Indeed, ineffable has become a prototypical marker of intensity in Western discourse; as Doyle encapsulates, from the historical accounts of Weir Mitchell and Havelock Ellis to contemporary online forums, ‘[f]ew elements in a trip report are more predictable than a version of “words fail me”’.¹²⁴ Like the previous example, this reveals more about language customs

¹²⁴ Doyle, p. 45.

in the Anglosphere than it does about psychedelics. Rather than psychedelic ineffability, I will spotlight how English is maladapted to expressing the insights of non-ordinary states of consciousness, along with the paramount importance of a type of code-switching, not only for the integration of psychedelics but as a general defence against dogma. Although English is at the centre of this study, many of the grammatical elements discussed will also be applicable to other languages, particularly those of Latin descent.

According to government surveys, sixty-two per cent of Brits and seventy-five per cent of Americans cannot converse in second language.¹²⁵ With the evidence of only one linguistic system, it is natural to assume that reality is fashioned along the seams that are impressed by that system, and, by extension, that the constraints of one language represent the Language faculty in general.¹²⁶ I espouse the view that, like a musical instrument, the shape and structure of a language affects its range and timbre, which determines its compatibility with particular genres of expression; the limits of a mouth organ do not set the limits of music. In order to taper this discussion, I will focus on how noun-heavy languages like English, spoken in monolingual environments, favour the affiliation between language and universal categories, but forestall the affiliation between language and perception, thus establishing feedback loops that sustain the conditions of their own conception.

Linguistic homogenisation allows certain tropes—such as ineffability—to propagate themselves to a point of overpopulation. In a discussion about the history of Pala, Dr Robert praises the ‘educational process that turned [them] at last into a bi-lingual people’ (p. 157). The citizens of Pala are fluent in Palanese and English, and most appear to have at least a functional comprehension of Sanskrit. Huxley offers no examples of the Palanese language, which may account for its lack of literary commentary. However, Dr Robert explains both its significance and its contexts:

We speak Palanese when we’re cooking, when we’re telling funny stories, when we’re talking about love or making it. (Incidentally, we have the richest erotic and sentimental vocabulary in South-East Asia.) But when it comes to business, or science, or speculative philosophy, we generally speak English. And most of us prefer to write in English. (p. 158)

¹²⁵ Eurobarometer, ‘Europeans and their languages’, *Eurobarometer 243*, 64.3 (2006), 1-176 (p. 9); Kate Palmer, ‘Seventy-five per cent of Americans have no Second Language’, *YouGovAmerica*, 31 July 2013, <<https://today.yougov.com/topics/lifestyle/articles-reports/2013/07/31/75-americans-have-no-second-language>> [accessed 28 October 2021].

¹²⁶ Asifa Majid and Stephen C. Levinson, ‘The Senses in Language and Culture’, *Senses and Society*, 6.1 (2011), 5-18 (p. 6).

Sanskrit, on the other hand, is used in the *moksha* ceremony, and in cases where an experience cannot be adequately conveyed in Palanese or English. Pala's multilingualism is not their way of participating in a global economy, but rather their way of making different types of knowledge and experiential modes more accessible.

Code-switching is a means of exposing cultural and linguistic bias. Over the coming chapters, I discuss the synergies between polylingualism and polyphasia, and why monolingualism may be a decisive impediment to psychedelic integration. Furthermore, ineffability rarely evokes a neutral silence; on the contrary, I believe it justifies a semantic nonchalance. Given the unprecedented distribution potential of digital media, this is a precarious situation. Rather than a verbal setback, ineffable can be framed as an opportunity to remember that words are more than static symbols for a set of universals. Creative linguistic applications can liberate the mind from the tyranny of absolutes. Ineffable can be a call for innovation.

1.7: CUSTODIANS OF CODE-SWITCHING

Psychedelics are not unanimously associated with ineffability. In numerous indigenous cultures, for example, visionary plant practices are accompanied by linguistic modulation—a kind of state-based code-switching. There are two elaborations of this practice that have been instrumental to my own research: Barbera Myerhoff's *Peyote Hunt: The Sacred Journey of the Huichol Indians* (1974) and Graham Townsley's 'The Ways and Means of Yaminahua Shamanic Knowledge' (1993).

Myerhoff's study is centred on the Wixárika ('Huichol' in Spanish), an indigenous community based in Mexico, and their traditional pilgrimage across the San Luis Potosí desert to Wirikuta, the sacred home of their ancestors. Led by a *marakame* (shaman), the pilgrims make offerings, commune with their deities, and gather *hikuri* (peyote). However, one of the most striking aspects of this custom is that the *marakame* also establishes an improvised language of reversals with which the pilgrims must comply throughout the excursion; 'On the peyote hunt, we change the names of things because when we cross over there, into Wirikuta, things are so sacred that all is reversed'.¹²⁷ These reversals are 'dreamed' by the *marakame* and,

¹²⁷ Barbara G. Myerhoff, *Peyote Hunt: The Sacred Journey of the Huichol Indians* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), p. 148.

as they can incorporate anything that the pilgrims are likely to communicate, they become increasingly complex throughout the course of the journey. Myerhoff quotes Ramón, the *marakame* who led her peyote hunt, at length on this topic. I have selected some examples that give a richer sense of the practice:

When we say come it means go away. When we say, “Shh, quiet,” it means to shout, and when we whistle or call to the front we are really calling to a person behind us [...] Even the peyote is called by another name [...] When one speaks of wood, one really means fish.¹²⁸

On the journey, mistakes were corrected and compounds were praised; ‘here we all were in the middle of the city, beneath the moon, having failed to bring back the *hikuri*, having only baskets of flowers’, one pilgrim commented as they stood under the baking sun in the empty desert with baskets heaped with peyote.¹²⁹ It is clear from the transcripts that the lexical and semantic switches were no more or less applicable to sacred sites and deities than they were to objects outside Wixárika cosmologies—the campervan became the ‘burro’ that was fuelled by ‘tequila’.¹³⁰

Myerhoff interprets inversion as a tool to enable the pilgrims to experience ‘the sense of totality and cosmic unity that is their overarching religious goal’—it is a way of dramatising the unification of opposites, such that the mundane becomes the sacred, and vice versa.¹³¹ I am underqualified to either affirm or challenge this interpretation, but regardless of the cosmological context and meaning, the practice shows the Wixárika’s embodied recognition of the reciprocity between language and perception. Evidently, the land of peyote and the rituals of the peyote hunt are not considered commensurable with the speech patterns of ordinary activities and consciousness; however, far from ineffable, they are a call for linguistic disruption.

Another example of this psychedelic code-switching is elaborated in Townsley’s article on the healing songs of the Yaminahua *ayahuasqueros*, which are constructed through abstruse and elaborate metaphors:

Almost nothing in these songs is referred to by its normal name. The abstrusest metaphoric circumlocutions are used instead. For example, night becomes

¹²⁸ Myerhoff, *Peyote*, pp. 186-87.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

¹³¹ Barbara G. Myerhoff, ‘Return to Wirikuta: Ritual Reversal and Symbolic Continuity in the Huichol Peyote Hunt’, in *Symposium of the Whole: A Range of Discourse Toward an Ethnopoetics*, ed. by Jerome Rothenberg and Diane Rothenberg (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 225-31 (p. 226); Myerhoff, *Peyote*, p. 258.

“swift tapirs”, the forest becomes “cultivated peanuts”, fish are “peccaries”, jaguars are “baskets”, anacondas are “hammocks” and so forth.¹³²

After outlining some of the more salient distinctions between Yaminahua and Western ontologies, Townsley allows the indigenous commentaries to speak for themselves (as far as possible). As one shaman explains, ‘twisted language brings me close but not too close—with normal words I would crash into things—with twisted ones I circle around them—I can see them clearly’.¹³³ Townsley relates that the commentaries he received about this practice all made some reference to clarity of vision. From this, he permits himself some minimal conjecture, and posits that ‘seeing as’ (i.e., seeing concepts through other concepts) ‘in some way creates a space in which powerful visionary experiences can occur’.¹³⁴ In relation to the Yaminahua cosmologies that give meaning to alternate states of consciousness (in this case, dreaming and ayahuasca visions) obscure metaphors are not improper naming, but ‘the only proper naming possible’.¹³⁵ This semantic mode is an integral part of working in an alternate state of consciousness and navigating its nuances—in its simplest form, twisted metaphors generate the need for more twisted metaphors.

These examples are not intended to imply any cosmological similarities between Wixárika and Yaminahua cultures, or between peyote and ayahuasca. I use them as two isolated examples of code-switching that respond to the incompatibilities between ordinary language patterns and psychedelic states of consciousness.

Although this type of code-switching has been reported around the world, there is a lamentable lack of research in the area. Jeremy Narby, a leading authority on Amazonian shamanism and plant medicines, attributes this neglect to a failure on the part of anthropologists to take indigenous ontologies and poetics seriously.¹³⁶ There are many more factors that may account for this scarcity: invalidation of alternate modes of perception (monophasia); lingering taboos around psychoactive substances; underestimation of the reciprocities between language and experience; the challenge of translating any language that is embedded in a radically different ontological system, let alone its modifications.

¹³² Graham Townsley, ‘The Ways and Means of Yaminahua Shamanic Knowledge’, *L’Homme*, 126/128 (1993), 449-68 (p. 459).

¹³³ Townsley, p. 460.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 446.

¹³⁶ Jeremy Narby, *The Cosmic Serpent: DNA and the Origins of Knowledge* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2016), Kindle edition, pp. 163, 98.

David Abram is one of the rare individuals who has written extensively about these issues; his book, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World* (1996), harmonises anthropology, ecology, linguistics, philosophy, and storytelling into a moving account of how '[t]he members of any given culture necessarily inhabit an experienced world very different from that of another culture with a very different language and way of life'.¹³⁷ Western disconnection, Abram argues, is largely rooted in literacy—'the dominion of alphabetic reason over a natural world'.¹³⁸ This trailblazing book argues that cultural and linguistic customs have veiled a severance from the sensuous body. Westerners are perpetually primed towards abstraction, and Abram's vision of a better world begins with the reanimation of language—the marrying of poetry and precision, of lyrical imagination and lexical hypervigilance. In his own case, semantic vigilance extends beyond his publications; in interviews or panels he will often linger on the minutiae of lexis and grammar, or pause to salute homonyms and polysemy, or digress from the question for a pithy excavation in the undercurrents of language; 'the word embodiment feels a little problematic to me, because it suggests that the psyche is first of another dimension, and then it becomes 'embodied''.¹³⁹

Another author worth mentioning in this lineage is Jeremy Lent, whose first book *The Patterning Instinct: A Cultural History of Humanity's Search for Meaning* (2017) tracks the genesis of Western abstraction and traces the relays between metaphor, perception, and social praxis.¹⁴⁰ Hunter-gatherers, he explains, 'viewed the natural world through the root metaphor of *giving parent*, which gave way to the agrarian metaphor of *ancestor to be propitiated*' and then both 'the Vedic and Greek traditions used the root metaphor of *high is good* to characterise the source of ultimate meaning as transcendent'.¹⁴¹ Lent gives a comprehensive overview of the process by which narrative networks reach a critical mass within a particular cultural discourse, and how they calcify into the hidden frameworks that sculpt human realities—from the collective beliefs of a society, to the individual attention of its denizens. Only by exposing these can we begin to make way for more flexible, fair, and varied sociocultural systems.

¹³⁷ David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-than-Human World* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), p. 41.

¹³⁸ Abram, *Sensuous*, p. 199.

¹³⁹ Patricia Damery, 'The Environmental Crisis and the Psyche: A Conversation with David Abram and Pat Damery', *Jung Journal*, 7.1 (2013), 104-19 (p. 108).

¹⁴⁰ Jeremy Lent, *The Patterning Instinct* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2017), Kindle edition, p. 204.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

1.8: SIGNIFICANCE

The modern West has been mass producing the same stories and melodies for too long. Between drug prohibition, language suppression, scientific fundamentalism, and an education system that prioritises uniformity, civilisations are subdued by oversimplicity and the illusion of certitude. History testifies to the potential for psychedelics to disrupt—if only temporarily—the autotuning that homogenises human experience. Imposing a parched taxonomical rhetoric onto psychedelic research for the sake of scientific ‘legitimation’ has parallels with colonisation—forcing diverse communities to conform with the conceptual-linguistic orthodoxies of the dominating culture. Psychedelics have the potential to modulate consciousness away from the usual protocols of being, knowing, and communicating. In most cases, however, these modulations cannot be comparably invoked in the individual’s linguistic or philosophical systems. Despite narratives that proclaim psychedelic reawakenings, I maintain that sustainable change at any scale—be it individual, social, or environmental—demands diversity and flexibility in more than just sensory perception. The Palanese cultivate contrast at all costs: *moksha* sessions are accompanied by other perceptual modalities, such as hypnosis, meditation, and sexual practices; multilingualism is accompanied by poetics; and their truths are contingent on context. As the Old Raja states it, ‘[n]othing short of everything will really do’ (p. 160).

Objectivist myths and abstracted modes of thought are not devoid of value. They merely require taming and rehabilitation. If a wild animal is seized from its habitat and confined to a cage, expressions of sympathy will generally default to the dispossessed creature, rather than the ecosystem out of which it was extracted; it is much easier for humans to empathise with a singular entity than with a complex bionetwork. Furthermore, the displacement of one animal can seem inconsequential when considered as an anonymous unit or fraction of an environment’s biomass. Quantity is often used as a measure for significance. Relatedly, most people in the Western world tend to align ‘higher’ with ‘superior’ (and ‘more’ with ‘better’). These frameworks can be disrupted by alternative metaphorical frames—for example, most people in that same demographic would not agree that high-pitched sounds are ‘superior’ to low-pitched sounds, or that the right-hand side of a piano is ‘better’ than the left-hand side.

Music metaphors will become a significant means of communicating the importance of context, for instance, the following notes are grouped according to

their pitch:

DD-EE-FF-GGGGGGGG-AAA-BB-CCCCCC
DD-EE-FF-GGGGGGGG-AAA-BB-CCCCCC

In the second iteration, the final C has been removed. Most listeners would not register this as a significant change. Here are the same notes in a different arrangement:

GGAGCB-GGAGDB-GGGECBA-FFECDC
GGAGCB-GGAGDB-GGGECBA-FFECD

This arrangement uses the contrast between the notes (the ‘intervals’) to create a pattern of tension and relief. This is in fact the melody line of ‘Happy Birthday’ played (almost) twice. In the second iteration, removing the final C—that falls on the climactic ‘you’—deprives the listener of the song’s resolution. Its absence will likely affect the balance of neighbouring systems too, since this particular C note, in this particular context, also functions as a cue for social behavioural systems that may involve involving clapping, cheering, wish making, or extinguishing fire. The significance and the potential impact of this note cannot be understood by measuring decibels, or by the fact that its frequency range is represented in twenty-four per cent of the melody, or even by its unique placement—in this example, as a globally recognised song, its absence at the end of the melody would be more conspicuous than its presence.

In music, context cannot be relegated; more is not better, and homogeny is not harmony. Inspired by both Pala and the resurgence of research into psychoactive substances, I deem psychedelics integral to the task of liquifying the basic metaphors that have congealed into repressive dogmas. However, this alone is not enough; equally important is having a means of establishing ‘novel’ metaphors. This thesis strives to invoke metaphorical multiplicity and narrative contrast, and so long as a ceaseless single note still signals an alarm, there is some hope.

1.9: STRUCTURE

Over the following six chapters, analyses of Huxley's work will give structure, direction, and pace to a broader exploration of the reciprocities between Language, Philosophy, and Perception, and I will apply these insights to the difficulties of psychedelic integration.

In the upcoming chapter, Chapter 2, I explore the consonance between *Island* and panpsychism. Although Pala's pedagogies and general cultural practices are tuned towards agnosticism, I suggest that panpsychism (or process philosophy) constitutes their closest Western philosophical ally. This will serve as a baseline for the rest of the thesis—as a platform from which to observe the practical benefits of a philosophy that ascribe sentience beyond the traditional Western delineation of organic life.

Chapter 3 reads Pala's pedagogical model through Iain McGilchrist's divided brain theory, which narrates human experience as the synthesis of two distinct styles of processing in the brain; the left hemisphere, which 'tends to deal more with pieces of information in isolation, and the right hemisphere, which tends towards the 'entity as a whole'.¹⁴² His seminal book, *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* (2009), argues that modernity has compromised the equilibrium between these modes, in favour of the left hemisphere.¹⁴³ McGilchrist is commensurate with Huxley in terms of his polymathic capacity to build bridges between what initially seem like disparate regions of knowledge. Together, Huxley and McGilchrist offer a wealth of insights into how we might unbind ourselves from the myths and dogmas that continue to jeopardise the balance of all life systems.

Many of these insights are based on language practices, and Chapter 4 explores the linguistic symptoms of an over dominant left hemisphere, and how these correspond with the biases of English. For perceptual flexibility (induced by psychedelics or otherwise) to function as a shield against dogma, it requires corresponding linguistic latitudes. I examine Pala's poetic practices and polylingualism, and also introduce the opening chapter of Huxley's *Hypothetical Novel*—the last novel that he worked on prior to his death, and in which he explores new techniques of linguistic defamiliarisation that are not elaborated elsewhere.

Alongside *moksha*'s consciousness 'expansion', the Palanese also learn to

¹⁴² Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), Kindle edition, p. 4.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 346.

contract their attention through hypnosis. In Chapter 5 I examine the ‘reducing valve’ metaphor for which Huxley is famed, but also pitch an extension which I call ‘hourglass attention’. Hourglass attention is my own original metaphor that emphasises the importance of training both the receptive and the projective elements of perception. This will be clarified through an examination of both Archera’s own work, and of her creative contributions to *Island*.

Chapter 6 considers Huxley’s satirical treatment of spirituality, and the consequences of dichotomising matter and spirit, a topic that speaks directly the more disquieting trajectories of contemporary psychedelic research. It uses the ensemble of Philosophy, Perception, and Language as a tool through which to expose and recast some of the prerequisites of individual and social transformation. Finally, Chapter 7, synthesises the main ideas of the thesis into a different allegorical form—the pitfalls of Western paradigms and the challenges of psychedelic integration are dramatised in a way that I hope lives up to the poetic creativity that is endorsed (but not necessarily implemented) by the chapters. Essentially, I respond to my own call for more context-based categorisation by developing an extensive metaphor to both illustrate and expediate the processes of recategorising Language, Perception, and Philosophy.

As a note on my use of *Island*, there are numerous exchanges and phrases that I refer to or cite three or four times. This is intentional and speaks to the structure of the thesis as a whole, which may be compared to a musical composition; voices enter one by one and either reiterate or develop a previous theme. For instance, in the next chapter, I introduce Whitehead as a relatively independent voice (in tandem only with Huxley), but he provides a bassline for the chapters that follow. Each chapter can be understood as a melody line designed to be heard alongside the others. It builds a complex harmony.

CHAPTER 2: PALANESE PANPSYCHISM

Dualism...Without it there can be no good literature. With it, there most certainly can be no good life—Huxley, Island (p. 215).

2.1: OPENING

In this chapter, I make the case that—although the Palanese have no institutional religion, nor do they subscribe to any singular ontology—panpsychism constitutes *Island*'s closest Western philosophical ally. However, Pala's panpsychist inclinations are not based on empirical evidence—rather, the Palanese select philosophical models according to their practical applications and outcomes. Furthermore, as their ontological allegiances are contextual, they do not refute alternatives outright. For this reason, Pala's philosophical pedagogies involve understanding of the consequences of various perspectives and cultivating the ability to shift between them.

In the original version of 'Notes on What's What', the Old Raja explains that '[d]ualism is disastrous for life; but in the world of letters it is God's gift to playwrights and story-tellers. Conflict is the raw material of the world's most moving fictions'.¹⁴⁴ As he explains, the 'relative poverty' of Palanese literature is the sign of a trade-off:

This is unfortunate—but a good less unfortunate than the individual and collective insanities of the heirs of Plato and Paul, of the Cartesians and the Marxists. Racine and Dostoevsky are wonderful, but they can be had only at a price and, so far as we're concerned, the price is decidedly too high.¹⁴⁵

Dualism is well-suited to fiction, but hazardous for general consumption. Alongside an analysis of Palanese ontologies, I will also show how process philosophy can elucidate the evolution of Huxley's approach to psychedelics, and, reciprocally, how

¹⁴⁴ Huxley, *Island* MS, box 52, fol. 9, p. 77.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*.

Island constitutes an accessible set of panpsychist pedagogies.

Although there are many iterations of panpsychism—also termed ‘process philosophy’, ‘philosophy of organism’ and ‘organismic philosophy’, which I use interchangeably—they share the view that consciousness is a fundamental and ubiquitous feature of reality. Or, in Thomas Nagel’s phrasing, that ‘the basic physical constituents of the universe have mental properties’.¹⁴⁶ Process philosophy recognises no qualitative distinction between ‘humans’ and ‘nature’; there are no dualistic divisions between matter and spirit, or body and mind. This perspective, which has been academically marginalised throughout the twentieth century, is becoming increasingly credible as more compatibilities with neurobiology and quantum physics come to light. Beyond scientific empiricism, there may be great ecological benefit to a metaphysic that ascribes sentience universally; it is more difficult to relegate the earth’s elements to their use-value if they are granted some degree of experience or awareness.

One of the most salient impediments to the propagation of panpsychist worldviews, however, is that the English language is saturated with dualist dichotomies and materialist metaphors. For this reason, I centre my discussion around Alfred North Whitehead, whose sophisticated articulation of process philosophy accounts for this complication.

Language and Philosophy are inseparable processes—neglecting their connection imprisons perception. Whitehead’s challenging (and often perplexing) expository style leads the reader against the grain of the dualist, materialist, semantic patterns that sculpt the Western psyche. As David Bohm clarifies, the problem is not only that ‘the subject-verb-object form of the language is continually implying an inappropriate division between things but, even more, that the ordinary mode of language tends very strongly to take its own function for granted’.¹⁴⁷ As outlined in the introductory chapter, objectivist assumptions permeate the English language; if categories are assumed to exist independently, then language becomes abstracted—a set of corresponding symbols. Through the lens of panpsychism, on the other hand, everything emerges from a collective, interactive, fundamental sentience. Thoughts, electrons, feelings, furniture, planets are not qualitatively different from one another, but represent local actualisations of a shared reality-process. However, as objectivist assumptions permeate the English language so thoroughly, there is an opening for Whitehead as an equalising force, especially (as I will discuss) in questions of psychedelic ‘ineffability’ and integration.

¹⁴⁶ Thomas Nagel, *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 181.

¹⁴⁷ David Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 40.

For structural clarity, I will initially contextualise the basic tenets of panpsychism with little reference to Huxley, establishing a philosophical foundation that will support the rest of this thesis. I argue that panpsychist pedagogies are paralysed without concurrent recourse to both poetics and alternate states of consciousness—and Pala responds to both of these calls. The rich history of Western panpsychism has been relegated into obscurity by religious dualism and mechanistic science, then further concealed by the fact that ‘it’ is not a singular metaphysic with a variety of subsets, but a network of related-yet-diverse models with different denominations.¹⁴⁸ In most contexts, panpsychism is best understood as a category, however, unless otherwise stated, I use ‘panpsychism’ and its most common synonyms to refer to Whitehead’s philosophical system.

After elaborating on the ontological climate of Western thought, I explore Whitehead’s relevance to psychedelic research, before reintroducing Huxley through his own convergence with Whitehead’s ideas and process philosophy more generally. Despite Huxley and Whitehead’s shared presence in contemporary psychedelic rhetoric, there has been no academic commentary on this intersection. I examine how Huxley’s engagement with panpsychism evolved throughout his career, only fully maturing after his experiences with mescaline and LSD. In the second half of the chapter, I discuss *Island*’s expression of panpsychist ideas, resituating the text as a practical guide to some key aspects of the theory. I also explore the symbiosis between panpsychism and psychedelic phenomenology; that is, how panpsychism can offer philosophical context to many psychedelic experiences, and how psychedelic experiences can invoke panpsychist modes of thought. Both theoretically and experientially, this is a strong foundation on which to accommodate a more interconnected, animated ecology from which to challenge the consequences of dualism and materialism.

Just as pitch, tempo, melody and harmony are not distinct from a piece of music, rhythm, meter, syntax and imagery are not distinct from a poem. In the same way, Whitehead’s rhetorical reprises are not distinct from his metaphysical system; language ‘and’ process philosophy are a unified event.

¹⁴⁸ David Skrbina, ‘Participation, Organization and Mind: Toward a Participatory Worldview’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Bath, 2001) in EThOS <<https://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.760771>> [accessed 17 August 2020].

2.2: THE PANPSYCHIST RENAISSANCE

Philosopher Philip Goff optimistically observes a ‘panpsychist renaissance’, particularly in the philosophy of mind and the science of consciousness, where ‘panpsychism has become a well-respected albeit minority position’.¹⁴⁹ Although he avoids their overt discussion, psychedelics are implicit in his comment that the notorious ecological aspirations of the 1960s cultural revolutionaries ‘fell flat without an intellectual worldview in which they made sense. Such a worldview—panpsychism—is now intellectually credible. There is every reason to hope that the new science of consciousness will lead to a new covenant with nature’.¹⁵⁰ The problem, as Goff traces, is that mainstream Western notions of ‘nature’ have been disproportionately influenced by inconsistent coalescences between materialism and dualism,¹⁵¹ following the successes of quantitative scientific methods over the last four centuries, materialism has flourished in parallel with ecclesiastical dualism. Although materialism, like panpsychism, has many interpretations, most materialists assume that all phenomena will eventually be quantifiable and explicable through material causation.

The dominance of dualism and materialism is becoming increasingly incongruent with the physical sciences, ecology, and studies of perception. Monica Gagliano, for example, is one of a growing community of biologists exploring plant cognition, specifically their capacities to learn, remember, and make ‘counterintuitive’ decisions. Her first book, *Thus Spoke the Plant* (2018), poetically documents her experiments on plant sentience, alongside the professional precarity of challenging the materialist orthodoxies which sanction the extractive, resource-based annihilation of our shared environment. Furthermore, to the chagrin of many academic peers, Gagliano credits her discoveries to the plants themselves, with whom she learned to communicate through *dietas* and ayahuasca ceremonies with the Shipibo in Peru. She laments that ‘[a]verting socio-ecological disaster now will

¹⁴⁹ Philip Goff, *Galileo’s Error: Foundations for a New Science of Consciousness* (London: Penguin, 2019), Kindle edition, p. 117.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 194-95.

¹⁵¹ Contemporary scholars such as Donna Haraway, Rosi Braidotti, Karen Barad, and Michael Marder represent a growing academic divergence from a mechanistic view of nature, particularly in the fields of eco-criticism, eco-phenomenology, and posthumanism. See, for example, Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* (London: Routledge, 1991); Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013); Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); and Marder, *Plant-Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013); ‘[I]f a hope for reversing the philosophical neglect of plants in the West and for overcoming the environmental crisis of which this neglect is a part is to stay alive, immanent (internal) criticism of the metaphysical tradition must become a *sine qua non* of any reflection on vegetal life’ (p. 6).

take a scientific revolution [...] a destruction of our reductionist and parochial approach to understanding life and the invention of whole new ways of understanding the world'.¹⁵² However, these ways need not be new—panpsychism is already established as a comprehensive and agnostic system through which to frame such a philosophical revolution.

Even the more environmentally conscientious psychedelic studies tend toward ontological negligence. For example, the correlation between psychedelics and environmentalism has recently been surveyed by Hannes Kettner and others.¹⁵³ Their study uses the term 'nature relatedness' to describe the feeling of enhanced connectivity to the natural world both during and following psychedelic experiences. From an analysis of the Imperial College study on psilocybin for depression, introduced in the previous chapter, they extrapolate that the connection between psychedelics and 'nature relatedness' is causative, rather than correlative.¹⁵⁴ Although this research undeniably carries ecological significance, the authors do not define their use of the term 'nature'; indeed, this is not a requirement in the scientific peer-review criteria.¹⁵⁵ In personal communication, one of the authors, ecologist Sam Gandy, clarified that 'nature' referred to the presence of 'diverse living organisms', such as plants, fungi, and animals. In contrast to the broader meaning of 'organism' in 'the philosophy of organism', Gandy was referring to cell-based life forms, and the standard Western biological criteria that determines whether something is or isn't 'alive'—often taught to schoolchildren through the mnemonic acronym 'MRS GREN' (Movement, Respiration, Sensation, Growth, Reproduction, Excretion, and Nutrition). The panpsychist prerequisite for 'alive' is much shorter, with only the 'S' of sensation. With MRS GREN at the pedagogical foundation of biology, the definition of a living organism is presupposed in scientific research. However, this is not an ontological truth, but a particular philosophical perspective.

While presuming the definitions of 'nature' or 'living organisms' may be general practice in scientific publishing, it is conspicuously more problematic in the study of psychedelic experiences, which tend to relax the weighting of one's habitual belief systems.¹⁵⁶ Furthermore, the 'connectivity' aspect of Kettner's article is also rendered ambiguous; the authors reiterate that patients in Imperial's depression study

¹⁵² Monica Gagliano, *Thus Spoke the Plant* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2018), p. x.

¹⁵³ Hannes Kettner and others, 'From Egoism to Ecoism: Psychedelics Increase Nature Relatedness in a State-Mediated and Context-Dependent Manner', *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 16.24 (2019), 1-23.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁵⁵ Gagliano, *Thus Spoke*, pp. 65-66.

¹⁵⁶ Robin Carhart-Harris and Karl Friston, 'REBUS and the Anarchic Brain: Toward a Unified Model of the Brain Action of Psychedelics', *Pharmacological Reviews*, 71.3 (2019), 316-44.

reported enhanced ‘nature relatedness’. However, if depression is characterised by feelings of disconnection, and these were successfully diminished by the psilocybin treatment, then it is difficult to distinguish between the alleviation of depressive symptoms and the augmentation of nature relatedness.

Indeed, pathologising depressive symptoms is somewhat contradictory under a materialist paradigm. Materialists generally hold that consciousness either constitutes, or is the result of, neurological activity—in either case, the brain and the mind are inseparable from one another, but removed from everything ‘else’. In this model, a sense of isolation simply reflects an ultimate truth; a feeling of disconnection from ‘nature’ cannot be logically pathologised in a system that distinguishes human consciousness as exceptional. If a deep sense of separation resonated with a fundamental truth, then it seems incongruent that its embodied realisation would induce suffering. Kettner’s study celebrates the potential for psychedelics to diminish the sense of an isolated ego (counter to the ontologies of materialism) while simultaneously assuming a materialist distinction between ‘organic’ and ‘inorganic’ natural forms. I am not suggesting that this is incorrect, only highlighting how an enriched education in alternative philosophies might encourage researchers to outline their philosophical predilections, rather than reflexively fortifying the presuppositions of cultural consensus.

2.2.1: PSYCHEDELIC PANPSYCHISM

In terms of a ‘psychedelic panpsychism’, insightful work has emerged from philosophers such as Peter Sjöstedt-Hughes and Matthew Segall, both of whom have inspired many aspects of this project. Sjöstedt-Hughes’s *Noumenautics: Metaphysics – Meta-ethics – Psychedelics* (2015) is an articulate exploration of how psychedelics have informed some of the most impenetrable philosophical questions, and a full chapter is devoted to the resonances between Whitehead’s work and psychedelic phenomenology.¹⁵⁷ While this represents the most in-depth analysis of this intersection to date, it is not the first time that Whitehead’s work has been applied to psychedelic discourse.

Terence McKenna, one of the most influential thinkers in Western psychedelic history, esteemed Whitehead’s work as the most eloquent culmination

¹⁵⁷ Peter Sjöstedt-H, *Noumenautics: Metaphysics – Meta-ethics – Psychedelics* (Cornwall: Psychedelic Press, 2015).

of the organismic philosophical tradition and named it as his central inspiration.¹⁵⁸ Likewise, his brother Dennis McKenna likens panpsychism to animism; ‘in an animistic culture the rocks are alive, everything is alive and intelligent. This isn’t that far from Whitehead’s idea, which was very much about this: everything is an organism, the electron is an organism’.¹⁵⁹ Indeed, Whitehead is often used as a touchstone for animist concepts. As both panpsychism and animism constitute extensive philosophical categories, I will not attempt to qualify McKenna’s comparison, but rather elaborate on how panpsychism can, and often does, function as an translator for alternative ontologies.

Author and biologist Rupert Sheldrake endorses the potential for panpsychism to dismantle Western science’s dogmatic dichotomisation of mind and matter. His landmark book, *The Science Delusion: Freeing the Spirit of Enquiry* (2012), refers to Whitehead over twenty times in defence of this position, and has no doubt contributed to Whitehead’s resurgence within the psychedelic research community.¹⁶⁰ Sheldrake’s theory of morphic resonance, which suggests that self-organising systems can access and learn from the memories/experiences of similar systems, also coheres with the ubiquitous sentience postulated by panpsychism. Furthermore, morphic resonance is not limited to MRS GREN’s definition of a living organism, but equally applies to both the microcosmic (atoms, molecules, crystals) and the macrocosmic (ecosystems, plants, galaxies) scales.¹⁶¹ According to Sheldrake, ‘[a]t all levels of nature there’s a kind of mind, psyche, or some level of consciousness’, and his only reservation about panpsychism is his feeling that most of its proponents ‘don’t go far enough’.¹⁶² With this he is referring to the tendency for panpsychists to foreground microcosmic sentience as a means of explaining human consciousness, while neglecting the implication that macrocosmic systems

¹⁵⁸ Terence McKenna and Dennis McKenna, *The Invisible Landscape* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), p. 7; New Media Productions, *The Foundation of Terence McKenna’s Ideas - Alfred North Whitehead’s Concrescence and Process*, YouTube, 4 December 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BdpT-du_GzA> [accessed 19 August 2020].

¹⁵⁹ D McKenna, pp. 90-91.

¹⁶⁰ Rupert Sheldrake, *The Science Delusion: Freeing the Spirit of Enquiry* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2012), Kindle edition. This publication is also the basis of his famously ‘banned’ 2013 TED talk, which received a torrent of publicity that only brought further attention to Sheldrake’s concerns over what constitutes scientific legitimacy – see TED Staff, ‘The Debate about Rupert Sheldrake’s Talk’, *TEDBlog*, 19 March 2013, <<https://blog.ted.com/the-debate-about-rupert-sheldrakes-talk/>> [accessed 22 September 2021]. The video soared from a modest view count of 35,000 to 5 million subsequent to its removal from the official TED platform – see ‘TED “Bans” the Science Delusion’, *Rupert Sheldrake Official Website*, <<https://www.sheldrake.org/reactions/tedx-whitechapel-the-banned-talk>> [accessed 22 September 2021].

¹⁶¹ Sheldrake, *Delusion*, p. 127.

¹⁶² Rupert Sheldrake, ‘Morphic Resonance, Psychedelic Experience, and Collective Memory’, in *DMT Dialogues*, pp. 205-42 (p. 206); The Institute of Art and Ideas, *What is Panpsychism?*, YouTube, September 2019, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B7KaNnFij2Q>> [accessed 19 August 2020].

may also enjoy a form of integrated awareness.

Exemplifying Sheldrake's observation, theoretical physicist Roger Penrose and anaesthesiologist Stuart Hameroff use Whitehead to contextualise their pioneering 'Orch OR' theory of consciousness. As they explain, 'Orch OR perhaps aligns most closely with Alfred North Whitehead [...] who viewed mental activity as a process of "occasions", spatio-temporal quanta, each endowed—usually on a very low level, with mentalistic characteristics'.¹⁶³ Penrose and Hameroff designed an experiment to demonstrate how a form of consciousness at the quantum level may be 'orchestrated' by microtubules in the brain, which, at a certain level of complexity, facilitate self-reflexive awareness.

For panpsychists this is known as the 'combination' problem. In terms of the theories of consciousness, for (most) dualists the mystery is framed by how immaterial minds and material matter relate, and for (most) materialists the mystery is how consciousness emerges from unconscious processes. In both cases there is a qualitative rift between mind and matter. Exemplified by the Orch OR hypothesis, panpsychists frame the enigma of consciousness through a spectrum of complexity; the combination problem asks how simpler forms of consciousness manifest more complex forms of consciousness. Like any theory that implicates the 'fundamentals' of experience, Hameroff and Penrose have incited much criticism. However, my concern is not the veracity of their work, but rather how Whitehead is selected as their exponent of a non-materialist, non-dualist metaphysic.

Elsewhere, Hameroff has suggested that the 'expanded consciousness' associated with psychedelics may relate to microtubule activity in the brain.¹⁶⁴ While I cannot assess this empirically, the phenomenological implications are compelling. Hameroff's comment supports the idea that psychedelic neuroscience cannot be divorced from subjective experience, echoing Francisco Varela's 'neurophenomenology'—the first systematic outline of a practical phenomenological approach to the science of consciousness.¹⁶⁵ This is important in the context of psychedelics, whose effects are often so conspicuous that they nullify the double-blind placebo models on which science currently depends.

¹⁶³ Roger Penrose and Stuart Hameroff, 'Consciousness in the Universe. A Review of the Orch OR Theory', *Physics of Life Reviews*, 11.1 (2014), 39-78 (p. 71).

¹⁶⁴ Stuart Hameroff, 'Consciousness, Microtubules and 'ORCH-OR'', *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 21 (2014), 126-53 (p. 147).

¹⁶⁵ Francisco Varela, 'Neurophenomenology: A Methodological Remedy for the Hard Problem', *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 3.4 (1996), 330-49.

2.2.2: PHILOSOPHICAL PLURALITY

Western science attends to measurement, and quantifiability presumes ontological objectivity. The belief that the laws of nature are mechanical and immutable has led to the staggering feats of technology that have sculpted our world. However, aligning predictability and manipulability with objectivity inevitably leads to ontological singularity. If one assumes an objective reality that exists irrespective of subjective experience, then multiple perspectives create distortion—this characterises monophasia. Whitehead, on the other hand, held that philosophy ought to value and incorporate multiple modes of awareness, due to his sense that vision petrified the world’s dynamism.

Theologian John B. Cobb Jr sees deep resonances between Whitehead’s panpsychism and psychedelic experiences—the presence of a ‘deep relationality that is not given to us in [unaltered] sight’.¹⁶⁶ This is the foundation of polyphasia, not necessarily implying that ‘normal’ vision is false, but emphasising that different sensory modalities emphasise different aspects of reality. Although the first wave of psychedelic research gained momentum subsequent to Whitehead’s death, Cobb Jr maintains that they would have ‘obviously’ been included in his work.¹⁶⁷ Likewise, decades prior to the contemporary wave of psychedelic enquiry, Leonard Gibson suggested that a Whiteheadian scheme of interpretation for the LSD experience might help to elucidate the ‘arbitrary disjunction’ between ‘ordinary and extraordinary experience’.¹⁶⁸

As introduced in the previous chapter, psychedelics have been ill-suited to the ‘magic bullet’ paradigm, which pitches medical treatment as an occurrence between a targeted drug and a physiological mechanism in a passive patient. As I explore in Chapter 5, a substance like psilocybin does not ‘reset’ the depressed brain as though it were a glitching machine; rather, its benefits are inseparable from the phenomenological experiences of the individual prior to, during, and following its ‘administration’. While fMRI technology has contributed to our biochemical understanding of psychedelic molecules, there is no one-to-one correlation between neurological activity and subjective experience, as materialism holds. With its emphasis on sensation, panpsychism coheres with an approach that foregrounds

¹⁶⁶ John B. Cobb Jr, ‘How Exceptional Experience Can Help Save the World’, *Psychedelics Today*, podcast, 26 March 2019, <<https://psychedelictoday.com/2019/03/26/john-cobb-how-exceptional-experience-can-help-save-the-world/>> [accessed 23 May 2019].

¹⁶⁷ Ibid..

¹⁶⁸ Leonard Gibson, ‘The LSD Experience: A Whiteheadian Interpretation’, *Process Studies*, 7.2 (1977), 97-107 (p. 97).

phenomenology—an approach that does not neglect the uniquely contextual and embodied qualities of experience. For this reason, philosophical plurality may be integral to the future of psychedelic research, and vice versa.

Developing these observations, psychedelic research faces two entwined obstacles that are scarcely signposted: the need to evolve beyond the myopic objectivism that precludes philosophical plurality from science, and, simultaneously, how to align experiential multiplicities with appropriate linguistic frameworks.

2.2.3: LABYRINTHS OF DISCLOSURE

Sjöstedt-Hughes shares my conviction that psychedelic ineffability is overstated, and compares it to how Whitehead’s process-based metaphysic effectively required a new language.¹⁶⁹ I will develop this by discussing not only Whitehead’s linguistic choices, but also his pedagogies relating to language. Whitehead commented that his ‘philosophy of organism seems to approximate more to some strains of Indian or Chinese thought, than to Western Asiatic or European thought’.¹⁷⁰ As Alan Watts has expressed, there is an inevitable impracticality in transmitting alternative thought systems, such as Taoism or Zen, as they are not only embedded in their respective linguistic and social contexts, but also utilise different pedagogical methods; whereas Eastern spiritual teachers encourage their students to learn the hard way, Western teachers work on the principle that everything ‘must be done to inform and assist the student so as to make his mastery of the subject as easy as possible’.¹⁷¹ The advantage of Whitehead’s panpsychism, however, is that it predominantly evolved out of twentieth-century science, in opposition to its metaphysical dogmas—a terrain that has changed little in the last century. Indeed, although scholars have drawn insightful parallels between Whitehead and Eastern thought, his primary philosophical influence is generally agreed to be William Wordsworth.¹⁷²

I do not foreground this heritage to imply that Western cultures ought to prioritise Western philosophical lineages, but to revisit the issue of translation, Whitehead was sensitive to the inseparability between belief systems and language;

¹⁶⁹ Peter Sjöstedt-H, ‘The Philosophy of Psychedelics’, *The Third Wave*, podcast, 7 May 2017, <<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/the-third-wave/id1200537009>> [accessed 22 August 2020].

¹⁷⁰ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, ed. by David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: The Free Press, 2014), p. 7.

¹⁷¹ Alan Watts, *The Joyous Cosmology: Adventures in the Chemistry of Consciousness* (New York: Vintage, 1965), p. 33.

¹⁷² Ming Dong Gu and Jianping Guo, ‘How Can We Cross the Intellectual Divide between East and West?’, *Philosophy East and West*, 65.1 (2015), 298-315; Mary Wyman, ‘Whitehead’s Philosophy of Science in the Light of Wordsworth’s Poetry’, *Philosophy of Science*, 23.4 (1956), 283-96 (p. 283).

‘Every philosophy is tinged with the colouring of some secret imaginative background, which never emerges explicitly into its train of reasoning’.¹⁷³ Whitehead, born and educated in England, was acutely aware of the metaphysical biases of the English language, and much of his philosophical exposition is directed towards dismantling its dualistic predilections.

Plato’s cosmology incited a cascade of dualism and essentialism that would structure European thought about humans and their place in the universe for millennia.¹⁷⁴ Manifest in nearly all aspects of Western languages and cultures, dualism and materialism have facilitated unprecedented advances in the physical sciences, but at the cost of uninhibited extraction and exploitation; if the world is devoid of sentience, then meaning can be attributed according to utility. In David Skrbina’s words, these philosophical presuppositions demarcate the human mind as a ‘Great Exception to the natural order of things, either as a completely spiritual entity (for dualists) or as an astonishingly unique act of emergence (for materialists).’¹⁷⁵ Whitehead not only resituates the human as continuous with the natural order, but also responds directly to his Western predecessors.

Due to their rhetorical style, Whitehead’s expositions evade easy abridgement. As Isabelle Stengers puts it, *Process and Reality* (1929)—Whitehead’s most detailed articulation of panpsychism—is composed of a ‘labyrinth of propositions, deliberately fashioned to “induce” the “sheer disclosure” proper to a speculative regime of thought’.¹⁷⁶ He inducts the reader through a measured process of replacing familiar terms with adjacent neologisms—first narrating a panpsychist concept through everyday language, then subsequently coining a term that captures the organismic nuances of his description. The neologism is intended to minimise the established connotations of conversant expressions. For example, ‘prehension’ denotes a particular understanding of ‘perception’, and ‘superject’ underscores a particular rendering of ‘subject’. Paradoxically, neologisms are also supplemented with conventionalities, such as terms like ‘feeling’. After a dense and detailed exposition of ‘positive prehensions’, he reiterates that these events are synonymous with his use of the word ‘feelings’; ‘[a] feeling—i.e., a positive prehension—is essentially a transition effecting a concrescence’.¹⁷⁷ This is a rhetorical style that both

¹⁷³ Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (New York: The Free Press, 1967), p. 7.

¹⁷⁴ Lent, p. 157.

¹⁷⁵ Skrbina, pp. 132-33.

¹⁷⁶ Isabelle Stengers, *Thinking with Whitehead: A Free and Wild Creation of Concepts*, trans. by Michael Chase (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), p. 448.

¹⁷⁷ Whitehead, *Process*, pp. 220-21. For more details on the term ‘feeling’ see Melanie Sehgal, ‘Diffractional Propositions: Reading Alfred North Whitehead with Donna Haraway and Karen Barad’, *Parallax*, 20.3 (2014), 188-201, where she describes the value of using terms

clarifies and confounds.

In the example of ‘prehension’, the term is intended to temper the dualist assumption that the act of perception is qualitatively distinct from the object perceived. Whitehead offers a more conventional elucidation in an earlier work, where he explains that ‘the awkward term prehension [...] was introduced to signify the essential unity of an event, namely, the event as one entity and not as a mere assemblage of parts or of ingredients’.¹⁷⁸ The self-reflexive refrains of *Process and Reality*—simultaneously crystalline and cryptic—inseparably merge with its philosophical content. Although, following Whitehead’s mode of ‘sheer disclosure’, the term ‘merge’ is evidently inadequate as it imposes a dichotomy between style and content.

To reiterate the introduction and justify the brevity, the network of ideas in this outline constitutes a contextual schema that will inform the rest of the thesis. The themes introduced will be developed alongside Huxley’s work, psychedelics, and ecology in the remainder of this chapter and the subsequent chapters. I begin this polyphony by exploring Huxley’s panpsychist inclinations.

2.3: HUXLEY’S PROCESS

In Mark Taylor’s article on Henri Bergson and Pala, he charts Huxley’s Bergsonian citations from *Those Barren Leaves*, published in 1925, until *Island*, in order to show how the Western philosophical roots of Huxley’s ideas are often overlooked.¹⁷⁹ This is an insightful model on which I will expand—beginning with a discussion of Huxley’s early criticisms of Whitehead, and then tracking how this transmuted, ultimately supporting my reading of *Island* as a panpsychist pedagogy.

2.3.1: EARLY CRITICISM

In his 1927 essay, ‘A Note on Dogma’, Huxley criticises Whitehead’s commentary on religious experience in *Religion in the Making* (1926) on several grounds: his desire to rationalise spirituality; his lack of attention to the diversity of religious

that are simultaneously general and specific. As the current discussion pertains to semantic pedagogies, I have opted to exclude close readings of Whitehead’s lexicon.

¹⁷⁸ Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (New York: The Free Press, 1967), p. 72.

¹⁷⁹ M Taylor, p. 362.

experience; and his tendency to oversimplify.¹⁸⁰ In the first instance, Huxley's reading of 'rationality' does not account for Whitehead's lateral rhetoric; Whitehead's use of rationalism is not a reduction to logic or objectivism, but the expression of an intuition that can be 'divorced from dialectics'.¹⁸¹ True to his *modus operandi*, this is admittedly an unconventional application, and one to which Huxley responds that '[e]ach person will choose the rationalisation which suits his prevailing or passing mood'.¹⁸² From this initial misreading, Huxley holds Whitehead's position to be one that dismisses subjective diversity. Contrariwise, Whitehead summarises religion as 'the art and theory of the internal state of man, so far as it depends on the man himself'.¹⁸³

There is a dissonance between Huxley's critique and his phenomenological perspective here; he suggests that since men have identical sensations, their reactions are the source of variety—'to these, for all practical purposes, identical sensations, individuals react in the most unexpectedly diverse ways'.¹⁸⁴ This proposition had shifted considerably by the time he wrote *Island*, which devotes several pages to describing 'private pains' and the impossibility of passing such an experience 'from one centre of pain to another centre of pain' (p. 264). However, in the essay under discussion, he takes sensory equivalence for granted and uses it to assume the possibility of temporary human truths in scientific theory—a possibility that he does not extend to religious experience.¹⁸⁵ This ironically reproduces the position to which he objects in his misreading of Whitehead—that of discounting the mysterious medley of subjective experience. While Huxley emphasises that '[t]he religious experience of mankind is diverse to the point of self-contradiction', he attributes this to the array of possible reactions and interpretations, rather than to potential divergences at the sensorial interface.¹⁸⁶

Whitehead's project was to immanentise spirituality by considering which aspects of religious feeling might best integrate into 'ordinary' perception. He gives two examples of religious feeling, one in which the ego dissolves and one in which it remains intact, notably during deity encounters—though, to the latter, he remarks that 'a rational [divorced from dialectics] religion must not confine itself to moments

¹⁸⁰ Aldous Huxley, 'A Note on Dogma', in *Proper Studies* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1927), pp. 192-206.

¹⁸¹ Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1927), p. 46.

¹⁸² Huxley, 'Dogma', p. 195.

¹⁸³ Whitehead, *Religion*, p. 48.

¹⁸⁴ Huxley, 'Dogma', p. 197.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

of emotional excitement'.¹⁸⁷ Whitehead sees greater concurrence in the accounts of religious experiences that are not inhabited by entities, and reasons that the more 'pantheistic' experiences are also more frequent and accessible, sharing a general consensus 'in favour of a rightness in things'.¹⁸⁸ There is a certain poetry to how closely this echoes Huxley's post-psychedelic understanding of religious experience as a fundamental sense of 'All Rightness'.¹⁸⁹ During Huxley's final years he remarked to Huston Smith that it was 'a bit embarrassing [...] to have been concerned with the human problem all one's life and find at the end that one has no more to offer by way of advice than 'Try to be a little kinder'.¹⁹⁰ In this early analysis, however, after an ironic series of analytical oversimplifications, Huxley concludes that '[t]he beautifully rational simplicity of Professor Whitehead's theology is the chief argument against its validity. Nothing so simple and so rational can possibly be true'.¹⁹¹

Huxley reinforces this critique in a letter to his brother Julian, also written in 1927, expressing how he 'can't see that there's anything to distinguish [Whitehead's] rationalising of religious emotions from those of anyone else'.¹⁹² However, a less combative reading of *Religion in the Making* occurs a decade later in his essay collection *Ends and Means* (1937). Here he questions Whitehead's scale of evidence and socio-cultural conclusions, but there is no mention of oversimplification or his ontological foundations. On the contrary, Huxley approves of how recent 'investigators, trained in the discipline of mathematical physics' are developing systems which suggest that 'all the apparently independent existents in the world were built up of a limited number of patterns of identical units of energy' and is clearly convinced by the model that 'all apparently independent existents are in fact interdependent'.¹⁹³ By this time, *Process and Reality* had been published and Whitehead irrefutably constitutes one of the 'investigators' with whom Huxley vouches philosophical allegiance.

In *Time Must Have a Stop* (1944), which Huxley deemed his finest and most important work until *Island*, there are clear indications that his esteem for Whitehead was evolving. He preaches the merits of ('Professor') Whitehead's organismic philosophy through Paul De Vries—a sharp and progressive educator who

¹⁸⁷ Whitehead, *Religion*, p. 43.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 55, 50.

¹⁸⁹ Archera, *Timeless*, p. 96.

¹⁹⁰ Huston Smith, 'Aldous Huxley – A Tribute', *The Psychedelic Review*, 3.1 (1964), 264-65 (pp. 264-65).

¹⁹¹ Huxley, 'Dogma', p. 206.

¹⁹² *Letters of Aldous Huxley*, p. 284.

¹⁹³ Aldous Huxley, 'Beliefs' in *Ends and Means* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1946), pp. 252-302 (p. 295).

juxtaposes the coarse and conservative Eustace Barnack.¹⁹⁴ De Vries, representing Huxley's intellectual counterpart, celebrates the Einsteinian revolution for having 'integrated mind into the fabric of Nature' and for having 'put an end for ever to the Victorians' nightmare universe of infinitesimal billiard balls', philosophically situating himself somewhere between idealism and panpsychism.¹⁹⁵ De Vries plans to establish 'an international clearing house of ideas' with a 'general staff of scientific-religious-philosophic synthesis for the entire planet'; like Huxley, he views himself as an interpreter between disciplines and presents Whitehead's organismic viewpoint as an exemplar of such a collaborative synthesis, avowing its significance and lauding it as 'one of the great bridge-ideas connecting one universe of discourse with another'.¹⁹⁶

Furthermore, in another letter to Julian from the same era (26 June 1943) Huxley discusses the revolutionary potential of 'teaching all men the habit of analysing the language they not only use, but actually swim in, like fishes in the sea'; he clarifies that 'no language spoken in the ordinary way by ordinary people is capable of expressing the fact [...] that the universe is a continuum; that there is no such thing as simple location, in Whitehead's phrase'.¹⁹⁷ These references bear the seeds of the bridge-building sessions and semantic pedagogies that characterise Palanese education.

2.3.2: LATER PRAISE

In a letter to Huxley in 1956, Osmond uses a quotation from Whitehead's *Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effect* (1927) to vindicate his desire to study psychedelics with society's most gifted individuals. He cites Whitehead's suggestion that low-grade characteristics should be studied in low-grade organisms, whereas high-grade characteristics ought to be studied at their first manifestation in high-grade organisms. Osmond applies this to his opinion (shared by Smythies) that '[t]o study psychedelics on immature, inadequate or sick people is to lose most if not all of their great and indeed extraordinary possibilities', and explains that 'we had recognised this intuitively but Whitehead's phrase shows us that our hunch was in keeping with a general principle'.¹⁹⁸ This is a skewed reading of Whitehead, who

¹⁹⁴ Archera, *Timeless*, p. 274; Aldous Huxley, *Time Must Have a Stop* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1944), p. 89.

¹⁹⁵ Huxley, *Time*, p. 87.

¹⁹⁶ Huxley, *Time*, pp. 87, 89.

¹⁹⁷ *Letters of Aldous Huxley*, p. 491.

¹⁹⁸ Huxley and Osmond, pp. 275-76.

uses the ‘low’ and ‘high’ gradations to refer to organismic complexity, not health or intellect. Although misguided, it reveals Whitehead’s status among this small but influential research community—a veneration that clearly endured, with Osmond referring to the ‘excellent dialogues’ of Whitehead in March 1961.¹⁹⁹

After the fire that destroyed Huxley and Archera’s home in May of the same year, Huxley wished to replace the contents of his perished library, and Whitehead was included in his list of requests from Harper & Brothers’ trade list.²⁰⁰ Huxley’s 1963 essay ‘Has Man’s Conquest of Space Increased or Diminished His Stature?’, which explores Western reductionism and its ecologically estranging effects, also demonstrates his augmented deference to Whitehead. He aligns the newer ideas of modern organicism with Mahayana Buddhism (the school of Buddhist thought that is applied in Pala) and names Whitehead as one of its exemplars.²⁰¹ Huxley praises this worldview, translating Pierre Teilhard de Chardin on how this perspective ‘towards which the new Physics and the new Philosophy seem to be converging’ suggests that the Mind represents ‘the state of higher organisation assumed within ourselves and around us by that indefinable something which we may call, for lack of a better phrase, “the stuff of the universe”’.²⁰² This perspective contextualises Dr Robert’s sense that the brain ‘transmits consciousness’ (p. 168). Although Pala has no organised religion or belief system, this is the foundational framework through which most of the Palanese understand the *moksha* experience.

In the essay, Huxley also underscores the practical significance of the organismic outlook; ‘to those whose world-view is dualistic and reductionist the ‘conquest’ of an infinity of blank space and mindless matter will bring an ever more oppressive sense of human loneliness, insignificance and futility’.²⁰³ Pala is Huxley’s answer to the dualism and reductionism that pervades Western praxis; understanding the panpsychist substructure of Pala clarifies Huxley’s sense of the philosophical prerequisites of a better world.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 477.

²⁰⁰ Aldous Huxley, Photocopy of book list for Mrs. David Kahn. Huxley papers, box 81, fol. 10. Bedford reproduces a selection of book requests that Huxley sent to Lucille Kahn, based on a letter in Grover Smith’s collection (Sybille Bedford, *Aldous Huxley, A Biography Volume Two: The Turning Points 1939-1963* (London: Quartet Books, 1974), pp. 302-04.) Smith provides an annotation explaining that ‘a number of books which Huxley had lost by fire were replaced, during the next months, through the zealous efforts of Lucille Kahn’ (*Letters of Aldous Huxley*, p. 918). However, the published correspondence around this request appears to be incomplete; the list reproduced in the archive source contains extra titles, with Whitehead amongst them.

²⁰¹ Aldous Huxley, ‘Has Man’s Conquest of Space Increased or Diminished His Stature?’, in *The Great Ideas Today*, ed. by Robert M. Hutchins and Mortimer J. Adler (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc, 1963), pp. 21-33 (p. 32).

²⁰² Ibid., p. 32.

²⁰³ Ibid., p. 33.

2.3.3: PANPSYCHISM BY PROXY

Before furnishing my reading of Pala as (by and large) a panpsychist community, there are several more points of contact between Huxley and the philosophy of organism that warrant mentioning. The UCLA archive contains a sample of his (post-fire) book collection, and as he almost always read with a pen many of the titles contain valuable marginalia, such as annotations and highlighted passages, through which to glean a more comprehensive understanding of his intellectual incitements.

Several volumes in this collection were useful for tracking his interactions with process philosophy, most notably Herbert Dingle's *Science and Human Experience* (1931) with its accompanying annotations. Dingle, who studied with Whitehead for several years, was a physicist with a passion for natural philosophy. Like Whitehead and Huxley, he was committed to challenging the disciplinary divides around and within Western science. Echoing Whitehead's oft quoted '[b]iology is the study of larger organisms; whereas physics is the study of smaller organisms', Dingle suggests that 'the boundaries which separate physical, biological and psychological sciences are only temporary conveniences'.²⁰⁴ Huxley has highlighted this passage in his copy of the text, which reflects one of the foundational principles of Palanese education; '[n]ever give children a chance of imagining that anything exists in isolation' (p. 260).

Dingle suggests that experiential diversity is the reason why 'attempts to define such postulates as Beauty, Goodness, Humour, and the like, have always failed; we have almost as many definitions as we have persons capable of expressing their individual experiences'.²⁰⁵ This is reiterated almost verbatim in *Island's* 'Elementary Applied Philosophy' class, in which the children are instructed to pinch themselves, 'to an accompaniment of giggles, of *ais* and *ows*', before enquiring whether they were able to feel the pain of the person beside them (pp. 263-64). They affirm that they could not, to which the teacher responds:

It looks as though there were twenty-three distinct and separate pains. Twenty-three in this one room. Nearly three thousand million of them in the whole world. Plus the pains of all the animals [...] And notice this: there's only one public word, 'pain', for three thousand million private experiences. (p. 264)

²⁰⁴ Whitehead, *Science*, p. 129; Herbert Dingle, *Science and Human Experience* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1931), p. 13.

²⁰⁵ Dingle, p. 96.

This is a pedagogical reaction to the idea of a singular, Platonic form of pain in which all beings participate. As discussed, the Platonic realm of forms weighs heavy on the Western concept of categories; Beauty, Justice, Love, Circles, for example, are often deemed to exist beyond their experiential manifestations. The Palanese resist Platonism due to its penchant for abstraction; in Dr Robert's philosophical diagnosis of the Western world—'all of you are still Platonists. You worship the word and abhor matter' (p. 181). Huxley's ability to transpose philosophical enigmas into simple anti-dogmatic pedagogies corroborates *Island's* enduring relevance.

There are further examples in this annotated collection that reveal Huxley's exposure to Whitehead, though I mention these only briefly as they pertain to topics covered more comprehensively either in later chapters, or by other scholars. For instance, in his copy of I. J. Good's *The Scientist Speculates* (1962), a compendium of challenges to the ideologies of Western science, Huxley has marked a section in which Michael Polanyi (chemist, economist, philosopher, and polymath) mentions Whitehead in the context of the West's inability to find a shared language for different scales of reality: '[t]he higher level is unaccountable in terms of its particulars'.²⁰⁶ Another example can be found in Huxley's copy of Eric Bentley's *A Century of Hero Worship* (1957), where his marginalia disclose a particular interest in the intersection between Whitehead, William James and Romanticism.²⁰⁷ As Neşe Devenot has produced several rich discussions on this topic, I only wish to emphasise that I share Devenot's vision of a more poetic future for psychedelics and philosophy.²⁰⁸ Having outlined Huxley's evolving reverence for Whitehead, I turn to the panpsychist pedagogies of Pala and how they pertain to contemporary psychedelic integration.

²⁰⁶ Michael Polanyi, 'Clues to an Understanding of Mind and Body', in *The Scientist Speculates: An Anthology of Partly-Baked Ideas*, ed. by I. J. Good. (New York: Basic Books, 1962), pp. 71-78 (p. 71).

²⁰⁷ Eric Bentley, *A Century of Hero Worship* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), p. 259.

²⁰⁸ Neşe Devenot, 'Altered States/Other Worlds: Romanticism, Nitrous Oxide, and the Literary Prehistory of Psychedelia', (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 2015) in ProQuest <<https://repository.upenn.edu/dissertations/AAI3722655>> [accessed 26 August 2020]; Neşe Devenot, 'Aldous Huxley's New Romanticisms: Reading Blake And Wordsworth After Mescaline', delivered at *Breaking Convention IV* (University of Greenwich, 30 June – 2 July 2017), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EXq_kB6Npq8> [accessed 8 August 2020].

2.4: PALA & THE PILLARS OF PANPSYCHISM

The nature of Whitehead's philosophical-linguistic endeavour justifies deep etymological and contextual reflection, far beyond the scale of this project. For this discussion, a basic sketch of some of process philosophy's core principles will suffice. I have selected various quotations from Whitehead's *Process and Reality* (1929), *Science and the Modern World* (1925), and a later publication, *Modes of Thought* (1944). The latter two are useful as they expound many of the concepts articulated in *Process and Reality*, only without the profuse, mercurial interjections. Although I maintain that Whitehead's poetic pedagogies are inseparable from his philosophy of organism, the plainer rhetoric of his other works remains useful in expository contexts.

2.4.1: FEELINGS AS FUNDAMENTAL

For Whitehead, 'feeling' is the fundamental element of the cosmos; in *Modes of Thought*, he advocates that we 'conceive mental operations as among the factors which make up the constitution of nature'.²⁰⁹ However, this is not limited to the feelings that actualise into conscious experience—logical possibilities, which he terms 'eternal objects', are also implicated within the fabric of reality. Furthermore, we do not invent possibilities, but rather actualise them into 'drops of experience', or 'actual occasions'. As Segall elucidates, '[a]ctual occasions of experience are not determined by the structure of space-time; rather, the structure of space-time is an emergent product of the experience of actual occasions'.²¹⁰ According to panpsychism, consciousness is not a passive phenomenon, but the active constituent of a reality in process. This is a coherent contender for the metaphysical foundation of Huxley's 'brain as filter' model, which is inconsistent with any system that dichotomises mind from matter.²¹¹

Huxley outlined his view of universal sentience in an interview with *Cavalier* magazine:

²⁰⁹ Alfred North Whitehead, *Modes of Thought* (New York: The Free Press, 1968), p. 156.

²¹⁰ Matthew Segall, *Physics of the World Soul: The Relevance of Alfred North Whitehead's Philosophy of Organism to Contemporary Scientific Cosmology* (Morrisville: Lulu Press, 2016), p. 75.

²¹¹ Notwithstanding the observer effect on quantum superpositions (a curiosity that coheres with panpsychism) the physical sciences generally categorise consciousness as an epiphenomenon.

[T]he fact that we have an intelligence means that some potentiality of intelligence is in all matter. All matter has an inside and an outside. The outside is material, and the inside, on a low level of organisation, is psychoid. It's capable, when it's highly organized, of becoming fully psychic and psychological.²¹²

Given the informal context of this interview and the dualistic predilections of the English language, concessions can be made for his dichotomisation of 'inside' and 'outside', as he otherwise captures the panpsychist concept of ubiquitous mentality and the importance of its organisation. This is granted a more sophisticated elaboration in *Island*, through Dr Robert's theory of how Mind with a large 'M' flows into mind with a small 'm' (p. 168). The continuity of 'Mind' and 'mind' is moderated by the filter—though it would be more accurate to say that the continuity *is* the filter since it is not a separate mechanism, but rather the means by which 'Mind' (collective) is experienced as 'mind' (personal). Although this perspective could be framed through philosophical idealism, given Dr Robert's unfavourable view of Platonism and idealism's incompatibility with spiritual experience, I take the filter metaphor to be predicated on a panpsychist ontology.

Process philosophy also resonates with Pala's emphasis on an immanent divine. Unlike most iterations of materialism, panpsychism does not disqualify or distance spiritual experiences. Arthur Eddington, a panpsychist contemporary of Whitehead, summarised the essential truth of mystical revelation as the understanding 'that our minds are not apart from the world [...] that the harmony and beauty of the face of Nature is at root one with the gladness that transfigures the face of man'.²¹³ I use Eddington in this example as Whitehead's definition of 'God' would require a lengthy and tangential explanation. Eddington also highlights the inseparability of revelation and understanding. Describing a revelation tends to impose a rhetorical linearity; experience *followed by* narrative framing. For example, an extraordinary experience of interconnectivity may be subsequently rendered through a panpsychist metaphysic. However, for Eddington, understanding that minds are not separate from the world *is* the mystical revelation; philosophical framing is at the base of experience, and not simply a description after the fact. Dr Robert echoes this with his theory that the underlying Platonism of Western culture 'makes immediate spiritual experience almost impossible' (p. 181). The Palanese

²¹² Lionel Olay, 'An Interview with Aldous Huxley', *Cavalier*, September 1963, p. 11.

²¹³ Arthur Eddington, *The Nature of the Physical World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928), p. 321.

treat non-dualist pedagogies as a prerequisite to mystical revelation, and not as a narrative overlay. Pala's educational system imparts panpsychist concepts—such as the ubiquity of sentience—prior to the teens' *moksha* initiation; integration involves a long process of priming.

For the Palanese, non-dualism is not intrinsic to the *moksha* experience, as Susila explains:

The *moksha*-medicine can take you to heaven; but it can also take you to hell. Or else to both, together or alternatively. Or else (if you're lucky, or if you've made yourself ready) beyond either of them. And then beyond the beyond, back to where you started from—back to here, back to New Rothamsted. (p. 323)

These are the final words uttered before Will's *moksha* experience, and they foreshadow its trajectory. Most relevant to the current discussion is the second part—Will's awareness of the 'Essential Horror' (p. 336). At Susila's request, he turns his attention to one of Tom Krishna's pet lizards, and his heart begins to pound as 'The Essential Horror glared out of everything' (p. 336). This perspective is further intensified when he witnesses two praying mantises copulating, or rather, 'a pair of inch-long monsters, exquisitely grisly, in the act of coupling', moments away from being devoured by the lizard—an allegory for his destructive sexual past (p. 337).

Despite the influence of set and setting, psychedelics almost ubiquitously lead to an amplification of one's experience. In an earlier conversation with Susila, Will describes a time in his life where nothing felt real, where he experienced other people as maggots, and '[n]ot even real maggots—just the ghosts of maggots, just the illusion of maggots'—his romantic perspective was that of 'an entomologist investigating the sex-life of the phantom maggot' (p. 118). Will diagnoses this outlook as a symptom of his upbringing, furnished with alcoholism, Christianity, existential angst, trauma, and capitalism. Despite his exposure to a Palanese alternative, he predictably relapses into this Kafkaesque world during his *moksha* session; the moderate cynicism that he displays throughout the book is temporarily amplified by the medicine.

The mantises, creating life on the precipice of death, are merely 'two brightly enamelled gadgets in the bargain basement, two little working models of a nightmare, two miniaturized machines for copulation' (p. 338). Likely inspired by Huxley's trip to the 'World's Biggest Drug Store' during his first mescaline experience and recounted in *Doors*, this passage shares the anti-capitalist overtones

as its precursor.²¹⁴ However, beneath the socio-cultural critique is a deeper observation about ontology; Will's vision of the insects exhibits a highly mechanistic approach to nature—an exemplification of the Cartesian-inspired idea that (non-human) animals lack souls.

Will's *moksha* session takes him through a series of different philosophical perspectives—he embodies various ontologies. The Horror corresponds with the view of a mechanised, insentient cosmos. This is resolved by Susila, whom he encounters as an endless stream of feeling in flux; he feels an abundance of love and empathy watching 'Incarnate Bereavement' transmuting into strength and will (pp. 346-47). Any notion of absolute 'truth' is irrelevant, the point is that there are profound humanitarian and ecological consequences to one's ontologies—a relationship that psychedelics can vividly illuminate.

2.4.2: SCALES OF SUI GENERIS

After years of priming, the Palanese teens are unlikely to be overcome by mechanistic nihilism during their *moksha* initiation, but they are also unlikely to be overcome by the type of rapture that characterises the onset of Will's session—the 'luminous bliss [...] only union with unity in a limitless, undifferentiated awareness' (p. 326). Susila encourages him to open his eyes. He reluctantly complies and the fountain of forms gives way to a 'composition of uprights and diagonals [...] all carved out of some material that looked like living agate, and all emerging from a matrix of living and pulsating mother-of-pearl' (p. 333). Although there is a panpsychist resonance to the vitality of this description, Will proceeds to confirm that the landscape of his attention is blissfully devoid of humans, or even animals (pp. 334-35). His heaven is comfortably abstracted. This mirrors Huxley's first mescaline experience, detailed in the previous chapter, in which his sense of boundless unity was isolated from the immanent, living world. As he became more acquainted with alternate states, he increasingly acknowledged the importance of human engagement.

Whitehead's process philosophy contributes critical shades of nuance to the discourse and paradigms pertaining to psychedelic experiences; panpsychism articulates interconnectedness without renouncing diversity. For Whitehead, the fabric of reality is composed of sentient processes, each shaped by the entire causal history of the universe—(as opposed to a collection of accidental objects that

²¹⁴ Huxley, *Doors*, p. 11.

exemplify fixed natural laws). As each unique event manifests according to the antecedent conditions of the entire cosmos, the history of the universe is implicit in each manifestation. In Segall's words, this synthesis between oneness and particularity means that 'Whitehead is able to preserve the unique identity of each individual organism without at the same time so exaggerating their separateness that continuity with the larger ecosystem of other organisms is broken'.²¹⁵ William Blake, who lent the titles to both *Doors* and *Heaven*, and who became a tangible presence in the psychedelic art of the 1960s, articulates a corresponding sentiment in 'Auguries of Innocence' when he describes 'a world in a grain of sand and a heaven in a wildflower'.²¹⁶ It is the paradox of feeling the infinite in a particular conscious event.²¹⁷

In one of the inaugural issues of the *Utopian Studies* journal, Gorman Beauchamp explores the distinction between 'eupsychic' and a 'eutopic' utopias, noting that this is a matter of emphasis; 'more often than not the relative importance assigned the eutopic and the eupsychic elements must be inferred from the ratios in the presentation itself'.²¹⁸ In a eupsychic utopia, individual improvement predominates, whereas a eutopic model foregrounds socio-political structures. As one of only a handful of critics to read Pala's perishing with optimism, Beauchamp frames its invasion as a strong eupsychic indicator; the physical land is compromised but Palanese principles and practices survive through the book's readers.²¹⁹ Although I applaud the delicacy of Beauchamp's emphasis-based classifications, panpsychism offers an additional lens on *Island*.

As Dr Robert explains, the problem of power must be confronted at every iteration, 'from national governments down to nurseries and honeymooning couples' and prevented on the multiple levels of 'instinct and emotion [...] the glands and the viscera, the muscles and the blood' (pp. 182, 189). This approach is elaborated in the manuscript, as Dr Robert gives a detailed history about the trials and tribulations of implementing sensible social foundations:

They need to be supplemented by appropriate measures on the genetic level,

²¹⁵ Segall, *World Soul*, p. 40.

²¹⁶ William Blake, 'Auguries of Innocence', *Bartleby* <<https://www.bartleby.com/41/356.html>> [accessed 22 May 2019], ll.1-2.

²¹⁷ John Higgs, *William Blake: Why He Matters More Than Ever* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2019), Kindle edition, p. 12.

²¹⁸ Gorman Beauchamp, 'Island: Aldous Huxley's Psychedelic Utopia', *Utopian Studies*, 1.1 (1990), 59-72 (p. 63).

²¹⁹ George Woodcock is another rare *Island* optimist, who deems it 'the happiest of Huxley's books', in *Dawn and the Darkest Hour: A Study of Aldous Huxley* (New York: Viking, 1972), p. 284.

the physiological level, the intellectual level; by appropriate measures in the fields of family relationships, sexual relationships, professional and political relationships; by appropriate education in perceiving and imagining, in passive alertness and directed attention, in the right uses of symbols, abstractions, generalisations and in the delicate art of being wordlessly receptive.²²⁰

In an analogous critique of modern culture, Whitehead explains that the same principles ought to apply to ‘a nation, a city, a district, an institution, a family, or even to an individual’.²²¹ On a metaphysical level, he reiterates that all communities are organisms, incomplete and in the process of production, and that each actual entity within the nexus of a community ‘repeats in microcosm what the universe is in macrocosm’.²²² From a Palanese-panpsychist perspective of attending to all levels at once, eupsychic and eutopic do not refer to distinct approaches—individual and societal are more akin to the different scales of a hologram. The whole universe is contained at all gradations, but each aspect inhabits a unique perspective. This allows for diversity, with no need for categorical or qualitative distinctions.

2.4.3: THE “I” OF PANPSYCHISM

For Whitehead, the notions of ‘existence’ and ‘process’ synonymously presuppose one another, only the former carries an inappropriate implication of stasis.²²³ To clarify, I am not suggesting that this concept is uniquely panpsychist, but rather showing how Pala encapsulates some of the system’s most salient aspects. In his ‘Notes on What’s What’, the Old Raja discusses the implicit misdirection within the phrase ‘I am’; “‘I’ affirms a separate and abiding me-substance, “am” denies the fact that all existence is relationship and change’ (p. 215). This is more embellished in the manuscript version:

“Here and now shifting awareness relates to a very small part of a very complex process, related to and completely dependent on a very large number of interrelated processes within a probably infinite and everlasting web of processes”. But how does one say all this in two words?²²⁴

²²⁰ Huxley, *Island* MS, box 59, fol. 2, pp. 215-1E.

²²¹ Whitehead, *Science*, p. 246.

²²² Whitehead, *Process*, pp. 215.

²²³ Whitehead, *Modes*, p. 96.

²²⁴ Huxley, *Island* MS, box 59, fol. 2, p. 78.

The idea of reality as a compendium of objects has dominated Western thought for millennia, and in the absence of a less demarcated language or cultural ontology, phrases like ‘I am’ are unavoidable; we are resigned to these expressions.

During his *moksha* session, Will shifts from a detached Nirvanic bliss to a mechanistic nightmare, in which he experiences his identity as a ‘dark little inspissated clot’ (p. 341). Finally, through an interaction with Susila, he reaches his most profound realisation—his metaphysical denouement—that ‘God is love’ (p. 354). He is awestruck by Susila’s face and marvels at the vision of ‘[s]omething new all time’; she is neither a static object, nor an undifferentiated mass of energy, but an organism both divine and individuated (p. 346). The microcosmic processes that form the Susila-nexus are entirely unique. Indeed, the Old Raja does not suggest that the ‘I’ of awareness is an illusory fiction, but rather a ‘crowd’ (p. 78). Will reverently lists the crowd of characters that he sees in Susila—‘Mary with swords in her heart [...] and Circe, and Ninon de Lenclos and now—who? Somebody like Julian of Norwich or Catherine of Genoa. Are you really all these people?’ (p. 348). This interaction, the most meaningful of his *moksha* revelations, renders a dissolution of identity that acknowledges and celebrates the multiplicities of a living world—at once mental, material, and spiritual.

2.5: REFRAMING THE FILTER

For most adults in an ‘ordinary’ state of awareness, prediction and perception are barely distinguishable. Computational neurobiologist Andrew Gallimore explains how even when we are awake, ‘only a small fraction of the information used to model the world actually comes from sensory data, known as *extrinsic information* [...] Sensory data doesn’t create the world, but rather, modulates this ongoing activity by being *matched* to it’.²²⁵ This principle is relatively uncontroversial—the work of Oliver Sacks constitutes a treasury of evidence for how we perceive with the brain, rather than with the eyes.²²⁶ Recent fMRI studies have revealed how psychedelics interrupt the neural networks associated with predictive perception.²²⁷ Karl Friston’s free energy principle contextualises this, asserting that ‘any sentient creature must

²²⁵ Andrew Gallimore, ‘DMT and the Topology of Reality’, *Neurotransmissions: Psychedelic Essays from Breaking Convention*, ed. by Dave King and others (London: Strange Attractor Press, 2015), pp. 9-24 (p. 14).

²²⁶ Oliver Sacks, *Hallucinations* (London: Picador, 2013), p. 164.

²²⁷ Carhart-Harris and Friston.

minimise the entropy of its sensory exchanges with the world'.²²⁸ Neuroscientists exploring such phenomena continue to use Huxley's brain-as-filter metaphor to communicate such observations, yet I believe that this often leads to materialist implications that do not reflect his metaphysical nuance.

In *Doors*, Huxley glances at the furniture in the room, suggesting that 'what the rest of us see only under the influence of mescaline, the artist is congenitally equipped to see all the time', and repeating that '[t]his is how one ought to see, how things really are'.²²⁹ In this iteration of the filter metaphor Huxley interprets his 'cleansed perception' as a more direct experience of the world. However, as discussed, his assumption that there is a way that things 'really are' presupposes an objective reality beneath the distortions of the senses. The ontological insinuations of Will's *moksha* session, in contrast, are more ambiguous:

Well, this terrifying mystery consisted of nothing but two pieces of furniture and an expanse of wall. The fear was allayed, but the wonder only increased. How was it possible that things so familiar and commonplace could be this? (pp. 333-34)

Whitehead offers an analogous commentary on chairs in the opening of *Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effect* (1927):

We look up and see a coloured shape in front of us and we say - there is a chair. But what we have seen is the mere coloured shape. Perhaps an artist might not have jumped to the notion of a chair [...] But those of us who are not artists are very prone, especially if we are tired, to pass straight from the perception of the coloured shape to the enjoyment of a chair [...] having regard to our previous experiences.²³⁰

Whitehead is exploring how category-perception is dominated by one's past experiences. However, he suggests that this is not ineluctable, and recounts how an artist friend had 'acquired this faculty of ignoring the chair at the cost of great labour'.²³¹ The crucial difference between this and Huxley's first mescaline revelation is that Whitehead does not imply that a chair-category experience is less

²²⁸ Karl Friston and others, 'Active Inference, Curiosity and Insight', *Neural Computation*, 29.10 (2017), 2633-83 (p. 2636).

²²⁹ Huxley, *Doors*, p. 15.

²³⁰ Alfred North Whitehead, *Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effect* (London: The Macmillan Company, 1927), pp. 2-3.

²³¹ Whitehead, *Symbolism*, p. 3.

‘real’ than the coloured-shape experience, only that category-based prediction is a more recurrent phenomenological pattern.

This type of perception is also relevant to other species; dogs react to chairs with actions based on prior use-value-based categorisation. Utility judgements standardise object-interactions. However, for Whitehead, this is integral to the sense-object; perspective is not dichotomised from the object perceived.

Gagliano makes the case that even plants use some form of this predictive capacity, but suggests that ‘information about the world is virtually always misperceived because an organism’s past experiences and its expectations of the future unescapably colour the perception of its current reality’.²³² ‘Misconceived’ may be a problematic term—an ‘incorrect’ perception implies that there is an objectively ‘correct’ reality underlying our subjective biases. I am not suggesting that this is mistaken, as to do so would be a (paradoxically) absolute assertion that there is *no* objective reality, but rather highlighting the tendency for rhetoric around perception to subtly nourish materialist presuppositions.

In *The Concept of Nature* (1920), Whitehead asks the reader to ‘[c]onsider a blue coat, a flannel coat of Cambridge blue’. From there he illustrates the entanglement of utility and perception; ‘We say, That is flannel, and we think of the properties of flannel and the uses of athletes’ coats [...] The perceptual object is the outcome of the habit of experience’.²³³ Utility judgements standardise our interactions with the world; they are the baseline of our categorical denominations—they sculpt the stories of our own lives. For instance, I am not actively conscious of the lifetime of contingencies that precede my current circumstances. Rather, I passively retain a small series of linear reasons for why I am typing this particular document, in this particular room, in this particular part of Mexico, at this particular time, on this particular Thursday. This provides a sense of orientation. Furthermore, I can categorise all the objects in my immediate environment according to their utility and accurately predict their behaviour. This provides a sense of control. These simplifications contribute to the contraction of attention that allows me focus on the task of typing. Although I (appear to) exist in a world filled with unique configurations of ontologically inexplicable matter, my chances of survival would be compromised if I had to investigate every object in my proximity to decipher whether it was useful or threatening.

²³² Monica Gagliano, ‘In a Green Frame of Mind: Perspectives on the Behavioural Ecology and Cognitive Nature of Plants’, *AoB PLANTS*, 7 (2014), 1-8 (p. 2).

²³³ Alfred North Whitehead, *The Concept of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), pp. 151, 155.

Research on how psychedelics inhibit the neurological ‘filter’ networks associated with prediction tends to fuel Huxley’s initial narrative that this mode of perception is closer to ‘how things really are’.²³⁴ Panpsychism’s contribution to this discussion is the idea that ‘cleansed’ perception is neither more real, nor more illusory than ‘stained’ category-driven perception, but an opportunity to attend to a different scale of experience—one that may emphasise the microcosmic level of particulars or the macrocosmic level of unified networks, or indeed, both.

2.5.1: EGO DISSOLUTION

According to Chris Letheby and Philip Gerrans, the experience of a stable ego-identity is best explained by predictive processes and salience attribution. Attention is guided by what is relevant to a particular individual. This is informed by past experience, and it remains relatively consistent in ‘normal’ states of awareness—a continuity that constitutes the feeling of a fixed self.²³⁵ Likewise, Lawrence Fischman describes the ego-self as depending upon and promoting predictability, and so ‘[i]ts dissolution frees the brain from its hard-wired neurodynamic predisposition to discover only what it expects to find’.²³⁶ Building on the work of Letheby and Gerrans, Fischman explains how two neurological networks—the Salience Network and the Default Mode Network—appear to be the main orchestrators of the experienced self-model, together exerting a top down predictive bias towards self-relevance. The integration of these networks can be narrated as a relatively consistent ‘background or context of experience’, which is why the ‘self-model is ordinarily imperceptible to the subject until it starts to disintegrate, which is what can happen during psychedelic drug states’.²³⁷ The less integration within these neuronal orchestrators, the less likely we are to limit salience to personal interest. This is a valuable paradigm as it narrates the ego as a process, rather than an object that is either present or ‘dissolved’, and, as Letheby and Gerrans observe, in the majority of psychedelic experiences the self-model is rarely annihilated completely.²³⁸

In the blissfully detached onset of Will’s *moksha* experience, he describes

²³⁴ Huxley, *Doors*, p. 15.

²³⁵ Chris Letheby and Philip Gerrans, ‘Self Unbound: Ego Dissolution in Psychedelic Experience’, *Neuroscience of Consciousness*, 1 (2017), 1-11.

²³⁶ Lawrence Fischman, ‘Seeing Without Self: Discovering New Meaning with Psychedelic-Assisted Psychotherapy’, *Neuropsychoanalysis*, 21.2 (2019), 53-78 (p. 72).

²³⁷ Fischman, p. 58.

²³⁸ Letheby and Gerrans, p. 2.

unity with the light of the cosmos—‘[i]ts presence was his absence. William Asquith Farnaby—ultimately and essentially there was no such person’ (p. 326). After a short elaboration, Susila shakes her head and tells him that it sounds ‘suspiciously like Nirvana [...] Pure Spirit, one hundred degrees proof—that’s a drink that only the most hardened contemplation-guzzlers indulge in’ (p. 327). She explains how the Palanese dilute Nirvana with love and work. There is a balance to cultivate—too much ego-annihilation leads to detachment, and too little leads to isolation. Fischman elaborates on the latter, suggesting that the salience aspect of ego-attention has a defensive role—muting the emotional valence of our surrounding objects, diminishing a sense of affective connection with the environment, and minimising the potential for grief.²³⁹ If the ego is understood not as an enduring substance, but as a variable process relating to environmental salience, then we arrive at a panpsychist model of identity as encounter; subject and setting, or perceiver and perceived, are a unified process.

Panpsychism coheres with the modern neurobiology that is reframing the ‘ego dissolution’ of psychedelic experiences; Whitehead’s intermittent use of the term ‘superject’ captures this coherence. Segall clarifies that ‘subject’ and ‘superject’ are more like markers within the evolution of an experiential event; ‘[t]he “subject” phase of a conerescing occasion emerges from the prehensions of antecedent occasions which it unifies, while in the “superject” phase the occasion, having attained satisfaction as a unified drop of distinctly patterned experience, immediately perishes’.²⁴⁰ There is no difference in ‘kind’, only in temporality. Here, the introduction of ‘superject’ recontextualises the term ‘subject’, whose dualistic connotations have calcified into the cultural dogma of a subject/object dichotomy. Exemplifying Whitehead’s rhetorical style, ‘superject’ denotes the ‘subject’ experience, only reiterating that this is not emerging from a singular entity but rather a particular encounter at a particular moment.

2.5.2: ‘HOW THINGS REALLY ARE’

If ego dissolution is understood as a disruption of habitual salience selectivity, then it follows that more of our environment may be experienced as significant in these states of awareness—indeed, this characterises Huxley’s ecstatic encounters with his furniture and the folds of his trousers. Based on the philosopher and psychologist

²³⁹ Fischman, p. 65.

²⁴⁰ Segall, *World Soul*, p. 39.

William James, a heightened sense of presence and meaning is often referred to as the ‘noetic’ quality of a spiritual experience.²⁴¹ As the varieties of religious (and psychedelic) experiences are so numerous, I will briefly introduce two of Huxley’s interpretations.

Huxley’s metaphysics of the self/subject and spiritual experience evolved throughout his final decade of work. In *The Devils of Loudun* (1952) he describes beatific vision as a perspective from which ‘all things are perceived as they are “in themselves” and not in relation to a craving and abhorring ego’.²⁴² As in *Doors*, this presupposes an objective world, maintaining the dualistic separation of perceiver and perceived. The Palanese, however, take a more panpsychist approach to perception and the ego. Ranga describes the techniques that cultivate ‘[a]wareness of one’s sensations and awareness of the not-sensation in every sensation’—a ‘not-sensation’ being ‘the raw material for sensation that my not-self provides me with’ (p. 91). Radha (his partner, and Will’s nurse) supports this, describing her ability to attend to herself, and ‘at the same time to [her] not-self’ (p. 91). Akin to panpsychism, feeling is fundamental.

Similarly, discussing *moksha* medicine, Dr Robert’s assistant Vijaya explains to Will that with just ‘four hundred milligrammes’ of *moksha* one can ‘catch a glimpse of the world as it looks to someone who has been liberated from his bondage to the ego’ (p. 166). In line with a panpsychist interpretation of the ego/subject/superject as a perspective, Vijaya makes no reference to ‘how things really are’; the Palanese do not try to relinquish the ego in order to access some ultimate, objective reality, but rather to embody an alternative perspective that will be of service to both the individual, the community, and the environment.

In the 2016 revised edition of *The Embodied Mind* (first published in 1991)—a ground-breaking exemplar of cross-disciplinary study, bridging cognitive science, phenomenology and Buddhism—one of the authors, Evan Thompson, amends the first edition’s misguided suggestion that Buddhist philosophy is somehow closer to ‘direct experience’.²⁴³ He admits the fallacy of talking about experience apart from observation, and suggests that consciousness-altering practices are better understood as ‘ways of enacting certain kinds of embodied states

²⁴¹ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (London: Longmans & Green, 1929), p. 380. William James has been integral to psychedelic philosophy and rhetoric, famously suggesting that ‘Our normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different’ (p. 388).

²⁴² Aldous Huxley, *The Devils of Loudun* (London: Panther Books, 1977), p. 75.

²⁴³ Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson and Eleanor Rosch, *The Embodied Mind*, rev. edn (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2016), p. 41.

and behaviours in the world, not as inner observation of an observer-independent mental stream'.²⁴⁴ This encapsulates the assumption that ego dissolution initiates a more 'direct' experience of reality; to say that our patterns of attention are less dominated by habitual biases does not justify the conclusion that our attention is now neutral, or more 'direct'. Although the rhetoric of 'cleansed' perception challenges the reductive association between psychedelics and delusion, it also subtly fortifies the dualistic paradigm of an isolated, observing subject in an objective environment.

As a counterpoint to Murugan's insistence that chemical transcendence is merely delusion, Dr Robert explains that the *moksha* experience is 'more real than what you call reality. More real than what you're thinking and feeling at this moment. More real than the world before your eyes' (p. 170). However, as outlined in the previous chapter, given the philosophical and spiritual agnosticism in Pala, it would be misguided to take Dr Robert's comment as an ontological assertion. Through a panpsychist lens, the utterance 'more real' refers to a phenomenological experience of presence and significance, rather than one of 'direct' objectivity. This is an important distinction—especially as psychedelic scientists continue to narrate their findings through the Bergsonian-Huxleyan 'filter' metaphor.²⁴⁵

Panpsychism offers an alternative to the assumption that less predictive processing (or a more expansive filter) equates to a more 'direct' experience of 'how things really are'; the notion that perceptual consensus indicates objective reality is merely conjecture. For example, we tend to frame achromatopsia (colour blindness) as a 'deficiency' and assume that the experience of individuals with colour vision is truer to reality. However, this is inconsistent with our understanding that colour is not an inherent quality 'out there', but an interactional experience.

Will's *moksha* session is not philosophically uniform; the egoic 'filter' is not removed to unveil a metaphysical truth. Guided by Susila, he experiences varying amplifications of dualist, materialist and panpsychist perspectives. Panpsychism is a baseline from which to relinquish the pursuit of ontological certainty, in favour of nourishing the philosophies whose experiential counterparts lead to more enrichment, engagement, and empathy.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 43.

²⁴⁵ In Chapter 5 I explore a modification of this metaphor that mitigates its association with objectivism.

2.6: CLOSING

While Huxley's narratives have percolated through Western psychedelic rhetoric, much of his cultural influence remains bound to *Doors*, written long before the culmination of his panpsychist allegiance. Indeed, many of the most progressive and influential psychedelic researchers sustain subtle objectivist or materialist assumptions, such as the idea of 'how things really are' beyond the filter, or MRS GREN's requirements for an organism to qualify as 'living'. Given the global mental health crisis and the urgent need for ecological reform, I am compelled by the individual and collective consequences of inhabiting a worldview in which: everything shares a degree of consciousness; no species has privileged access to a more objective reality; and the fabric of unique diversity connects every living event.

At the level of literary and historical analysis, this chapter has clarified the evolution of Huxley's panpsychism and its articulation in *Island*. The salient aspect of this intertextuality is the way in which Pala, panpsychism, and psychedelics reframe one another. For example: panpsychism recontextualises Palanese praxis; Pala articulates a practical pedagogy of panpsychism; psychedelics can render panpsychism more experientially accessible; panpsychism cultivates an understanding of language that can prime psychedelic experiences and their integration towards harmony.

Goff celebrates the ecological potential of these ideas, stating that '[i]f panpsychism is true, the rainforest is teeming with consciousness'.²⁴⁶ This is a worldview from which most of the Western world has been conceptually and linguistically distanced for centuries. However, as exemplified by the philosophical whiplash of Will's *moksha* session, if psychedelics can mitigate this, such an effect is not intrinsic to the substances. Although many of the most ubiquitous features of psychedelic experiences can be articulated through panpsychism, a panpsychist psychedelic experience is contingent on one being familiar with such a worldview—without some basic philosophical-linguistic education and priming, an experience of metaphysical novelty is likely to be incoherent, or 'ineffable'.

Panpsychism conveys a model of reciprocity, in which reality is both activated and modified by the neuronal system that perceives it.²⁴⁷ The intersections between Whitehead and Pala are especially valuable because, unlike the non-dualist non-materialist wisdom of other traditions, they directly address the philosophical

²⁴⁶ Goff, p. 191.

²⁴⁷ Matthieu Ricard and Trinh Xuan Thuan, *The Quantum and the Lotus: A Journey to the Frontiers Where Science and Buddhism Meet* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2001), p. 116.

inclinations and linguistic shortcomings of the modern West.

Although this concept is articulated in other schools of thought, Whitehead's rendition addresses the semantic binaries that obscure its consideration in the West. There is a mounting need for more extensive linguistic paradigms: Gagliano appeals for a language that foregrounds feeling as well as concepts;²⁴⁸ Abram argues for ways of speaking that 'enhance the spontaneous reciprocity between our bodily senses and the earthly senses';²⁴⁹ ethnobotanist Robin Wall Kimmerer calls for a grammar of animacy that could reenchant our dialogues with the natural world;²⁵⁰ author Robert Macfarlane suggests that 'our present grammar militates against animacy; our metaphors by habit and reflex subordinate and anthropomorphise the more-than-human world'.²⁵¹

Furthermore, although panpsychism theoretically emphasises both the macrocosms of infinite interconnections and the microcosms of unique particulars, as Sheldrake points out, discussions of panpsychism are skewed towards the level of the particular; most panpsychists apply their ideas to particles in the service of a more pliable explanation of the 'emergence' of human consciousness, scarcely discussing the idea that larger systems may also enjoy a form of integrated awareness. From my experience of the research community, psychedelic rhetoric seems to be oppositely skewed; macrocosmic connectivity seems more present than uniqueness and diversity. That is not to diminish the importance of understanding the global repercussions of our actions, but to acknowledge that such narratives can detract from attending to ecologies on a smaller scale, such as ourselves and our immediate environments—the scale at which we can participate in discernible transformation. By placing psychedelics and panpsychism in a reciprocal exchange, we can address such imbalances and cultivate an experiential, philosophical literacy that could reanimate our relationships across the whole spectrum of the living world.

²⁴⁸ Gagliano, *Thus Spoke*, p. 15.

²⁴⁹ David Abram, 'The Ecology of Perception', *Emergence Magazine*, podcast, 20 July 2020, <<https://emergencemagazine.org/story/the-ecology-of-perception/>> [accessed 1 September 2020].

²⁵⁰ Robin Wall Kimmerer, 'Learning the Grammar of Animacy', *Anthropology of Consciousness*, 28.2 (2017), 128-34.

²⁵¹ Robert Macfarlane, *Underland: A Deep Time Journey* (New York: W.W Norton, 2019), p. 134.

CHAPTER 3: A DOUBLE TAKE

The urge to order, the dislike of incomprehension and the desire for meaning are at the root of all science. We dissociate in order to understand; but the understanding that dissociation brings us is always partial and misleading—Huxley, ‘Notes on What’s What’ (manuscript).²⁵²

3.1: OPENING

This chapter explores the intersection between polyphasia, pedagogy, and psychedelic states of consciousness. I read Pala’s pedagogies through Iain McGilchrist’s divided brain theory in order to analyse and critique the myopic objectivism of Western belief systems; together, Huxley and McGilchrist establish a strong base from which to address the monophasia that ultimately exacerbates psychological suffering by condoning a reductionist view of ourselves and the planet. Psychedelic substances have the potential to instigate profound moments of epistemological humility, and, as social psychologist Csaba Szummer has also suggested, may be invaluable to the future of phenomenological pedagogies.²⁵³ However, as discussed in the previous chapter, psychedelic substances in and of themselves do not encapsulate or implicate any particular cosmologies or experiences. I argue that for the potential of psychedelics to be realised, diverse and pluralistic ways of understanding human perception need to be familiarised.

McGilchrist’s *The Master and his Emissary* (henceforth, *The Master*) and his recent publication, *The Matter with Things* (2021) sculpt and synthesise a staggering range of source material to demonstrate how the two hemispheres of the brain correspond to two contrasting modes of attention. He argues that Western cultural habits have created an imbalance in favour of the left hemisphere, leading to multiscale problems, ranging from the mental health of individuals to the climate emergency. *Island* supplements the divided brain theory through its exemplification of a polyphasic education system, and the way in which *moksha* is aligned with meaning, richness, and uncertainty. Huxley intuited neurological processes that we

²⁵² Huxley, *Island MS*, box 59, fol. 2, p. 73.

²⁵³ Csaba Szummer and others, ‘The Hyperassociative Mind: The Psychedelic Experience and Merleau-Ponty’s “wild being”’, *Journal of Psychedelic Studies*, 1.2 (2017), 55-64 (p. 56).

now have the technology to observe; the Palanese cultivate two modes of attention which correspond with the distinct processing styles of the left and right hemispheres. Aligning these two narratives about perceptual variance creates a new contribution to questions of how psychedelic integration could challenge the systemic imbalances of the modern world, without implying a wholesale rejection of Western culture.

As an introductory overview, the left hemisphere perceives distinct objects—it is the narrow, targeted attention of a predator watching its prey. It strives for control, order, explanation, and it prefers categories to context.²⁵⁴ The right hemisphere’s attention, by complimentary contrast, is more holistic and contextual—its perceptual mode is both more animated and more uncertain.²⁵⁵ As a disclaimer, phrases such as ‘the left/right hemisphere’s mode of attention’ should not be taken literally, but rather as shorthand for ‘the observable neurological asymmetry in favour of the left/right hemisphere, in *most* individuals’.²⁵⁶ The divided brain theory shows the natural polyphasia of human biology—how we already depend on a perceptual contrast in almost all cognitive processes.

In the absence of flexible frameworks for philosophy and perception, the current trajectories of psychedelic medicalisation and mainstreaming are troubling. On the subject of medicalisation, author David Nickles highlights how the expectation that psychedelics will ‘cure’ people who are ‘brutalised by the coercive, destructive, and traumatising systems of dominant culture, without simultaneously working to change those systems is every bit as symptomatically oriented as current psychiatric regimens’.²⁵⁷ I wish to answer Nickles’ call for more systemic critique in the psychedelic research community.²⁵⁸ With Pala as a counterpoint, the chapter applies McGilchrist’s theory to the problems of psychedelic integration, but also deals with the hypocrisies of mental healthcare and Western education more generally—I examine how the West fortifies perspectives that are simultaneously pathologised.

²⁵⁴ Iain McGilchrist, *Anyone with Half a Brain Can See That*, TEDxGhent, January 2014, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DiPrM0DNI8w>> [accessed 24 September 2020]; McGilchrist, *The Master*, p. 51.

²⁵⁵ McGilchrist, *Anyone*; McGilchrist, *The Master*, p. 46.

²⁵⁶ Less than five per cent of the population are believed to differ significantly in their cerebral organisation—among them are subset of left-handed and ambidextrous people, and a minority of people diagnosed with schizophrenia or autism. McGilchrist, *The Master*, p. 12.

²⁵⁷ David Nickles, ‘It’s Time to Debunk Prohibitionist Narratives and Calls for Monopolies within Psychedelic Science’, *Psymposia*, 25 October 2018, <<https://www.psymposia.com/magazine/its-time-to-debunk-prohibitionist-narratives-and-calls-for-monopolies-within-psychedelic-science/>> [accessed 12 October 2020].

²⁵⁸ David Nickles, ‘The Dire Need for Systemic Critique Within Psychedelic Communities’, *Chacruna*, 17 September 2018, <<https://chacruna.net/dire-need-systemic-critique-within-psychedelics-communities/>> [accessed 12 October 2020].

If we downscale Western cultural fixations with individualism, leadership, and consumption to the level of human psychology, then we find some of the same imbalances that characterise afflictions such as ‘depression’ and ‘anxiety’. These pathological denominations are, of course, generalisations for unique and varied experiences. For this chapter, I spotlight experiences that are characterised by meaninglessness and low tolerance to uncertainty. Uniting the ideas of McGilchrist and Huxley, I illuminate how many of the symptoms or instances of ‘anxiety’ and ‘depression’ can be framed as justifiable reactions to an unbalanced society.

In this case, Huxley and McGilchrist work in tandem with one another—*Island* dramatises the core ‘characteristics’ of the hemispheres and perception, and *The Master* gives new context and relevance to Huxley’s ideas. In the following sections I explore polyphasia through both McGilchrist’s characterisation of the hemispheres and Palanese pedagogies. I then address how Western ontologies, particularly in combination with excessive forward planning, diminish one’s capacity to feel richness and meaning. I use the Huxley-McGilchrist composite to address some of the myths of modern mental health care, ultimately contending that a deeper understanding of human neurology could support a renewed appreciation of polyphasia, or perceptual pluralism. Akin to *Island*, this approach does not reject Western mainstream knowledge systems, but rather addresses their immoderations.

As a disclaimer, the irony of categorising philosophical perspectives according to two hemispheric processes, while simultaneously critiquing the habit of reductive categorisation, is not lost on me. However, I do not present these concepts with absolute conviction—the narrative outlined in this chapter is merely one of an infinite number of models that might assist a transition towards a more polyphasic approach to perception.

3.2: THE DIVIDED BRAIN

In 1967, psychologist Michael Gazzaniga conducted an experiment in which he showed paintings by the artist Giuseppe Arcimboldo to the left and right visual fields of a man with a severed corpus callosum—the central nerve tract that allows the hemispheres to send and receive signals from one another. When these paintings (portraits of heads composed of fruit, vegetables, plants, and other domestic items) were revealed to the participant’s right visual field (processed by the left

hemisphere), he saw only an assemblage of inanimate objects. When the paintings were shown to his left visual field (processed by the right hemisphere), he could see that they were representing human faces.²⁵⁹ This neatly encapsulates McGilchrist's model.

As a psychiatrist with a background in literature, McGilchrist's work articulates complex consonances between psychiatry, neurology, philosophy, psychology, and literature—to list only his most visible fields of inquiry. *The Master*, his first major work, is loosely inspired by Goethe's 'The Sorcerer's Apprentice', in which the apprentice foolishly believes himself capable of the master's work. McGilchrist explains the consequences of this form of hubris in relation to the brain's hemispheres:

Though the cerebral hemispheres should co-operate, they have for some time been in a state of conflict. The subsequent battles between them are recorded in the history of philosophy, and played out in the seismic shifts that characterise the history of Western culture.²⁶⁰

Contrary to popular mythology, the hemispheres do not differ dramatically in *what* they attend to, but *how* they attend; 'at the level of experience, the world we know is synthesised from the work of the two cerebral hemispheres, each hemisphere having its own way of understanding the world—its own 'take' on it'.²⁶¹ McGilchrist empirically and poetically demonstrates how these 'takes' have grown apart, ultimately correlating an over-zealous left hemisphere with many of the destructive thought patterns and social structures that define our epoch. In his own words:

It is not that one or other hemisphere 'specialises in', or perhaps even 'prefers', whatever it may be, but that each hemisphere has its own disposition towards it, which makes one or another aspect of it come forward—and it is that aspect which is brought out in the world of that hemisphere.

[...]

The world of the left hemisphere, dependent on denotative language and abstraction, yields clarity and power to manipulate things that are known, fixed, static, isolated, decontextualised, explicit, disembodied, general in nature, but

²⁵⁹ Michael S. Gazzaniga, 'The Split Brain in Man', *Scientific American*, 60 (1972), 311-17. For video footage of the experiment: *Severed Corpus Callosum*, YouTube, 25 June 2008, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lfGwsAdS9Dc>> [accessed 27 September 2020].

²⁶⁰ McGilchrist, *The Master*, p. 14.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

ultimately lifeless. The right hemisphere, by contrast, yields a world of individual, changing, evolving, interconnected, implicit, incarnate, living beings within the context of the lived world, but in the nature of things never fully graspable, always imperfectly known – and to this world it exists in a relationship of care.²⁶²

McGilchrist's interest is not in human optimisation, but in guiding people toward a more sustainable disposition towards themselves and the world; *The Master* is a guide to the different experiences/realities that can be summoned by different ways of attending.

As discussed, polyphasia implies that there is no 'realness' hierarchy amongst a culture's sanctioned states of consciousness. McGilchrist's narration of the right hemisphere is inevitably more attractive than that of the left, but this does not denote a hierarchy, and he frequently emphasises the importance of the left hemisphere's contracted attention; 'it grasps, sees, receives only some of what the right hemisphere has received. Its method is selection, abstraction – in a word negation. But this selection, this narrowing, is once again not a diminution, but an increase'.²⁶³ Exclusion is integral to experience; like a sculpture 'a thing comes into being through something else being pared away'.²⁶⁴ Reduced receptivity/increased projection is not an act of withdrawing from the 'real' world, but an efficient process of differentiation. The issue is when we cease to feel the fabric from which our concepts have been carved:

The more we rely on the left hemisphere alone, the more self-conscious we become; the intuitive, unconscious unspoken elements of experience are relatively discounted, and the interpreter begins to interpret – itself. The world it puts into words for us is the world that words themselves (the left hemisphere's building blocks) have created.²⁶⁵

The result is a culture in which the individual is isolated, prediction is truth, and uncertainty is exiled—human attention is colonised by the categories of its own design.

Collating numerous case studies of right hemisphere stroke patients, McGilchrist explains how the left hemisphere processes serially, attending to small

²⁶² Ibid., pp. 172-74.

²⁶³ McGilchrist, *The Master*, p. 197.

²⁶⁴ Ibid..

²⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 399.

pieces of information at a time; for example, like Frankenstein’s monster, a living being becomes merely an assemblage of decontextualised body parts.²⁶⁶ This encapsulates reductionism—‘the outlook that assumes that the only way to understand the nature of anything we experience is by looking at the parts of which it appears to be made, and building up from there’.²⁶⁷

3.3: PALA’S POLYPHASIA

In Beauchamp’s words, ‘if by novelistic criteria *Island* seems thin and didactic, by Utopian criteria it has more than usual complexity of character and plot’.²⁶⁸ Huxley has been repeatedly reproached for his literary didacticism; however, one aspect that seems to have been exempt from disparagement is Pala’s educational model; one reviewer described it as ‘by far the most substantial part of his invention, coherent and carefully elaborated’.²⁶⁹ The central challenge of the Palanese curriculum, and simultaneously the seed of its creative richness, is captured by Mr Menon, Pala’s Secretary of Education, who poses the question ‘how can we educate children on the conceptual level without killing their capacity for intense non-verbal experience?’ (p. 250). *Island*’s pedagogical method is based on cultivating two modes of attending to the world; one that heeds categorical projections, and one of a more open receptivity—their pedagogies are polyphasic.

It is worth acknowledging that *Island* is not a unique instance of polyphasia in speculative fiction. Lucy Sargisson, feminist scholar and previous editor of the *Journal of Utopian Studies*, suggests that engaging with utopian texts requires a ‘paradigm shift in consciousness’.²⁷⁰ Building on this, Donna Fancourt explores a series of literary examples of alternate states that fortify such a shift, concluding that ‘[i]f making connections with one another and nature, both mental and physical, is one of the keys to feminist utopianism, then these connections can only be facilitated by altering states of consciousness’.²⁷¹ In her analysis of Marge Piercy’s *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), Fancourt discusses the protagonist’s unusual receptivity, for which she is marginalised, but applauds the author’s ontological neutrality;

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 354.

²⁶⁷ Iain McGilchrist, *The Matter With Things: Our Brains, Our Delusions and the Unmaking of the World* (London: Perspectiva Press, 2021), p. 31.

²⁶⁸ Beauchamp, p. 64.

²⁶⁹ Geoffrey Gorer, ‘There is a Happy Land...’, *Encounter*, 106, July 1962.

²⁷⁰ Lucy Sargisson, *Contemporary Feminist Utopianism* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 229.

²⁷¹ Donna Fancourt, ‘Accessing Utopia through Altered States of Consciousness: Three Feminist Utopian Novels’, *Utopian Studies*, 13.1 (2002), 94-113 (p. 110).

Piercy ‘does not validate one form of consciousness as more or less “real”: all are possible co-existent realities’.²⁷²

In her article on global survival, Tara Lumpkin extols the adaptability of polyphasic cultures and their capacity to resist fundamentalism, all the while Western science remains dogmatically committed to sobriety; ‘[t]he scientific method only acknowledges monophasic consciousness. The method is a specialised system that focuses on studying small and distinctive parts in isolation, which results in fragmented knowledge’.²⁷³ Attending to ‘distinctive parts in isolation’ is characteristic of the left hemisphere. Unlike most Western curriculums, Palanese educators present the scientific method as simply one mode of engaging with the world—other modes are accessed via meditation, yoga, paradox, poetry, climbing, making love, and—most reliably—*moksha*. Polyphasia is fundamental to Huxley’s vision of a better world.

3.3.1: BRIDGE BUILDING

The history of modern Pala reflects McGilchrist’s definition of the hemispheres and why balance is critical. Dr Robert describes modern Palanese culture as the synthesis of two contrasting but complementary perspectives, characterised by Andrew MacPhail, a Scottish doctor, and Murugan the Reformer, the Palanese king at the time—‘each man supplying the other’s deficiencies’ (pp. 154-55). Christopher Rudge reads these characters as synecdoches for the East and West, but the metaphor also applies to human neurology.²⁷⁴ Murugan the Reformer embodies the right hemisphere, knowing nothing of ‘physical science’ or ‘European ways of thinking’, and Dr Andrew represents the left, knowing nothing about ‘Indian painting and poetry and philosophy’ (p. 155). They each bring out the best in the other; balance prevails.

The Raja and Dr Andrew ‘each became the other’s pupil and the other’s teacher’ (p. 155). In the manuscript, Huxley details how Dr Andrew began to feel the depths that had been inaccessible through a Western scientific model of reality; ‘[i]t was only gradually [...] that he came to understand the nature of expression, the

²⁷² Ibid., pp. 105-06.

²⁷³ Tara Lumpkin, ‘Perceptual Diversity: Is Polyphasic Consciousness Necessary for Global Survival?’, *Anthropology of Consciousness*, 12.1-2 (2001), 37-70 (pp. 40, 49, 39).

²⁷⁴ Christopher Rudge, ‘The Brain at Attention, Under Hypnosis and on Mescaline: Aldous Huxley’s Techniques for Actualizing Human Potential’ in *Aldous Huxley and Self-Realisation: His Concept of Human Potentialities, His Techniques for Actualizing Them, and His Views of their Social Consequences*, ed. by Dana Sawyer, Julian Piras and Uwe Rasch (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2020), pp. 103-48 (p. 110).

nature of experience and the nature of their relations in the life of fully human beings'.²⁷⁵ He learned that culture refers to more than the art, philosophy, and science of a particular location; 'There is also a culture of first-hand acquaintance with inner and outer reality, a culture that in its perfection, can be acquired only through an education in sensing, perceiving, feeling, imagining'.²⁷⁶ The Palanese learn to unlearn. They practice shifting the perceptual proportions between categorical projection and receptive immediacy. McGilchrist argues that the left hemisphere's overdominance can be addressed by mindfulness, time in nature, art, poetry, and other embodied practices. With the expository assistance of *Island*, I add psychedelics to this list, but not without contextual clarification.²⁷⁷

In *This Timeless Moment*, Archera recounts the day of the brush fire that engulfed the Huxley home in the Hollywood Hills on 12 May 1961. She describes how they stood calmly watching the flames—the 'Dionysian revelry' in which their material possessions were about to perish.²⁷⁸ Based on this account, Huxley and Archera had time to recover numerous items, but chose not to; the unfinished manuscript of *Island* was among the few survivors. Several weeks later, Huxley wrote that 'the fire seemed like a broad hint from the higher powers that books weren't the solution to the problems of life'.²⁷⁹ The incompatibility between literature and Pala's climate—the glue liquifies, the bindings disintegrate' (p. 217)—was realised for the English intellectual who had devoted his life to literature. Like Dr Andrew's conversion, the day of the fire is a testament to Huxley's willingness to relinquish his attachment to intellectual knowledge, and proof of his faith in another kind of acquaintance.

This interplay is reflected in Palanese education, which is also the basis of their *moksha* integration. In Pala, *moksha* is not a psychiatric remedy, but a revelatory adhesive that binds philosophy, perception, and cultural praxis. As such, the children's integration long precedes their acute initiation. As Principal Narayan explains, '[l]earning to take Mahakasyapa's-eye view of things is the best preparation for the *moksha*-experience. Every child who comes to initiation comes to it after a long education in the art of being receptive' (p. 268). Huxley exemplifies

²⁷⁵ Huxley, *Island* MS, box 59, fol. 2, p. 74.

²⁷⁶ Huxley, *Island* MS, box 59, fol. 2, p. 74.

²⁷⁷ At a recent Q&A with McGilchrist ('Salon London – *The Master and His Emissary* by Dr Iain McGilchrist', 19 August 2020) I asked for his opinion on how psychedelics might contribute to redressing the hemispheric imbalance. He explained that his neglect of this topic was not due to disagreement, only a lack of personal experience. He described having tried cannabis, psilocybin, and ketamine, but that the effects in each instance were too mild for him to feel qualified to discuss their phenomenologies.

²⁷⁸ Archera, *Timeless*, p. 74.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

this with an account of one the school's periodical 'bridge-building' sessions, in which the children study a gardenia flower from two perspectives, first as a botanical specimen, and later as an 'aesthetic or spiritual experience' (p. 268).

Palanese bridge-building sessions involve the following: scientifically analysing a particular specimen; a meditation; a creative exercise and, finally, an 'impossible' literary task (p. 270). In coherence with Lumpkin's warnings about the dangers of disavowing polyphasia, Pala's curriculum is designed to carry 'the complement and anti-dote to training in analysis and symbol-manipulation' (p. 268). Yet, as Mrs Narayan continues, '[b]oth kinds of training are indispensable. If you neglect either of them then you'll never grow into a fully human being' (p. 269). That is, tapered attention is still encouraged in Palanese science classes; 'The children are given all the obvious, elementary facts, tidily arranged in the standard pigeon-holes. Undiluted botany—that's the first stage' (p. 267).

In these bridge-building sessions, which take place every six to seven weeks, the children practice reapproaching their new knowledge and relating it with the realms of art, language, religion, and self-knowledge. From the first weeks of state-education, the Palanese are encouraged to bypass their learning—to remember that the 'facts' that they have procured are utility-based hypotheses.

Island's manuscript reiterates Pala's educational and philosophical foundations even more assiduously than the published version. The original 'Notes on What's What' offers direct pedagogical advice; teach children that 'words can never express the richness of the world, never denote the idiosyncrasy of event and things, but only the similarities observable between all the members of a class'.²⁸⁰ Mrs Narayan is not quite so direct, as she explains how, on the scale of perceptual receptivity, science requires very little—it is a method of selective observation through a lattice of projected concepts, and at the opposing end of the spectrum is the *moksha* experience, where '[y]ou don't select and immediately classify what you experience; you just take it in' (p. 269). The Palanese refer to this as 'the yoga of complete and total receptiveness, the yoga that consists in consciously accepting what is given as it is given [...] without any additions from your stock of second-hand ideas' (p. 203). In McGilchrist's terms, from a young age, the left hemisphere learns to yield.

Experience/consciousness/reality can be understood as the perpetual interplay between sensory reception and predictive projection. Just as the Palanese use the filter metaphor to cultivate multiple modes of attention, McGilchrist also

²⁸⁰ Huxley, *Island* MS, box 59, fol. 1, p. 75.

insists that ‘we must learn to use a different kind of seeing: to be vigilant, not to allow the right hemisphere’s options to be too quickly foreclosed by the narrower focussing of the left hemisphere’; he exposes the ever-increasing calcification of the left hemisphere’s contracted concentration.²⁸¹ Or, in Huxley’s words, how ‘[m]ost people, most of the time, know only what comes through the reducing valve and is consecrated as genuinely real by the local language’.²⁸² With diminished receptivity, we run the risk of becoming possessed by the concepts of our own creation—of the virtual world becoming indistinguishable from the material world.

3.3.2: EGO DISSOLUTION II

For neuroscientists like Lisa Feldman-Barrett, concepts and predictions are one and the same; predictive projection simplifies the noise of receptive sensory input into categories, and the ‘self’ is no exception to this process.²⁸³ The less sensory receptivity, the stronger the sense of a bounded self. Understanding the self as a mutable category challenges both the causes and consequences of excessive introspection.

The predictive categories of our own construction tend to feel more stable than the sensory overload of a world of unique events in constant flux. McGilchrist explains how excessive self-reflexivity both contributes to, and is reinforced by, a lack of receptivity to richness; it destroys ‘the quality that makes things live; the performance of music or dance, of courtship, love and sexual behaviour, humour, artistic creation and religious devotion become mechanical, lifeless, and may grind to a halt if we are too self-aware’.²⁸⁴ This is a common symptom of depression.

The experience of ‘ego dissolution’ seems to mitigate this. However, while the varying degrees of ego dissolution (or increased connectivity) may be acutely accompanied by positive affect, sustainable change requires that the experience is embedded within a coherent narrative—in this case, a more flexible ontology of what constitutes the ‘self’.

Roland Griffiths’ study on psilocybin and mystical-type experiences found that sixty-seven per cent of the volunteers rated their session to be either ‘the single most meaningful experience of his or her life or among the top five most meaningful

²⁸¹ McGilchrist, *The Master*, p. 164.

²⁸² Huxley, *Doors*, p. 8.

²⁸³ Lisa Feldman Barrett, *How Emotions are Made: The Secret Life of the Brain* (London: PAN Books, 2018), Kindle edition, p. 118.

²⁸⁴ McGilchrist, *The Master*, p. 180.

experiences of his or her life'.²⁸⁵ The article suggests a positive correlation between the intensity of a psilocybin-induced mystical experience (partially defined by a dissolution of the 'self') and a sustained sense of well-being.²⁸⁶ Although this investigation commendably emphasises the phenomenological (rather than pharmaceutical) action of psychedelics, it may be misleading without context. The participants in the study all reported regular participation in religious or spiritual activities prior to the session, thus increasing the likelihood that they already had a belief system that could accommodate an anomalous experience, and an ongoing practice related to that belief system. Griffiths' result would not necessarily be replicable with a group of secular individuals or reductive materialists.

Ego dissolution subverts the Western orthodoxy that we exist in a binary world of bounded individuals; it compels rhetorical recourse to alternative cosmologies, panpsychism being but one example.²⁸⁷ I will not summarise further ontologies of the self here, as others have done so with great animation, but highlight how the Palanese children learn to conceptualise their identities as plural and fluctuating.²⁸⁸

Mary Sarojini, for example, distinguishes between 'Little Miss Gibber', the self who remembers, imagines and is 'always talking about all the nasty things', and the self that 'doesn't talk—just looks and listens and feels' (p. 297). This eventually transmutes into the teachings of the Old Raja: 'these fused selves and not-selves are also continuous with the world around me and with the society of selves and not-selves of which I am a member'; he insists that a fully adequate science 'must take account of these fusions and continuities that underly the artificial honeycomb, cock-eyed but absolutely indispensable mosaic of our symbolic pigeon-holes'.²⁸⁹ In McGilchrist's terms, this is much closer to the right hemisphere's mode of perception, which cannot step in the same river twice, and which does not imagine existence as consistent and detached entity encountering demarcated examples of

²⁸⁵ Roland Griffiths and others, 'Psilocybin can Occasion Mystical-Type Experiences Having Substantial and Sustained Personal Meaning and Spiritual Significance', *Psychopharmacology*, 187.3 (2006), 1-16 (p. 9).

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*.

²⁸⁷ Alternative ontologies of the Self can be found in the literature of Ecocriticism, Affect Theory and New Materialism. The opening paragraph of Barad's landmark *Meeting the Universe Halfway* reads: 'This book is about entanglements. To be entangled is not simply to be intertwined with another, as in the joining of separate entities, but to lack an independent, self-contained existence. Existence is not an individual affair. Individuals do not preexist their interactions; rather, individuals emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating' (p. ix).

²⁸⁸ See Andy Letcher, 'Ontological Anarchy and the Ecological Self', delivered at *Breaking Convention V* (University of Greenwich, 16-18 August 2019), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rhrWodW4O9Q>> [accessed 22 October 2020].

²⁸⁹ Huxley, *Island* MS, box 59, fol. 2, p. 73.

categories—in the mode of the right hemisphere ‘one will always be taken unawares by experience, since nothing being ever repeated, nothing can ever be known’.²⁹⁰

3.4: REHARMONISING THE HEMISPHERES

Unlike many Eastern cultures which have longstanding traditions of understanding the body as a meeting of different forces, Western medical history reveals comparatively little evidence of widespread holistic practices.²⁹¹ Indeed, since the nineteenth century, Western biology and chemistry have proliferated through their refinement of isolation and extraction.²⁹² The positive aspects of this cannot be overstated: isolating and extracting alkaloids expedites the development of effective medicines; locating maladies and surgically removing or repairing them saves countless lives. Radha, Will’s Palanese nurse, describes Western medicine as ‘fifty per cent terrific and fifty per cent non-existent [...] Fantastic operations—but when it comes to teaching people the way of going through life without having to be chopped up, absolutely nothing’ (p. 77). The problem is when extraction and manipulation become the barometers of progress.

3.4.1: NOVELTY & DEPRESSION

In many contexts, ‘meaning’ refers to logic and probability; ‘I found a lizard in my car’ would generally be deemed more meaningful than ‘I found my car in a lizard’. Sentences that do not correspond with an expected model of reality may be categorised as meaningless (nonsensical). However, in other contexts, ‘meaning’ refers to affective intensity—a sensation beyond normal arousal that is registered as significant. As such, a meaningless (nonsensical) comment can be meaningful (significant), and a meaningful (sensible) comment can be meaningless (insignificant). These two interpretations capture McGilchrist’s characterisation of the hemispheres, in which one ‘specialises’ in rational sense, and the other in embodied feeling.

As we mature, we develop intricate models of reality, and sensory input serves to confirm or correct these predictions. Novel experiences tend to be less

²⁹⁰ McGilchrist, *The Master*, p. 31.

²⁹¹ Richard E. Nisbett, *The Geography of Thought: How Asians and Westerners Think Differently...and Why* (New York: The Free Press, 2003), p. 193.

²⁹² Ernst Jünger, ‘The Plant as Autonomous Power’, *The Entheogen Review*, 9.1 (2000), 34-36 (p. 35).

dominated by projection; ‘first times’, for instance, tend to be registered as more meaningful (significant) than subsequent experiences of the same category, and thus better recalled. A first kiss is meaningful for its embodied richness, not its logical consistency; generally speaking, heightened receptivity means heightened experiential richness. This, broadly speaking, characterises the experience of children, whose predictive categories are fewer in number and less established—there is now neuroscientific evidence that the right hemisphere is more developed than the left in children up to four years of age.²⁹³ Richness and animacy are the price we pay for excessive uniformity and standardisation.

In modern capitalist societies, ‘novelty’ has largely been outsourced to commodities, entertainment, and tourism. In Pala, however, the dispensable novelties of Sears Roebuck are considered obstacles to human satisfaction; they do not classify the acquisition of new objects as a contribution to novelty. Rather, novelty is a perspective that can be cultivated through defamiliarisation; the Palanese develop the ability to induce a sense of novelty—to ‘look with complete innocence at this infinitely improbable thing’ (p. 267). Through the lens of McGilchrist, novelty refers to that which has not been foreclosed by the left hemisphere.

Clinical studies at Imperial College London (and an ever-growing elsewhere) have been exploring the potential of psychedelic therapy in the treatment of ‘depression’—a broad category that typically signifies an ongoing diminishment of pleasure and a lack of animation. The metaphors with which people express their experiences often relate to enclosure and disconnection, corresponding with a lack of ‘richness’ or ‘meaning’. In a recent article on the qualitative experiences of patients undertaking psilocybin treatment for depression, most described their everyday reality as one in which their senses felt ‘shut down’.²⁹⁴ They were unable to enjoy the activities that they used to take pleasure in, describing reductions in their appetites, haptic senses, and visual perceptions. One patient explains how they would ‘look at orchids and intellectually understand that there was beauty, but not experience it’; beauty was adequately categorised, but affectively dissociated.²⁹⁵ As outlined in the previous sections, the left hemisphere excels at abstraction—simplifying experience according to pre-established categories. This relates directly to the embodiment of ‘meaning’.

²⁹³ Catherine Chiron and others, ‘The Right Brain Hemisphere is Dominant in Human Infants’, *Brain* 120.6 (1997), 1057-65.

²⁹⁴ Rosalind Watts and others, ‘Patients’ Accounts of Increased “Connectedness” and “Acceptance” After Psilocybin for Treatment-Resistant Depression’, *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 57.5 (2017), 520-64 (p. 527).

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*.

Without reducing subjective experience to neurological activity, observing their correlations can be illuminating—and necessary in a culture that equates quantification with legitimisation. The current neuroscientific consensus is that the experiences generally categorised as ‘depression’ correlate with increased activity and decreased entropy in the brain’s Default Mode Network, in contrast to psychedelics, which tend to increase connectivity and entropy across the brain as a whole.²⁹⁶ Carhart-Harris and Friston have explored the phenomenological implications of neurological entropy, and concluded that it ‘indexes the richness (i.e., the diversity and vividness) of subjective experience, within any given state of consciousness’.²⁹⁷ They propose that ‘a principal action of psychedelics is to increase the entropy of spontaneous brain activity, and that such effects are mirrored at the subjective level by an increase in the richness of conscious experience’.²⁹⁸

This is supported by patient testimonies: ‘[t]hings look different even now. I would look over at the park and it would be so green, a type of green I’d never experienced before. Being among the trees was incredible, like experiencing them for the first time, so vibrant, so alive’.²⁹⁹ In his first portrayal of mescaline in *Doors*, Huxley similarly describes flowers ‘quivering under the pressure of the significance with which they were charged’ (p. 5).³⁰⁰

Examples like this, or Griffiths’ study on psilocybin and mystical experience, acquire a different texture alongside the notion that one of the primary effects of psychedelics is to inhibit activity in the neuronal networks that correlate with expectation and familiarity. This is not to reduce experience to brain activity, but to highlight a semantic issue that is scarcely addressed.

The diminution of richness (significance) is culturally narrated as a ‘symptom’ of ‘depression’. Likewise (although contrastingly), the amplification of richness is culturally narrated as an ‘effect’ of psychedelic substances.³⁰¹ This allows statements such as ‘the amplification of meaning counteracts depression’ to be meaningful (make logical sense). However, if a person is understood as an ongoing event-experience, as a panpsychist view holds, then this is akin to saying, ‘amplifying meaning counteracts a scarcity of meaning’. This crucially challenges

²⁹⁶ Robin Carhart-Harris and others, ‘The Entropic Brain: A Theory of Conscious States Informed by Neuroimaging Research with Psychedelic Drugs’, *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 8.20 (2014), 1-22.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁹ Watts and others, p. 523.

³⁰⁰ Huxley, *Doors*, p. 5.

³⁰¹ Ido Hartogssohn, ‘The Meaning-Enhancing Properties of Psychedelics and Their Mediator Role in Psychedelic Therapy, Spirituality, and Creativity’, *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 12.1 (2018), 1-5; Benny Shannon, ‘The Epistemics of Ayahuasca Visions’, *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 9.2 (2010), 263-80 (p. 269).

the rhetoric that divorces pathologies from their phenomenologies—a matter to which I will return.

This discussion would be incomplete without acknowledging the amplification of meaning and its relationship with ‘psychosis’. When *Doors* was published in 1954, mescaline and LSD were still predominantly portrayed as ‘psychotomimetics’, and ‘psychedelic’ was coined two years later in semantic resistance to this association.³⁰² However, an augmented sense of meaning is one area where the term partially applies; unlike ‘depression’, ‘psychosis’ often denotes an excess of perceived significance.³⁰³ Carhart-Harris and Friston note that the crucial difference between psychoses and psychedelic experiences is that, in the case of a compound like psilocybin, the acute effects last only a matter of hours, which is insufficient time to consolidate a disruption in one’s degree of salience attribution.³⁰⁴ Here, the authors are offering reassurance against the myth that a single psychedelic experience may leave a subject delusional for a lifetime—indeed, the ‘psychotomimetic’ aspect of psychedelic experiences may be enriching for individuals with a reduced capacity to feel significance.

The case against sustained psychosis simultaneously challenges another psychedelic trope—that of single-dose, or even double-dose, treatment—an idea that has been propelled by the media.³⁰⁵ In single/double dose models participants often undergo a course of therapy sessions, one or two of which will involve ingesting a psychoactive substance. This is framed as an alternative to traditional selective serotonin-reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), which are also the efficacy measure for new treatments. In the Imperial College trials, for example, the efficacy of a double-dose psilocybin treatment was measured against escitalopram (an SSRI) over the course of six weeks.³⁰⁶ On the one hand, this challenges the (highly profitable) pharmaceutical model of daily medication, on the other, it presents something of a non sequitur, implying that one or two psychedelic sessions have the potential to permanently change salience attribution for the better, but not for the worse. It has long been understood, however, that single/double-dose treatment models rarely yield the most benefit for the patient. Teri Krebs and Pål-Ørjan Johansen’s meta-analysis of the randomised control trials on LSD for alcoholism collates the

³⁰² Huxley and Osmond, p. 267.

³⁰³ McGilchrist, *The Master*, p. 399.

³⁰⁴ Carhart-Harris and Friston, p. 328.

³⁰⁵ Alex Moe, ‘Researchers Looking to Treat Depression with Psychedelic Mushrooms’, *WisBusiness*, 26 August 2020, <<https://www.wisbusiness.com/2020/researchers-looking-to-treat-depression-with-psychedelic-mushrooms/>> [accessed 21 October 2020].

³⁰⁶ Robin Carhart-Harris and others, ‘Trial of Psilocybin versus Escitalopram for Depression’, *The New England Journal of Medicine*, 384.15 (2021), 1402-11.

multitude of investigators over the last half century who have emphasised the importance of repeated doses in psychedelic treatment.³⁰⁷ Contrary to the implications of a neurological ‘reset’ (to which I return in Chapter 5), it is very uncommon for any psychiatric drug to have sustained effects after only a single dose, not least when the problem may be a global-scale crisis of meaning.

3.4.2: UNCERTAINTY & ANXIETY

Developments in quantum physics in the early twentieth century—namely Niels Bohr and Werner Heisenberg’s work on the uncertainty principle—challenged the notion of scientific objectivism. This had profound philosophical implications; indeed, Whitehead’s process philosophy is grounded in these advances.³⁰⁸ However, after almost a century of scientific consensus that indeterminism is an essential aspect of the physical world, the Western distaste for darkness endures. One study conducted at the University of Michigan Medical Centre reports that Westerners with permanent disabilities experience more life satisfaction than those with a medical chance of recovery from the same affliction.³⁰⁹

Uncertainty is not especially valued in the Western education system. For centuries the assessment criteria of most disciplines have consisted of questions that require unambiguous answers—the left hemisphere’s proficiency. McGilchrist discusses the Vocabulary section of IQ testing as an example of this, where answers that use abstract nouns as descriptors are worth higher scores than those that use verbal phrases.³¹⁰

Whitehead similarly rebukes the ‘trimness’ of these data-memorisation-based knowledge traditions and emphasises how his process theory ‘admits a greater ultimate mystery and a deeper ignorance’.³¹¹ Indeed, there are many cultures that do not nurture this aversion to mystery. As Doyle summaries, ‘[f]undamental to shamanic rhetoric is the uncertainty clustering around the possibility of being an “I”,

³⁰⁷ Teri Krebs and Pål-Ørjan Johansen, ‘Lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) for Alcoholism: Meta-analysis of Randomised Controlled Trials’, *Journal of Psychopharmacology*, 26.7 (2021), 1-9 (p. 8).

³⁰⁸ In 1961 Huxley had lunch with Bohr—‘Bohr - the great scientist who acts the part of Bohr the great scientist’—and was less than impressed by his political involvements and social mannerisms. In his personal diary, Huxley comments on Bohr’s inability to light his own tobacco pipe and describes how he ‘talked without ceasing about his war experiences as an atomic advisor to Roosevelt and Churchill, apologising every now and then for not letting me say anything, & immediately going on with his own reminiscences’. Diary, workbook 1961, 19 August 1961. Huxley papers, box 50, fol. 1.

³⁰⁹ Dylan Smith and others, ‘Happily hopeless: Adaptation to a Permanent, but Not to a Temporary, Disability’, *Health Psychology*, 28.6 (2009), 787-91.

³¹⁰ McGilchrist, *The Matter*, p. 370.

³¹¹ Whitehead, *Concept*, p. 73.

an uncertainty that becomes the very medium in which shamanic medicine emerges'.³¹² Analysing the innumerable notions of self among shamanistic belief systems is far beyond the scope of this project, and I use Doyle's summary only to emphasise how uncertainty is not as ubiquitously associated with discomfort as it is in the modern West.

In an article entitled 'Toward a Radical Uncertainty', author Anna Luke writes poignantly of her childhood fear of the dark, which resurfaced during an ayahuasca ceremony.³¹³ She notes how darkness is uncommon in modern civilisation—even luxurious—many city dwellers go to great lengths and pay high premiums to visit locations without electricity. Luke describes searching for the phrase 'in the dark' in the *Oxford Thesaurus of English*, and her reaction to finding only synonyms such as 'unaware', 'uninformed', 'ignorant'; 'this shunning of darkness is encoded at the level of language. Not one of these phrases suggests that it might be anything other than an unfruitful, unprofitable, unworthwhile place in which to dwell'.³¹⁴ In coherence with McGilchrist and Huxley, she speculates that the need for certainty may have been solidified by the Enlightenment, and proceeds to counter this with an exploration of 'aporia', an Ancient Greek term for 'uncertainty' that implies 'a profoundly generative state of being'.³¹⁵ Her story relays how ayahuasca unveiled the fertility of uncertainty and broke down the logic of identity to reveal a liminal zone where darkness could flourish. I contend that psychedelic experiences, and other alternative states that diminish the ego's integrity, may be the key to a richer understanding of agnosticism.

Recent fMRI studies have revealed neurological mechanisms that help to describe the connection between psychedelic states of consciousness and feelings of uncertainty. Carhart-Harris and Friston describe our reality models as 'priors'; these are the beliefs/predictions/concepts that standardise/maintain/create human experiences—one such example is 'the belief that one has a particular personality and set of characteristics and views'.³¹⁶ Psychedelics, they explain, 'relax the precision weighting of high-level priors [to] create a state in which these priors are imbued with less confidence'.³¹⁷ For McGilchrist, a precision weighting in favour of

³¹² Doyle, p. 105.

³¹³ Anna Luke, 'Toward a Radical Uncertainty' in *Psychedelic Mysteries of the Feminine: Creativity, Ecstasy, and Healing*, ed. by Maria Papaspyrou, Chiara Baldini and David Luke (Rochester: Park Street Press, 2019), pp. 158-66.

³¹⁴ A Luke, p. 159.

³¹⁵ A Luke, p. 160; McGilchrist, *The Master*, p. 334; Huxley describes how 'the urge to order, the dislike of incomprehension and the desire for meaning – are at the root of all science. We dissociate in order to understand; but the understanding that dissociation brings us is always partial and misleading'. *Island MS*, box 59, fol. 2, p. 73.

³¹⁶ Carhart-Harris and Friston, p. 319.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*.

priors characterises the left hemisphere; whereas '[t]he right hemisphere makes it possible to hold several ambiguous possibilities in suspension', the left 'needs certainty and needs to be right'.³¹⁸

McGilchrist's theory that the characteristics of the left hemisphere have become exaggerated in modern civilisation is supported by the ubiquity of uncertainty-based 'anxiety'. As with 'depression', 'anxiety' is an extensive category—for this reason, early attempts to correlate anxiety with neurological activity were so inconsistent that they were considered meaningless (nonsensical). However, a pattern emerged when these contradictory studies were categorised according to their primary definition of anxiety; in 1997 Wendy Heller and others conducted a literature review in light of the distinction between 'anxious arousal' and 'anxious apprehension'.³¹⁹ 'Anxious arousal' is characterised by the somatic sensations associated with panic, which correlates with neurological asymmetry in favour of the right hemisphere, whereas 'anxious apprehension' is characterised by future-oriented worry, verbal ruminations, and obsessive compulsions, and correlates with asymmetry in favour of the left hemisphere.³²⁰

The Palanese show a distinct lack of anxious arousal. For example, the Rani and Murugan's conspiracy to colonise Pala provokes little negative rumination in Susila, one of *Island's* main cultural ambassadors. As she explains, all one can do is 'try to change their minds, hope for a happy outcome and be prepared for the worst' (p. 323). In Pala, uncertainty is not presented as either a shortcoming or a source of disquietude, but a foundational principle; 'Give us this day our daily Faith, but deliver us, dear God, from Belief' (pp. 43, 101). Beyond mitigating anxious apprehension, uncertainty is their antidote to dogma.

It is both ironic and absurd that a low tolerance to uncertainty is honed by education systems, but pathologised by healthcare systems. This, of course, is an oversimplification. Reducing uncertainty via simplified narrative concepts can be useful in the context of trauma or bereavement, as it 'reduces the emotional power of events by turning extraordinary, attention-demanding events into ordinary ones'.³²¹ However, this process also accelerates the 'recovery' from positive experiences, a phenomenon that has been termed the pleasure paradox—'whereby

³¹⁸ McGilchrist, *The Master*, p. 82.

³¹⁹ Wendy Heller and others, 'Patterns of Regional Brain Activity Differentiate Types of Anxiety', *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 106.3 (1997), 376-85.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 376-78.

³²¹ Timothy D. Wilson, David B. Centerbar and Deborah A. Kermer, 'The Pleasures of Uncertainty: Prolonging Positive Moods in Ways People Do Not Anticipate', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 88.1 (2005), 5-21 (p. 6). This approach encapsulates the 'psychological first aid' practiced in Pala, discussed in 5.5.1.

the cognitive processes used to make sense of positive events reduce the pleasure people obtain from them'.³²² This is unsurprising considering the negative correlation between prediction and presence, as previously discussed.

Equally, there are some aspects of Western culture that recognise, curate, and even celebrate uncertainty: poetry, literature (especially Modernism), surprise birthday parties, gambling, any creative product of the Thriller genre—suspense is highly commodified. However, the positive rhetoric around the latter examples is typically centred on the relief of uncertainty—the reveal. There is a cultural agreement that uncertainty is desirable only under specific (and temporary) conditions; the cut to black ending of *The Sopranos* is still described as one of the most controversial finales in history.³²³ Yet, it is also lauded as one of the best television productions of all time. (With the exception of the show's creators) most people underestimate the value of uncertainty. To call upon the principles of polyphasia, I am not suggesting a hierarchy between states of certainty and uncertainty, but rather highlighting the self-perpetuating causes and consequences of their imbalance.

For the individual, an excessively predictable environment fosters a low tolerance to uncertainty, and may be pathologised as anxiety (anticipation) or OCD. Excessive attention to internal predictive models negates the richness of sensory input and may be pathologised as depression. Again, while these are oversimplifications of vast cultural categories of illness, they spotlight the assumption that there is an 'optimal' way of experiencing an objective reality—a myth from the left-hemisphere's world. This asymmetry has become the backbone of monophasia.

3.5: CLOSING

In Pala, uncertainty is integral to conflict resolution. For example, Vijaya and Dr Robert have different hypotheses for how *moksha*-medicine works. According to Vijaya, 'the *moksha*-medicine does something to the silent areas of the brain which cause them to produce a set of subjective events to which people have given the

³²² Wilson, Centerbar and Kermer, p. 5.

³²³ James Hunt, 'Why *The Sopranos* Series Finale Ended So Abruptly', *Screen Rant*, 7 July 2019, <<https://screenrant.com/sopranos-finale-ending-explained-cut-black/>> [accessed 8 October 2020]. In 2007, HBO aired the revolutionary finale of *The Sopranos*, which ends with an abrupt cut to black during a tense scene which leaves the fate of Tony Soprano (the show's protagonist) ambiguous.

name “mystical experience”, whereas Dr Robert prefers the metaphor of *moksha* opening up a ‘neurological sluice’, but, as he says to Vijaya: ‘You can’t demonstrate the proof of your hypothesis and I can’t demonstrate the truth of mine. And even if you could prove that I’m wrong, would it make any practical difference?’ (p. 168).

Disagreement is calmly categorised as an alternative perspective; some individuals feel more aligned with the idea that the brain produces consciousness, and others that it transmits consciousness. Dr Robert’s detached affinity avoids the fervour of ideology—the force that ultimately engulfs Pala.³²⁴ Dr Robert’s question ‘would it make any practical difference?’ captures the Palanese interpretation of truth. Without objectivism, the aim of learning is not to acquire more certainty for the left hemisphere, but to develop valuable and adaptable dispositions towards the self, the community, and the wider world. When it is time for the children of Pala to learn the ‘deepest truths of religion’, they are set to climb a precipice and given their four hundred milligrams of revelation. *Moksha* is integrated into a pedagogy whereby truth is a personal, embodied experience; truth is guided by frameworks, not dictated by creeds. In dissociating truth from predictability, the darkness of uncertainty becomes bountiful.

Huxley’s use of the ‘reducing valve’ metaphor shifted over the final decade of his life, culminating in the Palanese practices which allow them to move between degrees of openness. As introduced, Huxley initially declares of mescaline that ‘[t]his is how one ought to see’.³²⁵ This is quoted from the acute experience, and his reticence grew with repetition; ‘“This is how one ought to see,” I repeated yet again. And I might have added, “These are the sort of things one ought to look at”’.³²⁶ Huxley almost eschews monophasia, but ultimately replaces the prioritisation of one mode of perception with the prioritisation of another; in this context, ‘this is how one ought to see’ implies that expansion is preferable to contraction. However, his gesture towards self-correction is the embryonic phase of what became Pala’s principal pedagogy.

Huxley began considering this concept with increasing importunity after his introduction to mescaline, highlighting the importance of ‘living amphibiously, half in fact and half in words, half in immediate experience and half in abstract notions’, but *Island* marks his first attempt to translate the idea into a conscious social

³²⁴ I reserve a more detailed discussion of the Rani’s ‘World-Wide Crusade of the Spirit’ for Chapter 6.

³²⁵ Huxley, *Doors*, p. 15.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

practice.³²⁷ The Palanese cultivate a balanced, context-based respect for different configurations of projection and reception. This early priming is absent from Western psychedelic integration—an absence that will necessarily endure as long as modern culture remains unyieldingly monophasic.

With no objective creeds or doctrines, the Palanese neither fight wars, nor prepare for them. The harmony of Pala is disrupted by forces intent on extraction and control—the Palanese could not possess the means to defend themselves from the oil industries without compromising the principles on which their society is based. Likewise, in McGilchrist’s analogy, if the right hemisphere had the means to assert its perspective over the left, then it would not be the right hemisphere. Like fighting fire with fire, or diluting water with water, the categorical dogmas that have neglected context and authorised excessive extraction will not be mitigated by the same paradigms that augmented them. With McGilchrist’s theory as a framework and Pala as an example, psychedelics can be positioned as a realistic means of equalising the disproportionate grasping for categories, certainty, and control that define modern culture—a means of rediscovering the delight of the darkness.

³²⁷ Aldous Huxley, *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Other Essays* (New York: Signet, 1956), p. 11.

CHAPTER 4: VERBAL VARIATION

It is, of course, perfectly natural to assume that everyone else is having a far more exciting time than you. Human beings for instance have a phrase which describes this phenomenon – ‘The other man’s grass is always greener.’ The Shaltanac race of Broop Kidron Thirteen had a similar phrase, but since their planet is somewhat eccentric botanically speaking, the best they could manage was ‘The other Shaltanac’s joogleberry shrub is always a more mauvy shade of pinky russet’, and so the expression soon fell into misuse and the Shaltanacs had little option but to become terribly happy and contented with their lot, much to the surprise of everyone else in die Galaxy who had not realised that the best way not to be unhappy is not to have a word for it—Douglas Adams.³²⁸

4.1: OPENING

Claudio Naranjo, the Chilean psychiatrist and educator, gave his final presentation at the World Ayahuasca Conference in 2019, a month before his death. He received a standing ovation from an audience of over a thousand people after his closing statement: ‘creo que el mundo psicodélico esta cayendo en el mismo pecado de la arrogancia de la ciencia, una superstición que la ciencia sabe más que la poesía y los mitos’.³²⁹ Beyond the hierarchies between disciplines of knowledge, Naranjo’s perspective is compounded by another factor—the association between psychedelics and ineffability. Although I do not dispute the *incompatibilities* between psychedelic experiences and prosaic narrative categories, I consider ‘ineffable’ to be a reductive concept that discourages inquiry into the entanglement of language and perception. ‘Ineffable’ nurtures a semantic nonchalance that inadvertently relegates the wisdom of poetry.

³²⁸ Douglas Adams, *The Original Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy Radio Scripts* (London: Pan Books, 2003), p. 133.

³²⁹ ‘I believe that the psychedelic world is falling into the same sin of arrogance that science has, believing that science is wiser than poetry and mythology’. Claudio Naranjo, ‘La Relevancia de la Ayahuasca en Los Problemas del Mundo’, delivered at the *World Ayahuasca Conference* (Girona, May 31 – June 2 2019), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0T8p-hDZyC0>> [accessed 26 October 2020].

The association between alternate states of consciousness and ineffability compels a reappraisal of English language conventions. In order to approach such an extensive topic, I limit my inquiry to *Island*'s use of the following: ambiguity; paradox; abstractive grammatical predilections; and 'untranslatability'. Developing McGilchrist's arguments about asymmetry, I also explore the semantic symptoms of an overactive left hemisphere. Although this discussion is based on scientific data, I use the hemispheres first and foremost as a metaphor through which to animate different approaches to Language. According to the left hemisphere's mythology, Language constitutes a series of arbitrary nominatives for bounded categories, and the right hemisphere cannot speak. This, of course, is incomplete, and understanding the linguistic capacities of the right hemisphere not only resituates the importance of poetic practices, but can also serve as a compass for navigating diverse perceptual experiences.

Inspired by Pala's multilingual population, I also support the notion that not all of the world's grammatical systems are equally skewed towards the left hemisphere.³³⁰ The evidence used is inevitably limited; with examples from Chinese and several indigenous languages. Except in the case of Chinese, I rely on translations from other researchers to explain these examples. However, this is not an exercise in comparative linguistics; the 'untranslatable' examples of this chapter are intended as platforms from which to observe some of the swells and riptides of the English language—the linguistic patterns in which perception is submerged. Harmony requires diversity; with a broader range of linguistic lenses, we can mitigate the most dominant disharmonies between psychedelics and semantics.

After a brief review of the literature on language and psychedelics, I return to the notion of *Island* as a pedagogical tool, this time focussing on the relationship between language and hemispheric activation. I discuss how ambiguity and paradox can offset the excesses of nomenclature and the relationship between bilingualism and perceptual flexibility, arguing that the Palanese language serves to augment a different mode of attention to that of English (which the islanders primarily use 'when it comes to business, or science, or speculative philosophy' (p. 157)). This will lead into a discussion of Huxley's final unfinished project, speculatively titled *The Hypothetical Novel*, which elucidates another creative and disruptive language practice. Due to the dearth of academic commentary on this content, I briefly deviate from my central line of inquiry in order to introduce its characters and context, before returning to its reflection on the Latinate foundations of English. In the final section,

³³⁰ McGilchrist, *The Master*, p. 275.

I consider ‘untranslatability’ alongside *Island*’s incorporation of Sanskrit, as a clinching example of the potential reciprocity between poetic practices, psychedelic integration and even the preservation of endangered languages.

4.1.1: CONTEXT

There is no scientific consensus on the boundaries between ‘language’ and ‘thought’. The breadth of meaning that permeates both concepts renders any question about ‘their’ relationship highly fraught (and therefore a topic of extensive scholarly dispute). Dimensions away from this debate, Pala’s school principal, Mrs Narayan, explains that the children are taught to notice ‘how their language habits affect not only their feelings and desires but even their sensations’ (p. 256). Although the minutiae of linguistic determinism are secondary to my discussion, I orient Huxley alongside a ‘weak Whorfian’ perspective, which suggests not that language determines thought, but rather *predisposes* attention in measurable (and immeasurable) ways.³³¹

The Whorf debate also develops more nuance under the evidence that the hemispheres process different aspects of language in distinct ways. Aubrey L. Gilbert and others present robust evidence that language has a stronger influence on perception in the right visual field (processed by the left hemisphere) than the left visual field (processed by the right hemisphere). They comment on how previous studies addressing the influence of language on perception ‘have tended to look for a simple yes or no answer to the question. Our findings suggest a more complex picture [...] our representation of the visual world may be, at one and the same time, filtered and not filtered through the categories of language’.³³² Different contexts produce different conclusions.

From the peripheries of the controversy, linguist Nicholas Evans similarly emphasises the variability of attention, maintaining that each language ‘has its own distinct psychological cast, because to speak it you have to attend constantly to facets of the world that other languages let you ignore’.³³³ In resonance with these examples, my baseline position is that it is *valuable* to nurture a close correlation between language and attention.

³³¹ Jerome Feldman, *From Molecule to Metaphor: A Neural Theory of Language* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2006), p. 190.

³³² Aubrey L. Gilbert and others, ‘Whorf Hypothesis is Supported in the Right Visual Field but Not the Left’, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 103.2 (2006), 489-94 (p. 493).

³³³ Nicholas Evans, *Dying Words: Endangered Languages and What They Have to Tell Us* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), Kindle edition, loc. 2279.

Dr Robert suggests that ‘our ordinary habits of perception cause us to see the world as Platonists’.³³⁴ One example of this would be the suffix ‘ness’, which allows concepts like ‘truthfulness’, ‘happiness’, ‘goodness’, etc., to be decontextualised from their material-experiential instances (see 4.3). Furthermore, the grammatical availability and ease of such an abstraction simultaneously augments the notion that language is little more than a compendium of labels for exogenous categories.³³⁵ This is a particularly left-hemispheric view. However, understanding reality as a continuous interplay between projection and reception, without objective external categories, can reanimate language in profound ways.

In 1965 Robert Mogar commented on the growing interest in LSD as a ‘method of nonaristotelian training producing ever greater semantic flexibility’.³³⁶ Scholarship on the specific intersection between language and psychedelics is sparse. Stanley Krippner’s ‘The Effects of Psychedelic Experience on Language Functioning’ (1970), Diana Reed Slattery’s *Xenolinguistics: Psychedelics, Language and the Evolution of Consciousness* (2015), and Devenot’s evolving body of scholarship on psychedelics and poetics constitute some noteworthy qualitative inquiries. In terms of quantitative research, there have been a handful of studies over the last sixty years. Marianne Amarel and Frances Cheek measured the unpredictability of semantic patterns in subjects under LSD, showing a positive correlation between psychedelics and free association.³³⁷ This was later developed by Manfred Spitzer, whose double-blind study suggested that psilocybin extends semantic activation, making indirectly related words more accessible.³³⁸

These results inspired Neiloufar Family’s more recent study on psychedelics and semantic networks, which was based on a picture-naming task. Family found that subjects under LSD were more prone to mistakenly naming different items from the ‘same’ category (e.g., body parts).³³⁹ However, nominative error is not interpreted as linguistic deterioration; Family concludes that the nature of the imprecisions supports Spitzer’s hypothesis that psychedelics broaden language accessibility in other ways. Although these studies are few, and limited by small samples sizes, they share the deduction that moderate doses interfere with object

³³⁴ Huxley, *Tomorrow*, p. 24.

³³⁵ Bohm, p. 60.

³³⁶ Robert E. Mogar, ‘Search and Research with the Psychedelics’, *ETC: A Review of General Semantics*, 22.4 (1965), 395-407.

³³⁷ Marianne Amarel and Frances E. Cheek, ‘Some Effects of LSD-25 on Verbal Communication’, *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 70.6 (1965), 453-56.

³³⁸ Manfred Spitzer and others, ‘Increased Activation of Indirect Semantic Associations Under Psilocybin’, *Biological Psychiatry*, 39 (1996), 1055-57.

³³⁹ Neiloufar Family and others, ‘Semantic activation in LSD: Evidence from Picture Naming’, *Language, Cognition and Neuroscience*, 31.10 (2016), 1320-27.

classification due to their stimulation of wider—(perhaps more creative)—semantic associations.

4.2: RIGHTING LANGUAGE

Since the mid-nineteenth century, the right hemisphere has been characterised as either ‘silent’, or, at best, linguistically ‘inferior’ to the left hemisphere—a myth that has percolated through neuroscience, pop psychology, and even advertising.³⁴⁰ However, research with split-brain individuals suggests that there are at least three major language networks in the brain, only one of which is exclusive to the left hemisphere. Therefore, it is not a question of ‘where language is, but what aspects of language are where’.³⁴¹ Gazzaniga has presented evidence that lexical units are predominantly processed by the left hemisphere, whereas semantic irregularities in longer narratives appear to activate the right.³⁴²

The current neuroscientific consensus is that language processing in the left hemisphere tends to be ‘fast, deep, and narrowly focused’, whereas processing in the right tends to be ‘slower and broader in scope, such that several alternate meanings may remain active over longer durations’.³⁴³ This is known as the ‘depth of activation’ hypothesis, and is particularly applicable to word recognition tasks, where the left hemisphere is inclined toward small sets of closely-related associates—an efficient categorical mode that limits the scope of potential meanings.³⁴⁴ For many language tasks, the left hemisphere can only be deemed ‘superior’ when speed and constraint are the criteria of success.³⁴⁵ The right hemisphere, in contrast, shows more activation in tasks that involve distantly-related words, non-salient meanings, and ‘novel’ language.³⁴⁶ Natalie Kacinik and Christine Chiarello suggest that the left hemisphere attends only to literal and contextually-relevant meaning, whereas the right is more suited to broader, alternative

³⁴⁰ McGilchrist, *The Master*, p. 12.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

³⁴² Michael Gazzaniga, ‘Cerebral Specialisation and Interhemispheric Communication: Does the Corpus Callosum Enable the Human Condition?’, *Brain*, 123 (2000), 1293-1326 (p. 1314).

³⁴³ Natalie Kacinik and Christine Chiarello, ‘Understanding Metaphors: Is the Right Hemisphere Uniquely Involved?’, *Brain and Language*, 100.2 (2007), 188-207 (p. 189); Kirsten I. Taylor and others, ‘Qualitative Hemispheric Differences in Semantic Category Matching’, *Brain and Language*, 70.1 (1999), 119-31 (p. 129).

³⁴⁴ David Anaki, Miriam Faust and Shlomo Kravetz, ‘Cerebral Hemispheric Asymmetries in Processing Lexical Metaphors’, *Neuropsychologia*, 36.7 (1998), 691-700 (p. 693).

³⁴⁵ K. Taylor and others, pp. 119, 129.

³⁴⁶ Miriam Faust and Nira Mashal, ‘The Role of the Right Cerebral Hemisphere in Processing Novel Metaphoric Expressions taken from Poetry: A Divided Visual Field Study’, *Neuropsychologia*, 45.4 (2007), 860-70 (p. 860).

interpretations, and they introduce the notion that ‘[t]his may be potentially useful in situations where an *initial understanding must be revised*’ [my emphasis].³⁴⁷

There are many unanswered (and potentially unanswerable) questions about the relationship between neurological activity and subjective experience. However, the data here embellish both McGilchrist’s theory and contemporary psychedelic science: if the modern West nurtures a neurological asymmetry in favour of the left hemisphere, and psychedelics temporarily increase connectivity and entropy across both hemispheres, then it is logical to assume that their linguistic disruption would be most evident in those aspects that pertain to the left. That is, diminished function at the level of primary lexical definitions—a hypothesis that coheres with the few existing studies on psychedelics and language patterns.

Regardless of whether this hypothesis would be demonstrable over long-term quantitative studies, it works as a metaphorical incentive towards a more lateral approach to the thing we call Language. The cultural myth of a linguistically ‘inferior’ right hemisphere implicitly prioritises the nominative aspects of communication. Indeed, English is more noun-centred than many of the world’s languages.³⁴⁸ This nominative inflation is manifest in, and thus perpetuated by, the association between psychedelics and ineffability, and a more nuanced understanding of the right hemisphere’s role in language processing may elucidate the semantic prosperities of psychedelic states.

4.2.1: POLYSEMY

Following his bestselling book on psychedelics, Michael Pollan published an essay entitled ‘How Does a Writer Put a Drug Trip into Words?’. In this piece he acknowledges his literary debt to Huxley, and poses the question: ‘[h]ow do you possibly construct a narrative without the essential ingredients of person, time and place?’³⁴⁹ Pollan describes his process of shifting between styles—from the stream of consciousness of the voyager, to the observer at one remove, to a meta-narration on the limitations of language itself. In *Island*, rhetorical plurality is integral to both Huxley’s articulation of *moksha*, and its imagined cultural container.

Over the course of the book’s evolution, ineffability was increasingly framed as an opportunity. In the original manuscript, language is described as ‘a device for

³⁴⁷ Kacinik and Chiarello, p. 188.

³⁴⁸ Twila Tardif, ‘Nouns Are Not Always Learned Before Verbs: Evidence from Mandarin Speakers’ Early Vocabularies’, *Developmental Psychology*, 32.3 (1996), 492-504; Kimmerer, *Sweetgrass*, p. 53.

³⁴⁹ Pollan, ‘How Does a Writer’.

persuading ourselves that the unfathomable mystery of existence is really quite unmysterious [...] a device for accumulating and embalming knowledge'.³⁵⁰ Several pages are devoted to listing the intrinsic inadequacies of language. These were removed from the published version, which puts more emphasis on Palanese pedagogies of 'training in the proper use of language' (p. 256). During the children's intermittent bridge-building sessions at school, Mrs Narayan explains how they are asked to 'attempt the impossible [...] to translate their experience into words. As a piece of pure, unconceptualised givenness, what *is* this flower, this dissected frog, this planet at the other end of the telescope?' (pp. 269-70). Her description shifts into to the second person; 'Try to put it down on paper. You won't succeed, of course; but try all the same. It'll help you to understand the difference between words and events, between knowing about things and being acquainted with them' (p. 270). The incompatibility between words and 'unconceptualised givenness' is a pedagogical opportunity; 'one finds oneself, at the end of a bridge-building session, thinking about the nature of language, about different kinds of experience' (pp. 269-270). The students are not assessed on the quality of their artistic output; the process is not one of rhetorical refinement, but of realising why certain perceptual modes are *particularly* resistant to certain narrative modes.

Early education in Pala casts a distinction between scientific stratification and poetic fabrication. However, to distinguish is not to dichotomise; 'science' and 'poetry' are relative. In one of his personal notebooks, Huxley outlines a mode of rhetorical differentiation that attends to the intention of the speaker, rather than the language in abstraction; 'The ambition of the scientist is to say one thing clearly and unambiguously, and to do this he simplifies and jargonises [...] in such a way that each phrase is susceptible to only one interpretation'; the literary artist, in contrast, does not attempt to say one thing unambiguously, but 'to create a language that can convey, not the one meaning of science, but the many meanings of experience'.³⁵¹ Following Huxley's example, some of my uses of 'poetic' refer to a subjective intuition of the narrator's intended ambiguity.

Other uses of the term will emphasise Dr Robert's elaboration, which renders the concept through a lamentation of his father's 'blindest spot'; 'His ideal was pure experimental science at one end of the spectrum, and pure experimental mysticism at the other' (p. 135). Regarding poetry, '[h]e said he liked it; but in fact he didn't. Poetry for its own sake [...] out there, in the space between direct experience and the symbols of science—that was something he simply couldn't

³⁵⁰ Huxley, *Island* MS, box 59, fol. 1, p. 73.

³⁵¹ Huxley, *Personal Effects, Notebook*. Huxley papers, box 50, fol. 26.

understand' (p. 136). In contrast, Dr Robert recites several abstruse verses over the course of the novel, from his wife Susila's ode to the 'poetry of silence', to the Old Raja's writings on a 'luminous secret' between the sky and the sea, and on 'a Being more timeless in transience [...] eternal in its dwindling' (pp. 158, 198, 31). For Dr Robert poetic language is not simply a counterpoint to scientific clarity, nor a mode of mystical representation, but a celebration of deliquescence. Poetry means to revel in the interstices.

From a young age, the Palanese learn about the inevitability of polysemy. In a class on 'Elementary Applied Philosophy', the children are instructed to pinch themselves and observe that they cannot feel the pain of the person beside them, or anyone else in the room; 'notice this: there's only one public word, 'pain', for three thousand million private experiences' (p. 264). As words are public, they 'can't possibly stand for the ways in which happenings of the same general kind are unlike one another' (p. 264). Following this, they reflect on the meaning of a 'wordless flower-sermon', given by the Buddha, about which their teacher withholds any clarification (p. 266). Likewise, Whitehead observes how seemingly identical words can constitute 'an indefinite number of diverse propositions'; however, by understanding the 'hopeless ambiguity of language' we become aware of the 'futility of taking any verbal statement [...] and arguing about *the* meaning'.³⁵² Without the myth of objectivism the ineffability of every aspect of human experience would be more conspicuous.

In contrast to England's present curriculum, in which poetry is currently optional for teenagers at GCSE level, the Palanese learn to revere poesy as an amplification of the foundational ambiguity of communication.³⁵³ Likewise for McGilchrist, poetry constitutes a 'speaking silence [...] part of the world that is delivered by the right hemisphere, the world characterised by betweenness'—it is a means of relinquishing the projected categorical certainties of a distended left hemisphere.³⁵⁴ It is not generative to approach ambiguity as a semantic shortcoming. Rather, it can be a way of resisting the fervours of ideology—a topic to which I return after introducing two supplementary metaphors for Language that will permeate the rest of this chapter.

Without universal categories with arbitrary classifiers, the *moksha*

³⁵² Whitehead, *Process*, p. 216.

³⁵³ Kate Clanchy, 'Making poetry optional in GCSE English literature is out of tune with the times', *The Guardian*, 5 August 2020, <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/aug/05/making-poetry-optional-in-gcse-english-literature-is-out-of-tune-with-the-times>> [accessed 27 October 2020].

³⁵⁴ McGilchrist, *The Master*, p. 72.

experience is no more intrinsically ineffable than the experience of looking at a flower; in the examples above, poetic ‘silence’ does not simply symbolise an insurmountable task, nor does it signify an absence of communication. To avoid such connotations, it may be useful to integrate ‘silence’ and ‘ambiguity’ into an image of semantic ‘spatiality’. In this metaphor, poetic (as opposed to expository) language refers to the degree of ‘spaciousness’ experienced by the receiver in a particular instance. In other words, how much of the meaning is ordained by consensus social frameworks, and how much is contextually variable. Drawing on McGilchrist’s model, the (more ‘crowded’) language of the left would be a manufactured metropolis of classifiers, and the (more ‘spacious’) language of the right would be ‘the waters and the wild’.³⁵⁵ To reiterate, this is an approach to Language and not a reduction to binaries. As the Palanese children learn, meaning is a participatory process—at least partially subjective. Chemical equations, for example, are not typically deployed for their ambiguity, but their symbols could be ‘spacious’ for an individual with no background in chemistry.

Although he does not align himself with any particular metaphysic, McGilchrist has speculated that consciousness may have phases—just as water remains water whether its form is solid, liquid or vapour, he suggests that matter may be a phase of consciousness.³⁵⁶ This metaphor easily extends to Language. For example, in a community of chemists the names of the elements would be icy—frozen units of data. In my own case they are fluid—malleable to many interpretations and momentary associations. To my preliterate nephew they would be vaporous—detectable in some sense but eluding connotation or meaning. Spaciousness and fluidity imply participation, and, although this is variable, I maintain that certain linguistic customs tend to colonise and congeal meaning more than others.

Along a parallel vein, Abram also postulates that phonemic literacy valorises an abstract realm of ideas and distances the material flux of the sensory world.³⁵⁷ In one example, he outlines how the biblical scriptures written in Ancient Hebrew were more ambiguous than their modern counterparts; the alphabet ‘had no letters for what we have come to call “vowels” [...] Thus, in order to read a text written in traditional Hebrew, one had to infer the appropriate vowel sounds from the consonantal

³⁵⁵ William Butler Yeats, ‘The Stolen Child’, *Poets.org*, <<https://poets.org/poem/stolen-child>> [accessed 19 November 2020].

³⁵⁶ Bruce Parry (dir.), *Tawai: A Voice from the Forest*, Amazon, <https://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/video/detail/B07CHYN8Q4/ref=atv_yv_hom_c_unkc_1_7> [accessed 27 September 2020].

³⁵⁷ Abram, *Sensuous*, pp. 71-72.

context'.³⁵⁸ This was a structural property of all the ancient Semitic languages.³⁵⁹ Written words, phrases, and stories were conspicuously incomplete; akin to poetry, meaning is sensitive to the moment of iteration.

Vowels entered the Semitic alphabet when the writing system was adapted to Ancient Greek, whose syllabic complexity required a more comprehensive mode of transcription.³⁶⁰ McGilchrist also hypothesises that the insertion of vowels 'consolidated a shift in the balance of hemispheric power, removing the last unconscious processing strategies from context-based to sequence-based coding'.³⁶¹ Mitigating this fundamental fluidity permitted precision, and therefore unprecedented cultural preservation. However, context contravenes creed.

Where meaning is motionless, words can crystallise, concepts can calcify, ideas can isolate, beliefs can bide, deities can distance; fluidity moderates fundamentalism. This is not confined to religious doctrine, but applies to any disambiguated complex of knowledge. As Huxley points out, ambiguity would be highly inconvenient in scientific institutions; Latin is suited to global binomial nomenclature because the language is no longer evolving. However, this fossilisation simultaneously compromises science's resistance to dogma, especially if the system is conflated with objectivity and prioritised over other ways of knowing.

Huxley saw little distinction between the dogmas of science, religion, and culture—excessive certainty leads to suffering, at the level of the individual as well as the community and the environment. Shelldrake similarly illuminates what he views as the principal dogmas of Western science—one being the assumption that nature is underwritten by fixed laws, rather than predictable habits.³⁶² He describes how the predictive accuracy of scientific methods gradually became conflated with the notion of objective truth.³⁶³

In Pala, poetic language pedagogies dilute the illusion of scientific certainties. The difficulty with applying these techniques to contemporary education is that they are inseparable from Pala's polyphasia; they exist in symbiosis with *moksha* and other perceptual techniques that nurture the state of uncertainty. There is a reciprocity between alternative states of consciousness and poetic practice that would not subsist in a culture that relentlessly exalts the concrete forms of its own construction.

³⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 241-42.

³⁵⁹ Evans, *Dying Words*, loc. 1152.

³⁶⁰ Ibid., loc. 1160.

³⁶¹ McGilchrist, *The Master*, p. 275.

³⁶² Shelldrake, *Delusion*, p. 7.

³⁶³ Ibid., p. 291.

4.2.2: PARADOX

Paradoxes and contradictions are longstanding spiritual pedagogies; as William James summates, mystical literature often contains an abundance of self-contradictory phrases such as ‘dazzling obscurity,’ ‘whispering silence,’ and ‘teeming desert’.³⁶⁴ The koans of Zen Buddhism, as another example, are metaphysical riddles that evade the voices of logic and create space for insight.³⁶⁵ Echoing Zen, Doyle presents the intersection between psychedelics and paradox as an opportunity—an invitation to suspend the binary logic of ordinary awareness.³⁶⁶ However, this requires careful metaphorical framing—especially in a cultural context where ‘paradoxical’ and ‘ineffable’ are often aligned. Through the two metaphors outlined, this discourse can be interpreted as spacious, or fluid, examples of language.³⁶⁷

In Huxley’s psychedelic discourse, paradoxes are often framed through music. As a contextual note, although Huxley claimed no formal musical training, several of his peers recall him spending long hours at the piano during his studies at Oxford, and he was sufficiently well-versed to make a living as a music critic for *The Westminster Gazette* between 1922 and 1923.³⁶⁸ Huxley maintained this musical fluency throughout his life—even in *Doors*, his account of listening to Mozart, Gesualdo, and Alban Berg under the influence of mescaline includes technical details about chromaticism and modal versus tonal compositions.³⁶⁹

In December 1955 Huxley took his first dose of LSD with Hubbard, Heard and William Galienne, an American psychologist. During the session they listened to Johann Sebastian Bach’s Orchestral Suite in B-minor and the Musical Offering, which Huxley subsequently described to Osmond as a ‘revelation’—a way to deliver an understanding of ‘divine nature’.³⁷⁰ He continues:

Only polyphony, and only the highly organized polyphony (structurally organised and not merely texturally organised, as with Palestrina) can convey

³⁶⁴ James, p. 321.

³⁶⁵ Ricard and Thuan, p. 231.

³⁶⁶ Doyle, p. 63.

³⁶⁷ In the spirit of this practice, I deliberately leave my definition/conflation of paradox/contradiction ambiguous.

³⁶⁸ Sybille Bedford, *Aldous Huxley, A Biography Volume One 1894-1939* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973), p. 74; John Aplin, ‘Aldous Huxley and Music in the 1920s’, *Music & Letters*, 64.1 (1983), 25-36 (p. 25).

³⁶⁹ Huxley, *Doors*, pp. 23-24.

³⁷⁰ Huxley and Osmond, p. 238.

the nature of reality, which is multiplicity in unity, the reconciliation of opposites, the not-twoness of diversity, the Nirvana-nature of Samsara, the Love which is the bridge between objective and subjective, good and evil, death and life.³⁷¹

In several of the lectures that he gave in the years that followed, he marvels at music's unique capacity to communicate both 'the very subtle and obscure kinds of movements within the mind-body and spirit' and 'at the same time [...] the universe at large'.³⁷²

A version of Huxley's revelation is fictionalised in Will's *moksha* initiation. As she places a recording of Bach's Fourth Brandenburg Concerto on the gramophone, Susila describes it as '[t]he music that's closest to silence, closest, in spite of its being so highly organised, to pure, one-hundred-degree proof Spirit' (p. 328). From Will's perspective:

The Allegro was revealing itself as an element in the great present Event, a manifestation at one remove of the luminous bliss. Or perhaps that was putting it too mildly. In another modality this Allegro was the luminous bliss; it was the knowledgeable understanding of everything apprehended through a particular piece of knowledge; it was undifferentiated awareness broken up into notes and phrases and yet still all-comprehendingly itself. And of course all this belonged to nobody. It was at once in here, out there and nowhere. (p. 329)

This is less a commentary on music or *moksha*, and more a synecdoche for an entire worldview—a synecdoche that embraces contradiction.

As McGilchrist elaborates, contradictions are only objectionable for the left hemisphere. It is inefficient and illogical for a concept to be both within and beyond a stable category; these either/or dichotomies 'may cease to be problematic in the world delivered by the right hemisphere [...] where concepts are not separate from experience, and where the grounding role of 'betweenness' in constituting reality is apparent'.³⁷³ In conjunction with this, psychiatrist Ede Frecska explains that when the left hemisphere is unable to handle a visual-spatial task it relinquishes its dominance over the right hemisphere—a temporary resignation that can also be

³⁷¹ Ibid..

³⁷² Aldous Huxley, 'Art', in *The Human Situation: Lectures at Santa Barbara*, ed. by Piero Ferrucci (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), pp. 182-97 (p. 196).

³⁷³ McGilchrist, *The Master*, p. 137.

induced through exposure paradoxes.³⁷⁴ In the logical landscape of the left, contradictory statements vaporise into shapeless insignificance; in the rhythmic wilds of the right, they liquify.

The poetry of paradox does not thrive in the captivity of mainstream Western curriculums; Whitehead argues that its potential is compromised by the fact that ‘educated language has been made to conform to the prevalent orthodox theory’.³⁷⁵ This orthodoxy is referring to the rationalism that his process philosophy is intended to dismantle. In formal logic, he explains, ‘a contradiction is the sign of defeat: but in the evolution of real knowledge it marks the first step in progress towards a victory’.³⁷⁶ This pedagogical imbalance is addressed in Pala, as one of the school teachers explains to Will—‘[y]our cure for too much scientific specialisation is a few more courses in the humanities [...] But don’t let’s be fooled by the name. By themselves, the humanities don’t humanise. They’re simply another form of specialisation on the symbolic level’ (p. 257).

In Pala, paradoxical expression is not symbolic reference, but a language custom that is integral to their perceptual training; ‘Each is both’, the young initiates chant while the *moksha* medicine takes effect (p. 202). Furthermore, when pedagogies are not dominated by data collection and classification, the seeming tautology of learning what you already know is not a paradox, but a deliberate practice. For the Palanese, *moksha* and paradoxical poetics are ongoing, reciprocal processes that permeate culture long after their formal education is complete. As Susila explains to Will, ‘the *moksha*-medicine can take you to heaven; but it can also take you to hell. Or else to both, together or alternately’ (pp. 323-4).

The notion of heaven and hell ‘together’ does not align with the spatialised metaphors of the afterlife developed in Abrahamic religions, or the corresponding myths that dramatise an endless struggle between good and evil. However, following the (foreshadowed) ‘descent’ from luminous bliss to essential horror, Susila calls Will to ‘attention’; the crescendo of his psychedelic experience is not Nirvana, but ‘the paradox of opposites indissolubly wedded, of light shining out of darkness, of darkness at the very heart of light’ (p. 345).

In modern physics, the question of whether or not light ‘is’ (objectively) a wave or a photon has become redundant; the instrument designed to observe photons detects photons, and the instrument designed to observe waves detects waves. The

³⁷⁴ Ede Frecska, ‘Why May DMT Occasion Veridical Hallucinations and Informative Experiences?’, in *DMT Dialogues*, pp. 154-74 (p. 163). He uses Zen koans as his prime example.

³⁷⁵ Whitehead, *Concept*, p. 134.

³⁷⁶ Whitehead, *Science*, p. 187.

two are not mutually exclusive, but variable according to the mode of measurement. Reflected in the abundance of contradictions in their rhetorical expositions, psychedelics can reliably induce an experience of paradoxicality, and Pala exemplifies how this can be framed as a practice to harmonise the polarities that arise through objectivism and disambiguation. Akin to the fluctuating states of matter, different approaches to language yield different experiences. ‘Left’ in the dominion of frozen abstractions, contradictions are meaningless vapour. In the ‘right’ context, however, they supplement the distortion of categorical certainties.

4.3: LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY

In Huxley’s 1955 lecture for the Vedanta Society, he suggests that the progression from ‘knowledge’ to ‘understanding’ requires relegating language to a secondary position and concentrating on ‘practical means’; ‘if the European student wishes to remain shut up in the prison created by [...] the thought patterns inherited from his predecessors, then by all means let him plunge through Sanskrit, or Pali, or Chinese, or Tibetan’.³⁷⁷ This is not reflected in the abundance of Sanskrit terminology in *Island*, nor in the Palanese themselves, who meticulously learn to manoeuvre different language forms. Poller has suggested that the children of Pala are ‘inculcated with an approximation of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis and taught to counteract [...] linguistic conditioning’.³⁷⁸ I develop this by aligning Palanese language practices with a ‘weak’ Whorfian perspective, and elaborating on why this is pertinent to psychedelic integration.

4.3.1: WEAKLY WHORFIAN

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is a general principle of linguistic relativity which suggests that language—to some degree—regulates perception. The theory has evoked decades of academic controversy due to various factors: procedural flaws in the studies upon which it was established; the difficulty of measuring thought in isolation from language; the indigenous exoticism that it evoked; and the trajectory

³⁷⁷ Aldous Huxley, *Knowledge and Understanding: A Lecture by Aldous Huxley*, Vedanta Society Hollywood, 27 November 1955 (GemsTone/Vedanta Press, 2005) [on CD].

³⁷⁸ Jake Poller, ‘Fully Human Being: Aldous Huxley’s *Island*, Tantra, and Human Potential’, *International Journal for the Study of New Religions*, 10.1 (2019), 25-47 (p. 38).

of successive academic trends.³⁷⁹ This convoluted debate is also compounded by a longstanding ambiguity; whereas Sapir emphasised how language predisposes thought, Whorf emphasised how language controls thought. As Lent outlines, the latter ‘led people to interpret the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis as a theory of linguistic determinism’, which is easy to discredit because ‘[a]ll you need to do is show a Hopi Indian capable of thinking in terms of past, present, and future, and you’ve proven that her language didn’t ordain how she was able to think’.³⁸⁰ In this context, there is a decisive difference between *capacity* and *habit*, which are respectively labelled ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ Whorfian perspectives in contemporary discourse.

In a discussion about the history of Pala, Dr Robert explains that the natives’ version of the Brahmi alphabet was ‘a prison without windows’ and praises their present bilingualism. This is worth citing again:

We speak Palanese when we’re cooking, when we’re telling funny stories, when we’re talking about love or making it. (Incidentally, we have the richest erotic and sentimental vocabulary in South-East Asia.) But when it comes to business, or science, or speculative philosophy, we generally speak English. And most of us prefer to write in English. (p. 158)

Reminiscent of McGilchrist’s hemispheric model, English is better suited to abstraction and speculation, whereas Palanese is better suited to sensation. To clarify, Huxley is not imagining a fully embodied communication system that avoids binaries. In *Island*’s manuscript, the Old Raja laments that the two noble languages of his upbringing are both ‘unfortunately, committed by their grammar, syntax and vocabulary, to dualism’.³⁸¹ However, they are evidently tuned to different degrees of abstraction, capturing the idea that language anchors attention in variable ways.

Given the fire that consumed his library in 1961, and his death in 1963, Huxley’s personal book collection preserved at UCLA constitutes an unusually condensed relic of his research interests around the years of *Island*’s publication. As discussed in Chapter 2, the Palanese resist the residual Platonism of the Western psyche; ‘You worship the word and abhor matter!’ (p. 181). Huxley’s copy of Hans Eysenck’s *Sense and Nonsense in Psychology* (1957) contains extensive marginalia that further elucidate this topic. He has highlighted the following section:

³⁷⁹ Evans, *Dying Words*, loc. 4500.

³⁸⁰ Lent, p. 199.

³⁸¹ Huxley, *Island* MS, box 59, fol. 2, p. 78.

Experiments with people whose congenital blindness was removed surgically in later life, and who thus experienced sight for the first time, have shown them to be quite incapable of distinguishing between a circle and a square, or of recognizing triangles and other simple figures. Weary months of learning were needed for them to make even such very simple discriminations, and the disheartening slowness with which such learning proceeded bore ample testimony to the absurdity of the notion that ‘roundness’ or ‘squareness’ were inherent qualities in the object, just waiting to be perceived.³⁸²

As there are no examples of Palanese lexicon or grammar, I briefly diverge from the content of *Island* in order to develop the notion that perception is moved by language patterns. There are grammars outside the English language that do not make Platonist abstractions so readily available. I will discuss a small sample of these; however, this is not offered as a speculation on Palanese grammar, nor meant as a comprehensive analysis of English, but as the demonstration of a more polyphasic approach to language—a linguistic disposition that not only challenges dogmas, but may also augment richer connections between people, culture, and the environment at large. Furthermore, although these examples are pitched as empirical evidence for (some iteration of) linguistic relativity, my emphasis is on the *benefits of attending* to an entanglement between language, philosophy, and perception.

4.3.2: GROUNDED GRAMMAR

Everett’s research on Pirahã (introduced in 1.5.3) reveals a language system that appears to be exclusively anchored to material interactions. After over three decades of study, Everett maintains that Pirahã culture ‘constrains’ communication to ‘nonabstract subjects which fall within the immediate experience of the interlocutors’.³⁸³ His initial ambitions as a Christian missionary were futile since the Pirahãs express ‘only what they see’ and will believe what someone else tells them only under the condition that the speaker ‘personally witnessed what they are reporting’.³⁸⁴ Since Everett had not seen Jesus Christ, ‘his’ relevance was unsubstantiated.³⁸⁵ Echoing my previous discussion of omissions and fluidity, Pirahã

³⁸² Hans Jurgen Eysenck, *Sense and Nonsense in Psychology* (London: Penguin Books, 1957), pp. 311-12.

³⁸³ Daniel Everett, ‘Cultural Constraints on Grammar and Cognition in Pirahã’, *Current Anthropology*, 46.4 (2005), 621-46 (p. 621).

³⁸⁴ Everett, *Don’t Sleep*, p. 266.

³⁸⁵ Daniel Everett, *Wisdom from Strangers*, TedxPenn. June 2017, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=get272FyNto>> [accessed 22 September 2021].

makes such extensive use of tone and accent that it can also be whistled or hummed, bringing it closer to music (and the right hemisphere) than English permits. Furthermore, like many indigenous languages, it has no written counterpart.

In coherence with their cultural apathy towards abstracted figures and concepts, Pirahã has no specific terms for either colours or numbers. Rather than colour categories, they use descriptive phrases such as ‘that is like blood’ or ‘that is not ripe yet’.³⁸⁶ As Everett observes, ‘if one has a concept of “red” as opposed to immediate, nonlexicalised descriptions, one can talk about “red things” as an abstract category’—Pirahã challenges the notion that ‘redness’ (like ‘roundness’) is a natural, extrinsic quality.³⁸⁷ However, he is cautious to avoid any theoretical linguistic allegiance, but mentions having arrived at the conclusion that the ‘weaker version of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is not an unreasonable idea’.³⁸⁸ Thus, he does not suggest that Pirahã speakers lack the capacity for these categorical abstractions, only the propensity.

Everett’s narration of teaching literacy and arithmetic is reminiscent of the ‘disheartening slowness’ that Eynsenck highlights in his example of newly sighted individuals learning to distinguish shapes. He describes how the community requested numeracy classes in order to help them trade goods with local Brazilians, but after eight months of daily lessons, not one learned to count to ten, or add to three. Literacy classes were much the same:

[W]e were never able to train Pirahã even to draw a straight line without serious “coaching,” and they were never able to repeat the feat in subsequent trials without more coaching [...] the concept of a “correct” way to draw was profoundly foreign.³⁸⁹

This was not the case with the young children in the community. Although Everett frames this as a linguistic constraint, the potential contributions of such an absence are compelling.

In a modern civilisation that operates around money, consumerism, and a measured twenty-four-hour day, counting and timekeeping (i.e., future-orientation) are primary skills. In an Amazonian community that operates around hunting, foraging and sharing, however, numerical abstractions are superfluous, and attention

³⁸⁶ Everett, *Don’t Sleep*, p. 21.

³⁸⁷ Everett, ‘Cultural Constraints’, p. 628.

³⁸⁸ Everett, *Don’t Sleep*, p. 219.

³⁸⁹ Everett, ‘Cultural Constraints’, p. 626.

to one's immediate environment is paramount.³⁹⁰ Without speculating beyond my authority on the correlations between abstraction and sensorial receptivity, this aspect of Pirahã compels us to reflect on the reciprocal cultural structures and language patterns that steer attention to 'somewhere else [...] some other time, some other home-made imaginary universe' (p. 114). From *moksha*-medicine to mynah birds, Pala offers an abundance of tools for continually realising the 'here and now'. Huxley's contextual description of the Palanese language corresponds with a sensorial, material emphasis—implying that its structure and concepts are distinct from the abstractive proficiencies of English.

In *Dying Words*, Evans gives another example of material attendance through his discussion of Eastern Pomo, a language spoken around Clear Lake, California, the grammar of which dictates that every verb be suffixed by one of four distinctions: 1) you felt the sensation yourself, 2) you have other direct evidence, 3) you have circumstantial evidence that allows you to infer, or 4) you are basing your statement on hearsay.³⁹¹ Evans suggests that without this grammatical requisite, English speakers are likely to be less attuned (than Eastern Pomo speakers) to the sources of the information they receive.

A parallel idea is presented in John Lucy's study of verbal and cognitive differences between speakers of Yucatec Maya and English, which was based on categorising random items. Lucy explains that Yucatec, unlike English, uses declension to indicate an object's material composition; predictably, the Yucatec speakers in the experiment were more likely to classify unfamiliar items in correspondence with this model.³⁹² Lucy concludes that we are at risk of misunderstanding the reality models of other cultures if we do not develop an awareness of our own linguistic biases.³⁹³ These biases can be mitigated through exposure to alternative grammatical frameworks.

However, these biases may not simply pertain to what English lacks, but what it possesses too. In their study on ontology and linguistic influences, Mutsumi Imai and Dedre Gentner suggest that the presence/absence of countable nouns in a language may explain certain cross-cultural differences regarding what constitutes

³⁹⁰ The following example does not easily integrate into the main body of the chapter, but I credit Bruce Parry for initially inspiring this line of inquiry. In his film, *Tawai*, Parry describes picking fruit with the Penan tribe in Borneo and asking how they know when a particular tree is fruiting. They say that they know because a particular bird is flying. Parry asks whether they can *anticipate* the bird flying and paraphrases their response as 'why would we want to anticipate it...it's a ridiculous question...when the bird flies, we go'.

³⁹¹ Evans, *Dying Words*, loc. 2394.

³⁹² John A. Lucy, 'Language, Culture, and Mind in a Comparative Perspective in Comparative Perspective', in *Language, Culture and Mind*, ed. by Michael Achard and Suzanne Kemmer (Stanford: CSLI Publications, 2004), pp. 1-21 (p. 10).

³⁹³ Lucy, p. 20.

an object, and what constitutes a substance. They conducted an experiment in which they asked English speakers and Japanese speakers to categorise ambiguous items into these two groups. The former were more likely to classify according to shape, and the latter were more likely to classify according to material constitution, and this distinction increased with age (in this case, they found that English-speaking four-year-olds were more attentive to substance than English-speaking adults).³⁹⁴ The authors speculate that this correlates with the presence of noun countability, which is a feature of English, but not of Japanese.

Whether or not these are ‘true’, or rather, applicable to the majority of each demographic, is somewhat incidental to the current discussion; either way, exposing oneself to different linguistic systems (even via secondary sources such as these) can reveal the elements of English that accentuate a dualistic distinction between the material and the ideal—a worldview that mechanises nature and distances the senses. To use Whitehead’s expression, ‘people do not know what they are assuming because no other way of putting things has ever occurred to them’.³⁹⁵

As Abram elaborates, with the advent of phonetic writing ‘previously ephemeral qualities like “goodness” and “justice” could be abstracted from their inherence in situations, promoting them to a new realm independent of the flux of ordinary experience’.³⁹⁶ Whereas Buddhism emphasises particulars—a cow exists, but there is no universal ‘cowness’ behind it—Western cultures and languages generally emphasise ideals.³⁹⁷ Social psychologist Richard Nisbett develops this line of inquiry, explaining how most Indo-European-based adjectives can become nouns through adding the equivalent of the English suffix ‘ness’, and deems this inseparable from the Greek philosophical tradition of categorising according to abstracted attributes.³⁹⁸ From a ‘weak’ Whorfian position, the grammatical accessibility of ‘ness’ magnifies a particularly Platonic perspective. Linguistic diversity can help to redress the provincial delineations of an over-dominant left hemisphere.

4.3.3: MAITHUNA

Island also makes liberal use of Sanskrit terminology—throughout the novel the

³⁹⁴ Matsumi Imai and Dedre Gentner, ‘A Cross-Linguistic Study of Early Word Meaning: Universal Ontology and Linguistic Influence’, *Cognition*, 62.2 (1997), 169-200 (p. 190).

³⁹⁵ Whitehead, *Science*, p. 61.

³⁹⁶ Abram, *Sensuous*, p. 111.

³⁹⁷ Mark Siderits, *Buddhism as Philosophy: An Introduction* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2007), p. 215.

³⁹⁸ Nisbett, p. 37.

reader is exposed to: *arhat; atman; brahman; dhyana, karma; karuna* (chanted by the mynah birds) *lila; maithuna, moksha, samadhi; tantra; shivanayama, sunyata, yoni*—and we learn that much of the *moksha* ceremony is conducted in the ‘splendid rumble of Sanskrit’ (p. 200). To readers versed in Vedanta or Buddhism, these terms evoke detailed concepts or practices that are not easily shaped into English constructs. To readers without this context, these are moments of spacious ambiguity.

Either for poetic effect, or to avoid additional exposition, few of these Sanskrit references are elaborated. One exception, however, is *maithuna*. Radha and Ranga, Will’s young nurse and her boyfriend, discuss the term’s translation to outline Pala’s sexual practices—or the ‘yoga of love’ (p. 88). To accommodate Will’s cultural paradigms, Ranga compares *maithuna* to ‘what Roman Catholics mean by *coitus reservatus*’ (p. 89). For Radha, however, the Latin phrase is comically incommensurable—“*Reservatus,*” the little nurse repeated. “It always makes me want to laugh. ‘Such a reserved young man!’” (p. 90). With this, Will arrives at a clinical translation of *maithuna* as ‘just birth control without contraceptives’ (p. 90). Ranga continues:

But that’s only the beginning of the story [...] *Maithuna* is also something else. Something even more important [...] What we’re born with, what we experience all through infancy and childhood, is a sexuality that isn’t concentrated on the genitals; it’s a sexuality diffused throughout the whole organism. That’s the paradise we inherit. But the paradise gets lost as the child grows up. *Maithuna* is the organized attempt to regain that paradise. (p. 90)

Will continues to request specificity and arrives at ‘making love with a rather special kind of technique’ (p. 90). Ranga calls Will’s ‘attention’ to the mynah birds before attempting again; ‘It’s not the special technique that turns love-making into yoga; it’s the kind of awareness that the technique makes possible’ (p. 91). *Maithuna* cannot be reduced to its kinaesthetic counterparts, its biological constituents, or its outcomes. Understanding the term involves an embodied acquaintance with a receptive practice of awareness, along with a contextual appreciation of its consequences on the scales of the individual, the interpersonal, the community, and the environment. *Maithuna* is not the classifier of a traceable ‘thing’ or replicable activity.

As discussed, the fossilised quality of Latin is useful for its disambiguation of scientific and medical terminology—a capacity that the Palanese welcome in their

biology classes. Radha and Ranga’s translation (or untranslation) of *maithuna*, on the other hand, evokes a contemplation of the interplay between sexual pleasure, meditation, awareness, and the divine. Likewise, *moksha* may refer to the physical toadstool, the state of consciousness, and/or the process of liberation on multiple levels. For the Palanese, Sanskrit—like poetry—celebrates the interstices. Words like *maithuna* and *moksha* emphasise context, relationship and attention—they are intended to bind the world together (as per the right hemisphere), rather than cut it apart.

McGilchrist explains how syllabic languages like Chinese engage more of the right hemisphere than phonemic languages, because meaning requires more contextual awareness.³⁹⁹ Furthermore, unlike the letters of the Latin alphabet, the smallest constituents of Chinese characters tend to carry meaning in themselves. I wish to expand on McGilchrist’s insightful example. The tens of thousands of Chinese characters are based on approximately two hundred ‘radicals’, many of which refer to the natural world. For example, the radical ‘水’ (shuǐ) refers to ‘water’ but appears not only in characters relating directly to liquid, but also in terms such as ‘spineless’, ‘concentrate’, ‘attention’ and ‘yield’. The radical ‘山’ (shān), refers to ‘mountain’, but can also be found in the terms for ‘dense’, ‘tranquil’ and ‘transcendent’. This lexical structure means that an elemental metaphor is visible in most Chinese characters—as in ‘智’ (zhì) a term for ‘intelligence’, which is composed of the radicals ‘矢’ (arrow), ‘口’ (mouth), and ‘日’ (sun). Without a graphic component, any attempt to even approximate this effect with English words would require an impressive grasp of at least their Germanic and Latinate roots—in this case, ‘intelligence’ (Latin) is derived from ‘inter’ (between) and ‘legere’ (choose; read). In my experience, most English speakers do not have such exhaustive etymological inclinations. However, Huxley introduces such an individual in his draft of *The Hypothetical Novel*.

4.4: THE HYPOTHETICAL NOVEL

Huxley died in 1963 having written only the opening chapters of *The Hypothetical Novel*. Two drafts of these chapters are kept in the UCLA archives, one of which was published in Archer’s *This Timeless Moment*—my citations primarily refer to

³⁹⁹ McGilchrist, *The Master*, p. 275.

this source for the simple reason that it is more accessible, but I will use supplementary archival material in cases where notable adjustments were made. There has been little commentary on either version of this material beyond Jerome Meckier's 1970 article 'The Hippopotamian Question: A Note on Aldous Huxley's Unfinished Novel', which considers how the novel might have developed (and comments that it might have been 'one of his better works but not his best'), but says nothing of the potential applications of Huxley's final creative and intellectual output.⁴⁰⁰ Given this scarcity of scholarship, I offer a short introduction to the text by way of its resonance with (and diversion from) *Island*, before exploring its insights regarding Language and Attention.

4.4.1: FIRST PERSON PLURAL

Unlike *Island*, and indeed most of Huxley's fiction, *The Hypothetical Novel* is written in first person. Although it was intended to be semi-autobiographical, the narrative is nonlinear, and the perspective is plural—a peregrination around 'the many different human beings that a man could be'.⁴⁰¹ The story begins in Surrey, England in 1900, with protagonist and narrator Edward Darley recounting his eleventh birthday.

In a handwritten outline of the project, Huxley noted how Darley would be liberated from his cultural conditioning through 'sexuality and Germanism, & through LSD-like experience of nature'.⁴⁰² In this way, although psychedelic experience remains integral to the narrative, there is no indication that chemical catalysts would be included in the plot. Indeed, in the final years of his life, Huxley became increasingly unsettled by psychedelic publicity. By the early 1960s, both Huxley and Osmond were troubled by what they interpreted as Timothy Leary's cavalier approach to psychedelics; in 1962 Osmond wrote to Huxley that 'Leary and his friends seem impervious to the idea that psychedelic substances may be both valuable and dangerous if misused'.⁴⁰³ Huxley was fond of Leary, but concerned that his antagonistic approach—'flouting conventions, cocking snooks at the academic world'—could compromise the integrity of psychedelic research'.⁴⁰⁴ Instead of chemically-induced changes of state, the perspective in *The Hypothetical Novel*

⁴⁰⁰ Jerome Meckier, 'The Hippopotamian Question: A Note on Aldous Huxley's Unfinished Novel', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 16.4 (1970), 505-14 (p. 508).

⁴⁰¹ Archera, *Timeless*, p. 210.

⁴⁰² Aldous Huxley, 'Notes, Holograph, on Technology, Developing Countries and Other Topics'. Huxley papers, box 45, fol. 19.

⁴⁰³ Huxley and Osmond, p. 510.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 513.

alternates between Darley in 1963, a dying neurologist in his seventies, and Darley as an eleven-year-old boy, who recounts impressions from even earlier childhood moments.

Elderly Darley expresses how autobiographies must necessarily be complicated, digressive and full of inconsistencies, because ‘everything that calls itself “I” exists simultaneously in the universe of experience and the universe of notions [...] among the brute happenings and within the home-made cosmos of intelligible symbols’.⁴⁰⁵ Excluding the majestic plural, English lacks any dual first person pronoun that could make this more intuitive—a constraint that does not apply to all languages. Many Australian aboriginal languages, for instance, use pronouns that can be translated as ‘I-myself’, ‘we two’, ‘we but not others’, and ‘we altogether’.⁴⁰⁶

Whereas *Island*’s Mary Sarojini describes her selves as ‘Little Miss Gibber’, and ‘the one that doesn’t talk’ (p. 297) in a positive sense, Young Darley refers to himself in plural as an attempt to reconcile his self-identification as a ‘brilliant boy, two years ahead of his contemporaries in book learning’ with his evolving sexuality, emotional instability, and general rebellious impulses.⁴⁰⁷ He feels a dissonance between his public selves and his private selves; ‘the sotto voce whisperer of dirty words, the Peeping Tom [...] And there was another, a still more clandestine Edward Darley—the “I” who descended every night into the shamefully delicious Other World’.⁴⁰⁸

Although eleven-year-old Darley is beginning to consciously explore the ‘unavowable Other World’ of his sexual fantasies, he still laments that, unlike his older sister Maud, he has not honed the ‘gift of bi-location’, where one can ‘be in two places at once’.⁴⁰⁹ As indicated in the previous chapter, mental time travel is facilitated by left-hemisphere based projection—attending to predictive internal models that tend to calcify as we ‘accumulate’ more experience of the world. Whereas the Palanese encourage controlled forms of emotional release, Darley’s upper-middle-class British family criticise his sensitivity, and he lauds his sister’s capacity to wander at large in the private worlds of her daydreams. Maud can abstract herself from the here and now; ‘Lacking this talent, I had to suffer the consequences of always being in the same place as my body’.⁴¹⁰ Darley’s experience is one of

⁴⁰⁵ Archera, *Timeless*, p. 213.

⁴⁰⁶ Yunkaporta, pp. 99-100.

⁴⁰⁷ Archera, *Timeless*, p. 217.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid..

⁴⁰⁹ Archera, *Timeless*, p. 232.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., p. 233.

intense, involuntary receptivity—unlike his sister, he cannot abide his Grandfather Garth’s ‘acrid smell’ and ‘the strange noises proceeding from somewhere beneath his soup-stained clerical waistcoat’.⁴¹¹ On the same page, elderly Darley reflects on these vivid impressions: ‘I know at first hand the nature of that old man’s world from which, across impassable gulfs, my poor grandfather believed himself to be communicating with the nine-year-old inhabitant of an incommensurably alien universe’.

The multiple temporalities of the Edward Darleys are used to structure and counterpoint radically different perspectives of the ‘same’ moment. Aspects of the ‘expanded’ filter are captured through the vivid, sensorial immediacy of Darley’s childhood impressions, which are then framed by older Darley’s contemplative reflections; ‘the hardest thing to forget is that the universe of which I am the centre is not *the* universe; it is merely my personal version of my culture’s and my period’s version of the universe of *Homo sapiens*’—a voice that is reminiscent of *Island*’s Dr Robert and the Old Raja.⁴¹²

4.4.2: LOREM IPSUM

Between the social satire and prepubescent pandemonium of *The Hypothetical Novel*’s opening chapter, Huxley integrates an inventive linguistic pursuit; Darley’s Grandfather Garth refuses to use any words of Latin origin. Where Meckier projects Garth as the novel’s chief ‘egocentric egotist’, I suggest that the character can be more favourably interpreted as a domestic development of Huxley’s interest in language and perception.⁴¹³ Although young Darley narrates Garth as a doddering and senile clergyman with an embarrassing habit of talking, outside church, about ‘God, or Jesus, or not-I-but-Christ-in-me’, elderly Darley clarifies how ‘the Andrew Garth of 1900 and the Edward Darley of 1963 belong to the same physical and spiritual species’.⁴¹⁴ The autobiographical ambitions of the novel render Meckier’s egoic interpretation of Garth unlikely.

‘Many happy again-comings of the day’, Garth ‘flutily’ calls to young Darley, who explains the game—‘[t]he re in “returns” was inadmissibly Latin. In my grandfather’s view, Cicero and the Norman conquest had utterly corrupted our fair Saxon tongue’.⁴¹⁵ Garth later laments that ‘we gave up *stound* for an outlandish

⁴¹¹ Ibid..

⁴¹² Aldous Huxley, *Last Novel* [1 of 3]. Huxley Papers, box 58, fol. 8.

⁴¹³ Meckier, ‘Hippopotamian’, p. 513.

⁴¹⁴ Archera, *Timeless*, pp. 233-34.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid., p. 232.

world like “hour”, before explaining to Fraulein Lili that the ‘good old Saxon *stound* [...] is the self-same word, root-wise, as your own German *stund*’.⁴¹⁶ Rejecting the concept of a singular chronology, he believes that people ought to acknowledge two forms of birthday—one of being born into the world, and one of being ‘born anew into God’.⁴¹⁷ Huxley’s first draft of this chapter also offers the detail that, according to this rebirth time-lore, Garth is barely older than nine-year-old Darley. Like Huxley himself, his pivotal ‘mystical’ experience did not occur until his later years. Furthermore, his reanimated attention to language is inseparable from his spiritual practice; he will not entertain ‘alien adjectives, only home-grown mark-words of suchness’.⁴¹⁸ Garth’s eccentric commitment to semantics is reminiscent of Pala’s linguaculture, albeit satirised in a way that is perhaps more suited to literary fiction. To be clear—to parody an idea is not to exile it (see Chapter 6). The absurd practice demonstrates a means of defamiliarising language without compromising coherence.

The details of this unconventional ‘time-lore’ precede and counterpoint Darley’s recital of a memory from his ninth birthday, in which his Cousin Hugh is demanding that he calculate his own age in days, meanwhile scorning his mathematical incompetence:

‘Can’t you even multiply?’ he asked. ‘Nine times three hundred and sixty-five. Quick! One, two, three!’ Another snap of the fingers. Boiling with hatred and on the brink of tears, I shook my head.

Cousin Hugh shrugged his shoulders. ‘Aren’t children taught *anything* nowadays?’ He unfolded his napkin. ‘It may interest you to know, Edward, that you’re exactly three thousand two hundred and eighty-five days old. Plus two for the leap years. Which means [...] Seventy-seven thousand eight hundred and eighty-eight hours.’ Then he picked up the *Times*, opened it out and disappeared into the morning news.⁴¹⁹

This short exchange is a repository of Huxley’s criticisms of Western education; Cousin Hugh is aggressive and patronising, while using negative reinforcements and disproportionately focusing on abstracted mathematics, meaningless quantification and measured time—which, incidentally, is the most commonly-used noun in the English language).⁴²⁰ This could not be further from Pala’s Mr Menon, for example,

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., p. 235.

⁴¹⁷ Huxley, *Last Novel* [1 of 3].

⁴¹⁸ Archera, *Timeless*, p. 233.

⁴¹⁹ Huxley, *Last Novel* [1 of 3].

⁴²⁰ ‘The Popularity of ‘Time’ Unveiled’, *BBC News*, 22 June 2006, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/5104778.stm>> [accessed 4 November 2020].

who describes how even the humanities in Western education are just another form of symbol manipulation that ‘leaves the living mind-body in its pristine state of ignorance and ineptitude’ (p. 257). Where *Island* only describes the consequences of such abstractive and disembodied pedagogies, *The Hypothetical Novel* satirises its ‘pathetic and repulsive’ paragons (p. 257).

Through these exchanges, Huxley traces a relationship between irregular language patterns and one’s resistance to cultural paradigms. As discussed, Latin is intertwined with a philosophical tradition in which categories are often assumed to objectively transcend ‘their’ exemplars. In contrast, Garth’s vocabulary is conspicuously elemental—‘root’ instead of ‘etymology’, ‘home-grown’ instead of ‘native’, and ‘hour’ is deemed ‘outlandish’.⁴²¹ As introduced in my discussion of Chinese radicals, such terms convey their elemental metaphors with more transparency than their Latin-based counterparts. While Garth as a character may be overbearing (‘don’t talk about bicycles and perambulators; call them tway-wheels and childer-wainlets’) his seemingly restrictive semantic custom requires attention, creativity, extensive etymological insight, and a commitment to unlearning the habitual patterns of English.⁴²²

4.5: EFFING IT ANYWAY

There is another important consequence to Garth’s lexical game. Darley comments on how, like the inadmissible ‘re’ of ‘return’, the rules also barred him from ‘regret’.⁴²³ Garth has jettisoned every English term that is prefixed by ‘re’, meaning that he cannot speak about ‘again’ implicitly, as it must always be signalled by the complete lexical unit. Without ‘re’, the concept of duplication is less grammatically accessible. ‘Again’, while the empirical interchange between language and perception remains elusive, endorsing their reciprocity is insightful. In this case, the impulse to use ‘re’ can function as an opportunity to question the encoded assumption that any instance can ever be the ‘same’ as any other—recall that the right hemisphere cannot step into the same river twice (see 3.3.3).

Feldman-Barrett applies a similar concept to emotions, arguing that they are not universal categories that are being repeatedly evoked, but culturally and contextually bound interpretations of valence (how pleasant or unpleasant one feels)

⁴²¹ Huxley, *Last Novel* [1 of 3].

⁴²² Archera, *Timeless*, p. 233.

⁴²³ Archera, *Timeless*, p. 235.

and arousal (how calm or agitated one feels).⁴²⁴ Thus, emotions such as ‘happiness’ and ‘sadness’ are real, but only in the way that ‘furniture’ or ‘animals’ are real. These are superordinate categories—the level at which categories cease to brandish a prototypical exemplar (see 5.6.2). Feldman-Barrett’s research suggests that there is a strong correlation between well-being, and the diversity of one’s emotive terminology, for which she has coined the phrase ‘emotional granularity’.⁴²⁵ In this metaphor, someone with high emotional granularity would distinguish between ‘awe’, ‘joy’, ‘wonder’, ‘pleasure’, ‘delight’, whereas someone with low emotional granularity may only acknowledge ‘happiness’. While there are socio-economic factors that make this pedagogically challenging, the theory is compelling and applicable to psychedelics, in that a reliable way to avoid their integration would be to sustain a rhetorical paucity with a term like ‘ineffable’.

With a rich erotic and sentimental vocabulary, Palanese culture is oriented towards granularity, and the islanders routinely incorporate Sanskrit to discuss experiences that are not adequately conveyed by their two native languages. To clarify, granularity is not an acquisition of lexical units to symbolise a subtle series of forms—its potential depends on its framing. If language is disassociated from material existence, then the potency of semantic diversity is undermined; words become artifacts for display only.

I interpret Tim Lomas’ ongoing *Positive Lexicography Project* as example of this; his evolving index of ‘untranslatable’ words from the world’s languages is intended to answer Feldman-Barrett’s call for granularity.⁴²⁶ Like the Shaltanac race of Broop Kidron Thirteen (cited in the opening of this chapter) who do not have a word for unhappy, Lomas’ generally omits ‘negative’ words.⁴²⁷ However, to an extent, he undercuts his own objective.

The words in his collection are concisely defined and thematically arranged. For example, he translates the Finnish term *tarjeta* as ‘to be able to withstand the cold (and function effectively)’—evoking a simple sense of its native culture and climate, which may be interesting, if generally inapplicable, to an individual living in Melbourne. *Tarjeta* is classified under ‘Character; Resources; Grit’. This approach is suitable if words are approached as labels—akin to learning the name and appearance of zoological specimens that are not found in one’s home country.

⁴²⁴ Feldman-Barrett, p. 72.

⁴²⁵ Ibid., p. 183.

⁴²⁶ Tim Lomas, *The Positive Lexicography Project*, <<https://hifisamurai.github.io/lexicography/>> [accessed 2 December 2020]. In this context, ‘untranslatable’ refers to terms with no ‘direct’ English equivalent that captures their connotations.

⁴²⁷ As of December 2020, 5 of the >1000 words are classified as negative.

However, the limitations become apparent where a term such as *Brahman* (‘the transcendent and immanent absolute reality; the supreme spirit that continually brings existence into being’) is classified under ‘Character; Spirituality; Reality/God’. There is an implicit assumption about universality here, and while I appreciate the logistical limitations of websites and publishing, these themes are presented with no caveat that they reflect an *English*-based consensus about the categories of reality. Furthermore, concision is prioritised over context; there is no discussion of how *Brahman* indicates an experiential-metaphysical perspective that does not neatly harmonise with the traditional assumptions of Western dualism and materialism.

Some categories/words are so contextually distinct that their resonance may require long periods of cultural immersion. Jerome Lewis offers an evocative example of this through his elaboration of *ekila*—‘a confusing body of seemingly unconnected and diverse practices’ referred to by the Mbendjele, a hunter-gatherer community in the northern Congo.⁴²⁸ *Ekila* can indicate: menstruation; blood; taboo; a hunter’s meat; animals’ power to harm humans; reproductive problems; production in general; health; and sanity—Lewis emphasises that its understanding was a slow revelation that developed over several years of exposure and consideration. Furthermore, despite daily utterances during his fieldwork, he clarifies that people would rarely talk about *ekila* directly, and ‘especially not as an abstraction or specific body of practices’.⁴²⁹ *Ekila* proscriptions were discussed in their unfolding contexts; the category could not be identified according to a series of universal and observable characteristics.

Lomas’ approach, in contrast, reinforces the categorical frameworks of Western culture and prioritises the nominative aspects of language. In his Tedx talk, he introduces the project by expressing his sense of relief that each tongue has ‘its own version of the same idea’.⁴³⁰ He encapsulates the residual Platonism that the Palanese endeavour to resist. In this format, unfamiliar vocabulary may arouse our curiosity, but they are offered as frozen units of data to ‘fill in the gaps’ of English. Language will not exert its full potential if it is shackled to an immaterial realm of static ideas. Transformation on any level requires fluidity, which means exposing the myth of a ‘perfect’ translation, and regularly inhabiting the perspective that

⁴²⁸ Jerome Lewis, ‘*Ekila: Blood, Bodies and Egalitarian Societies*’, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 14 (2008), 297-315 (p. 297).

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 298.

⁴³⁰ Tim Lomas, *Expanding our Experiential Horizons Through Untranslatable Words*, TedxZurich, November 2018, <https://www.ted.com/talks/tim_lomas_expanding_our_experiential_horizons_through_untranslatable_words> [accessed 2 December 2020].

categorical ‘sameness’ is simply a useful contribution from the left hemisphere. Psychedelic experiences—in all their diversity, inconsistency, and contextuality—are well-suited to highlighting the ubiquity of untranslatable moments.

4.6: CLOSING

Remonstrating the misguided concept of a universal language, Jorge Luis Borges cites a recollection of an encyclopaedia, entitled the *Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge*:

On those remote pages it is written that animals are divided into (a) those that belong to the Emperor, (b) embalmed ones, (c) those that are trained, (d) suckling pigs, (e) mermaids, (f) fabulous ones, (g) stray dogs, (h) those that are included in this classification, (i) those that tremble as if they were mad, (j) innumerable ones, (k) those drawn with a very fine camel's hair brush, (l) others, (m) those that have just broken a flower vase, (n) those that resemble flies from a distance.⁴³¹

The categories by which nature is divided are ultimately based on utility; classifications of ‘innumerable’ and ‘fabulous’ animals are not considered useful in a knowledge system that prioritises measurable attributes. However, this does not render the concepts less ‘real’ in any objective sense; they exist in this moment by virtue of Borges’ imagination. If every culture were to exclusively adopt binomial nomenclature, then a vast amount of local, contextual, relational ecological knowledge would perish.

A series of examples from Arnhem Land demonstrate how the rhythms of the local landscape reverberate through the semantic patterns of its inhabitants. As Evans explains, if a certain species of fish is often found in the billabong beneath a certain species of tree, then it is common for the same word (*bokorn*) to denote both the fish and the tree. Or if the call of a particular grasshopper signals the ripeness of a particular type of yam, then they share the same term (*yamidj*).⁴³² Scientific taxonomy does not permit this—plants and animals have different attributes, and the

⁴³¹ Jorge Luis Borges, ‘The Analytical Language of John Wilkins’, in *Other Inquisitions 1937-1952*, trans. by Ruth L. C. Simms (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1975), pp. 101-05 (p. 103).

⁴³² Nicholas Evans, ‘Indigenous Language and Perception’, *All in the Mind*, podcast, 1 September 2019, <<https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/allinthemind/indigenous-language-and-perception/11457578>> [accessed 7 December 2020].

fact that they share a context would only heighten any (unwelcome) ambiguity.

The ubiquity of the term ‘ineffable’ in contemporary psychedelic discourse implicitly magnifies a left-hemispheric take on ‘language’. In McGilchrist’s model, the left hemisphere attends to solidified, abstracted denominations and the right attends to transitive, contextual expression. One of the main concords in contemporary research is the capacity of psychedelics to disempower the ‘priors’ of belief systems and transform salience attribution habits, often inducing a sensation of novelty. The variety of psychedelic experiences means only that taxonomies based on attributes are particularly unsuitable. To refer to this incompatibility as ‘ineffable’ turns the living, fluid phases of language to stone. A critical consequence of this is a narrative nonchalance that vindicates careless metaphors—on which the next chapter will elaborate.

From one perspective, the language practices of *Island*’s Palanese and *The Hypothetical Novel*’s Grandfather Garth can be interpreted as oppositional—expansive and restrictive, respectively. Pala has a bilingual education system and even their English conversations are teeming with borrowed terminology. Garth, on the other hand, imposes vast lexical limitations on a ‘single’ language. However, both practices require profound semantic sensitivity, along with a certain faith that linguistic disruptions align with perceptual disruptions. While I maintain that Palanese bilingualism is integral to its polyphasia, (which I also consider a prerequisite to psychedelic integration), it is not the only way of pacifying the categorical predilections of English language customs.

John Koenig’s *Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows* is another ongoing, online project in which he invents words for relatable sensations that do not have a standard descriptor in English. The most famous example, *sonder*, expresses/evokes ‘the realisation that each random passerby is living a life as vivid and complex as your own’.⁴³³ The video on *sonder* currently has over a million views. However, Koenig explains that the single most common question he receives from viewers is whether or not these words are ‘real’, reflecting a collective cultural tendency to forget that all words are invented.⁴³⁴ Flexible language practices decalcify the categories that sculpt our experience; Huxley and Osmond coined the term ‘psychedelic’ not to label a new discovery, but to dilute the noxious connotations of ‘hallucinogen’ and

⁴³³ John Koenig, *Sonder: The Realisation that Everyone Has a Story*, Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows, YouTube, 26 October 2014,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AkoML0_FiV4> [accessed 7 December 2020].

⁴³⁴ John Koenig, ‘Beautiful New Words to Describe Obscure Emotions’, TedxBerkeley, February 2016,

<https://www.ted.com/talks/john_koenig_beautiful_new_words_to_describe_obscure_emotions> [accessed 7 December 2020].

‘psychotomimetic’. This type of coinage assumes an inseparability between language and the projections that shape our behaviour.

The ‘untranslatability’ of psychedelic experiences can thus be framed as a nourishing supplement in the preservation of dying languages. For the left hemisphere, translation is a version of interchangeable taxonomies; at best, untranslatable words are specimens to fill in the gaps of a static universal image. To invoke harmony from the right hemisphere, I suggest that translation is more comparable to musical transposition. For this metaphorical moment, different languages are the instruments; related instruments share structural similarities, but their ranges vary. The ‘same’ melody played on a violin and a saxophone is only the ‘same’ if the sheet music is mistaken for the whole experience; a language is more than the sum total of its words. Furthermore, we do not expect to ‘directly’ transpose a song that uses the seven octaves of a piano onto a flute with three octaves, nor do we expect chromatic instruments to render microtones. Insisting that categorical universals are shared by the world’s languages is akin to insisting that everyone in a band ought to play the same instrument. Symphonies require diversity.

Particular instruments are suited to particular musical genres according to cultural consensus (and individual preference) at a particular moment. Instruments and genres evolve; I am not suggesting that English is forever fated to ‘more’ abstraction than other language systems, but rather highlighting the types of melodies that are acutely accessible, and thus perpetuated.

In Western mythology, The Tower of Babel is a monument to dogma and dualism; linguistic variety is a punishment for the attempt of humans to bridge heaven and earth. Where truth is objective, categories are universal, and divinity is elsewhere—here lies little incentive to nourish narratives of uncertainty, multiplicity, mutability, and immanence. The ‘ineffability’ of psychedelic experiences can serve as a profound incentive to perpetuate poesy and protect the world’s dying languages. All systems need diversity in order to survive.

CHAPTER 5: HYPNOSIS & METAPHORS OF MIND

It is fatally easy to kill people in the name of a dogma; it is blessedly difficult to kill them in the name of a working hypothesis—Huxley, ‘Notes on What’s What’ (manuscript).⁴³⁵

5.1: OPENING

Modern Pala was founded after Dr Andrew performed a radical, life-saving operation on Murugan the Reformer, made possible only by hypnosis. The Palanese maintain this as a practice, having refined the capacity to shift their attention via suggestion and priming. Mrs Narayan, for instance, can induce a trance that allows her to ‘telescope [her] time into a thirtieth of its normal span’ (p. 252). These techniques are also integrated into their psychedelic practices; Vijaya gives a soothing sermon as part of the children’s *moksha* initiation, synchronising a series of hypnotic suggestions with the onset of the medicine. *Island*’s manuscript maintains a more prolix version of this priming:

You will climb into the knowledge of your own nature and the nature of the world. And that knowledge is now being deepened for you by the *moksha*-medicine. Deepened into another dimension of experience and at the same time sharpened to a pitch of unimaginable acuity, widened beyond all measure.⁴³⁶

In this chapter I reflect on Huxley’s presentation of perceptual ‘sharpening’, exploring the generative interplay between metaphor, hypnosis and psychedelic states of consciousness. However, it will be useful to dissociate the concept of ‘suggestibility’ from any latent connotations of power abuse or weakness of will. As Stengers clarifies, hypnotisers are not ‘giving orders [...] if they have a role, it is

⁴³⁵ Huxley, *Island* MS, box 59, fol. 9, p. 75.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 57-58.

rather than that of indicating a path, or authorising an experience'.⁴³⁷ From a mother lulling her child to sleep with soft rhymes, to catchy advertising campaigns, we are surrounded by examples of language that affect material changes in the mindbody.⁴³⁸

Hypnosis can showcase the important reciprocities between perceptual, philosophical, and linguistic priming—especially in relation to metaphors. As outlined in the introductory chapter, the future of psychedelic research (and civilisation) is contingent on the metaphors that dominate its discourse. Cultivating metaphorical diversity has become a matter of urgency.

The term 'hypnotic' could be applied to any communication that is intended to influence the actions of oneself or another, however, for this chapter I centralise (and explain) the preclusive and projective aspects of hypnosis. As well as 'opening' the doors of perception, or 'expanding' the filter, the Palanese also cultivate the capacity to 'constrict' their sensory input. I punctuate the terms 'opening' and 'expanding' because (using McGilchrist's characterisation of the left hemisphere) I will explore how sensorial constrictions can be coherently narrated as expansions.

Given the scale of this topic, I anchor my analysis to the 'basic' metaphor of THE MIND IS A CONTAINER, realised by Lakoff and Johnson, and accentuate its dissonance with hypnosis and psychedelics. To animate this line of inquiry, I trace how Huxley's metaphors of memory and the 'brain as a filter' evolved as he became more immersed in diverse states of awareness. In the final section, I pitch an alternative (original) metaphor for Palanese polyphasia that could serve as a fertile adjunct to the growing pastures of psychedelic discourse. I term this 'hourglass attention'.

The triad of metaphor, hypnosis and psychedelics that constitutes the foundation of this chapter also serves as a platform from which to acknowledge the female influences on Huxley's creative output during the final phase of his life. Although his intellectual interest in hypnosis can be traced to the 1930s, his personal affection for the practice was consolidated by its anaesthetic and spiritual value for Maria Nys-Huxley, his first wife.⁴³⁹ Together they hosted 'Tuesday night sessions' at their home in Los Angeles in the early 1950s, which gathered small groups of people who earnestly shared their enthusiasm for the unorthodox—hypnosis, parapsychology, alternative medicine, and alternate states. I draw on correspondence from the Maria Nys-Huxley collection held in the archives at Musée de la Littérature,

⁴³⁷ Stengers, p. 462.

⁴³⁸ Leslie Lecron and Jean Bordeaux, *Hypnotism Today* (Waterville: Thorndike Press, 2012), Kindle edition, loc. 1834.

⁴³⁹ Bedford, *Vol. II*, p. 145.

Brussels, in order to chart a hypnotic trajectory that elucidates a pivotal diversification in Huxley's foundational metaphors of memory and mind.⁴⁴⁰

I attribute much of this development to Archera, and I read her bestselling self-help book *You Are Not the Target* (henceforth, *Target*) as an accessible and indispensable supplement to *Island's* more verbose educational expositions. As Archera's publication has been neglected in Huxley scholarship, I dedicate a substantial segment of this chapter to a summary of its genesis and growth. As a skilled hypnotist and one of the first female psychedelic psychotherapists, Archera's therapeutic, educational, and creative accomplishments justify more recognition.

5.2: MIND THE METAPHORS

In 1980, Lakoff and Johnson's landmark *Metaphors We Live By* incited a wave of interest in the elemental significance of metaphors—and inspired a widespread academic accord that they are not simply decorative poetics, but foundational to human experience. The authors demonstrate how our most fundamental concepts, such as time, state, change, causation, action, purpose, and means, are framed metaphorically; these are 'basic' metaphors. On this basis, they aspire to show how 'new metaphors have the power to create a new reality', which can 'begin to happen when we start to comprehend our experience in terms of a metaphor' but will 'become a deeper reality when we begin to act in terms of it'.⁴⁴¹ However, this requires reframing the cultural consensus on what constitutes a metaphor in the first place.

In a follow-up publication, Lakoff and Mark Turner clarify that metaphors have many forms; 'One cannot just talk of them as being basic versus nonbasic, poetic versus everyday, conventionalised versus nonconventionalised, and so on. Metaphors differ along many parameters, and often the difference is a matter of degree'.⁴⁴² Like many of the concepts discussed in this thesis, 'metaphor' is a broad category with a fluid spectrum of possible interpretations. For Lakoff and Turner, a metaphor is 'basic' (or 'conventional') 'to the extent that it is automatic, effortless,

⁴⁴⁰ I have opted to use an informal style of address for Maria. On the one hand, it avoids overusing 'Huxley', but also, the material that I use from the Nys-Huxley archive are personal letters to her sister, Jeanne Neveux, and using the first names of Maria and Jeanne feels more appropriate for engaging with this content.

⁴⁴¹ Lakoff and Johnson, p. 145.

⁴⁴² George Lakoff and Mark Turner, *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 55.

and generally established as a mode of thought among members of a linguistic community’, and this can be adequately inferred by the range of everyday expressions that are underwritten by a shared form.⁴⁴³ For example, ‘I can’t get you out of my head’, or ‘keep your thoughts inside’ share the same underlying metaphor that *the mind is a container*.

Basic metaphors can be understood as narratives, or thought patterns, that persist beneath the surface of attention—*events are objects*, *love is a journey*, *argument is war*, are among Lakoff and Johnson’s other key examples. However, I foreground *the mind is a container* as it is the example which most readily pertains to Huxley’s interpretation of alternate states and my previous discussions of objectivism and abstraction in the mainstream Western worldview. It will be useful to outline some of the contemporary research on metaphors in order to fully appreciate their relevance to questions of hypnosis and psychedelics.’

McGilchrist suggests that ‘only the right hemisphere has the capacity to understand metaphor’.⁴⁴⁴ While this is an elegant narrative, his literature review of the neurolinguistic studies on metaphor oversimplifies the contradictions that developed from diverging definitions of the concept. Given the scale, audience, ambition, and poetic license of McGilchrist’s general hypothesis, this generalisation is understandable. However, for my purposes, it is too reductive to align the whole concept of ‘metaphor’ with the right hemisphere, as certain types of metaphor are just as susceptible to calcification as other linguistic forms. Neuroimaging data suggest that ‘basic’ and ‘novel’ metaphors are processed in markedly different ways, whereby the former correlates with more activation in the left hemisphere than the latter; ‘conventional metaphors are lexicalised, and are actually like long words, whose meaning is accessed as a unit’.⁴⁴⁵

Basic metaphors are implicated in the projective semantic demarcations of the left hemisphere. Linguists Nandini Nayak and Raymond Gibbs, for example, showed how English speakers predominantly understand ‘anger’ through two metaphorical models, ‘anger as heat in a pressurised container’ and ‘anger as a ferocious animal’, which are respectively underwritten by *the mind is a container* and *emotions are beings*.⁴⁴⁶ Naturally, degrees of conventionality fluctuate across

⁴⁴³ Lakoff and Turner, p. 55.

⁴⁴⁴ McGilchrist, *The Master*, p. 115.

⁴⁴⁵ Zohar Eviatar and Marcel Adam Just, ‘Brain Correlates of Discourse Processing: An fMRI Investigation of Irony and Conventional Metaphor Comprehension’, *Neuropsychologia*, 44.12 (2006), 2348-59, (p. 2355). This also aligns with the research discussed in 4.2, whereby the right hemisphere shows more activation in lexical tasks that are based on distantly-related words, non-salient meanings and ‘novel’ language’.

⁴⁴⁶ Nandini P. Nayak and Raymond W. Gibbs, Jr., ‘Conceptual Knowledge in the Interpretation of Idioms’, *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 119.3 (1990), 315-30 (p. 328).

regions, individuals, and moment-to-moment contexts—variables that complicate quantitative scientific investigations.⁴⁴⁷ However, the thrust of the study is that with enough repetition, basic metaphors become cognitively indistinguishable from lexical units (i.e., the relatively stable semantic categories that sculpt human perception); ‘conceptual metaphors provide more than a simple way of talking about the ontology of anger, fear, sorrow, and joy; they are used to understand and perhaps create our conceptual knowledge’.⁴⁴⁸ I would extend this, and hazard that abstractions such as ‘happiness’ and ‘sadness’ depend on metaphorical consistency.

Aligning the expansive category of Metaphor exclusively with the right hemisphere is misleading—fossilised metaphors that are processed as semantic units do *not* cease to qualify as metaphors. Rather, these neurological observations may be used to furnish the idea (or rather, the metaphor) that metaphors undergo a life cycle, and that these life cycles can monumentally affect their cultural environments. Lakoff and Johnson attribute social shifts to the waxing and waning of metaphors, suggesting that the westernisation of cultures throughout the world is partly a matter of introducing the concept of *time is money*.⁴⁴⁹ *Time is money* was once a novel idea, *nature is a complex machine* was once a revolutionary concept, and the industrious utility of these metaphors made them contagious. However, ubiquity implies neither truth, health, nor balance; I make the case that more diverse metaphors may counteract the inflammations of the modern psyche.

The first phase of activating this antidote is understanding that our most fundamental assumptions about reality are indeed metaphorical. However, as Lakoff and Johnson concede, ‘it is by no means an easy matter to change the metaphors we live by’; it is one thing to be aware of the possibilities inherent in an alternative metaphor ‘but it is a very different and far more difficult thing to live by it’.⁴⁵⁰ Psychedelics and hypnosis can be used to incite metaphorical flexibility and diversity, or, expressed another way, to liquify frozen conventions, or condense vaporious alternatives.

To clarify, the distinction that I draw between ‘basic’ and ‘novel’ metaphors is a rhetorical device. In some utterances I imply that they inhabit different realms, in others I foreground their life cycle. The former is more conventional, and the latter is used to emphasise mutability; whether one is ‘more true’ than the other depends on the context.

⁴⁴⁷ Anaki, Faust and Kravetz, p. 693.

⁴⁴⁸ Nayak and Gibbs, p. 328.

⁴⁴⁹ Lakoff and Johnson, p. 145.

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*.

5.3: HYPNOSIS AND METAPHORS OF MEMORY

In the early 1950s, Huxley habitually conceptualised memory as a type of storehouse—an iteration of *the mind is a container*. As outlined in the introduction, his integration of alternative metaphors of mind can be elucidated through his personal history with hypnosis, and the influences of both Maria and Archera.

5.3.1: MARIA NYS-HUXLEY

Archera recalls how Maria was a ‘very good hypnotic subject’.⁴⁵¹ As her health diminished with cancer, Huxley became adept at inducing hypnotic trances, which helped her with radiation sickness and pain management, particularly following the removal of a tumour.⁴⁵² However, under hypnosis she also had ‘many remarkable visionary experiences of a kind which theologians would call “pre-mystical”’.⁴⁵³ In an unpublished letter to her sister Jeanne, dated 16 April 1952, Maria offers a detailed description of such an experience from the previous evening, during one of their Tuesday night sessions.⁴⁵⁴ She lists the attendees as Leslie Lecron, and his wife, a dentist by the name of Hixon, and his wife, Huxley, and herself.⁴⁵⁵ On this occasion, Huxley is in another room with Mrs Hixon, and Lecron is attempting to hypnotise Mr Hixon and herself, to which the former is not responding. She indicates her authority on the subject of hypnosis, explaining to her sister that Mr Hixon’s lack of response was likely due to Lecron’s surplus of questions and shortage of silence. Her own experience, on the other hand, was one of becoming ‘a metronome ball that came and went in a ball of light in an even brighter sky’.⁴⁵⁶ Lecron’s queries seemed redundant in comparison to her feeling of profound happiness and lightness of being; investigation is ‘not the point’, she writes.⁴⁵⁷

Huxley increasingly adopted this indifference towards such targeted investigation. Following a hypnosis-mescaline experiment with Archera in 1955, he

⁴⁵¹ David Dunaway, *Aldous Huxley Recollected: An Oral History* (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 1999), p. 92.

⁴⁵² Poller, *Alternative Spirituality*, p. 83; Bedford, *Vol. II*, p. 129.

⁴⁵³ Archera, *Timeless*, p. 22

⁴⁵⁴ Maria Nys-Huxley, Letter to Jeanne (16 April 1952). Nys-Huxley archives. Bruxelles, Archives et Musée de la Littérature, ML 05051.

⁴⁵⁵ Leslie Lecron was a noteworthy psychologist and expert on hypnotism, with whom the Huxleys were close friends.

⁴⁵⁶ The original reads: *Puis tout a coup, je me suis sentie devenue un ballon métronome qui allait et venait un ballon de lumière dans un ciel encore plus lumineux*. Translation mine.

⁴⁵⁷ The original reads: *terriblement heureuse et légère et sachant très bien tout ce qu'il en dit mais n'ayant pas l'intérêt d'y répondre. "That is not the point" ...attitude*. Translation mine.

wrote to Osmond about his experience of ‘Love as the primary and fundamental cosmic fact’ and several days later suggested that ‘the opening of the door by mescaline or LSD is too precious an opportunity, too high a privilege to be neglected for the sake of experimentation’.⁴⁵⁸ His intention had been to use the combination of mescaline and hypnotic techniques to summon something of his forgotten childhood years.

Indeed, one of the dominant narratives of hypnosis during this era was that it granted one ‘the ability to bring back lost memories, those completely missing from consciousness and no longer subject to voluntary recall in the waking state’.⁴⁵⁹ This frames memory as something akin to data stored ‘inside’ the brain or mind; implicitly, *the mind is a container*. Although Huxley was unable to ‘restore’ this material, he (forgivably) reflects only on the profound intensity of the experience, rather than the presuppositions behind his original experiment.

Maria’s letter to Jeanne continues with a description of how Lecron brought Mr Hixon out of trance, and she suggested that he had worked too fast. Lecron asks Maria to close her eyes and requests that her ‘E’ explain why Mr Hixon had been unresponsive to hypnotic suggestion. This ‘E’ refers to ‘engrams’, a concept related to L. Ron Hubbard’s dianetic testing, with which Huxley and Maria both had several experiences.⁴⁶⁰ For the Huxleys this was a potential means of accessing material from the ‘subconscious’ mind; engrams are understood as memory traces, the crystalline contents of which can be retrieved through consciousness practices. As Huxley once wrote to Jeanne, Maria had ‘some success in contacting and working off engrams and has been back repeatedly into what the subconscious says is the pre-natal state’.⁴⁶¹ The practice is built on the metaphorical assumption that the brain/mind records experience and ‘stores’ the footage. Although Huxley was impervious to dianetics, I have found no explicit instances where he doubts its philosophical premise.

In the early 1950s, *the mind is a storehouse of memory* was a basic metaphor in Huxley and Maria’s social-intellectual community. During his time as a hypnotist, Lecron claimed to have witnessed and induced many extraordinary feats of hypermnnesia, suggesting that we ‘record every perception when received much as if a motion picture had been made with sound effects and with all the other senses

⁴⁵⁸ Huxley and Osmond, pp. 217, 223.

⁴⁵⁹ Lecron and Bordeaux, p. 132.

⁴⁶⁰ Huxley was deeply unimpressed by L. Ron Hubbard, describing him as ‘a very queer fellow [...] and in some ways rather pathetic; for he is curiously repellent physically and is probably always conscious of the fact, even in the midst of his successes’. Huxley, Letter to Jeanne (30 December 1950).

⁴⁶¹ Huxley, Letter to Jeanne (30 December 1950).

registered [...] Under hypnosis the picture can be replayed'.⁴⁶² Sheldrake offers an elegant critique of the idea that memories are stored and retrieved; the retrieval system would need to know what it was looking for, which must itself have a retrieval system, leading to infinite regress—in short, memory seems to be both everywhere and nowhere in the brain.⁴⁶³ Indeed, neuroscientists remain unable to locate an invariable physical correlate of memory. Nevertheless, this potential application of hypnosis was profoundly intriguing to Huxley, and no doubt consolidated by his own mnemonic demonstrations under the guidance of Milton Erickson—another attendee of the Huxleys' Tuesday night gatherings.⁴⁶⁴

5.3.2: MILTON ERICKSON

Milton Erickson remains one of the most influential and iconic figures in hypnosis; neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) is largely based on an Ericksonian approach—even self-help tycoon Tony Robbins continues to disseminate his legend, sharing his work on 'matching and mirroring', and describing him as a 'genius [...] probably the best [hypnotist] that ever lived'.⁴⁶⁵ In a retrospective article published in 1965, Erickson describes the project that he and Huxley began, 'each planning separately for a joint inquiry into various states of psychological awareness'.⁴⁶⁶

During his experiments with Erickson, Huxley was compelled by the idea of 'recapturing' psychedelic impressions after the substance had worn off.⁴⁶⁷ Erickson obliged this request, but relays that 'the hypnotic exploration did not give him an inner feeling [...] that there was an ordered intellectual content paralleling the 'feeling content'', aligning with the evidence that hypnotic practices predominantly correlate with left-hemispheric activation.⁴⁶⁸

Following this attempt, Huxley proceeded to describe his practice of 'Deep Reflection'—a 'psychological withdrawal from externalities' that allowed 'the realisations, the thinking, the understandings, [and] the memories' to seep into his

⁴⁶² Lecron and Bordeaux, p. 28.

⁴⁶³ Rupert Sheldrake, 'Morphogenesis – Creativity and Cosmic Consciousness', delivered at *Quantica Symposium* (Heidelberg, 2013), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9bm8RrkIHgQ>> [accessed 13 January 2022].

⁴⁶⁴ Dunaway, *Recollected*, pp. 91-93.

⁴⁶⁵ Tony Robbins, *Style Over Substance*, 2014, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1VG3mRDpWM8&pbjreload=101>> [accessed 13 January 2021].

⁴⁶⁶ Milton Erickson, 'A Special Inquiry with Aldous Huxley into the Nature and Character of Various States of Consciousness', *American Journal of Clinical Hypnosis*, 8.1 (1965), 14-33 (p. 14).

⁴⁶⁷ Dunaway, *Hollywood*, loc. 6749.

⁴⁶⁸ Erickson, p. 26; McGilchrist, *The Master*, p. 236.

creative work.⁴⁶⁹ From this state, Huxley was able to revisit the subtleties of his psychedelic sessions. However, he dismisses this as simply a vivid invocation of memory, rather than a ‘rival’ of the impression itself—a dismissal that illuminates the distance between Huxley’s concept of memory and his concept of experience.

According to Erickson, Huxley was highly adept at entering trance states, from which he was able to recall page numbers of passages from books that he had read, in some cases, decades earlier; ‘the page number “flashed” into his mind in the light state of trance’.⁴⁷⁰ However, Erickson clarifies that all of his experiences with this form of hypnotic hypermnesia had been ‘spontaneous occurrence[s] and with highly intelligent well-adjusted experimental subjects’.⁴⁷¹ Unlike Lecron, Erickson attributes this capacity to the constitution of the individual, rather than something intrinsic to hypnosis. Remarkably, Huxley could also recall these page numbers in his ‘normal’ waking state with an accuracy of around forty per cent, albeit more slowly.⁴⁷² Between cultural conjecture, Maria’s engrams, and his natural eidetic faculties, it is unsurprising that hypermnesia and the memory as a storehouse metaphor were so central to Huxley’s early interest in hypnosis. However, there are disquieting implications to the assumption that all varieties of memory, in all individuals, are stored like numerical accounts.

Western metaphors of the mind tend to propagate the same perspective. Even a simple utterance such as ‘your memories’ is metaphorical. The possessive pronoun implies that ‘you’ are the owner of ‘memories’, which are distinct from ‘you’. However, I speculate that most English-speakers educated in the West would not instinctively identify this as metaphorical. If I describe memories as ‘assets’ then the metaphorical tenor is more transparent. In modern language patterns, even the most intimate aspects of experience allegorically cohere with concepts of possession and proprietorship.

Unlike the artifacts of a museum, the majority of what we call ‘memories’ *cannot be recalled without some interference*. This statement (i.e., this stream of metaphors) is not an attempt to more accurately define ‘memory’, but to encourage perspectives that diversify conceptual conventions—to evoke more reciprocity between metaphors and culture. For example, due to my social, economic, and linguistic background, I tend to refer to any food items that I purchase as ‘mine’, or ‘ours’. The food items that I have ingested throughout my life have shaped my

⁴⁶⁹ Erickson, pp. 15-16, 18.

⁴⁷⁰ Erickson, p. 22.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid., p. 33.

⁴⁷² Ibid., p. 22.

experience, but I am under no illusion that these artifacts can be ‘retrieved’—and certainly not unchanged. This is a reduction to absurdity, but it serves as a form of defamiliarising the commodified connotations of memory. It is also a form of priming in light of the next section on Archera; contrary to Huxley’s early interest in mnemonic enhancement, Archera’s hypnotic pedagogies require a framework for understanding memory that is not cluttered with dusty artifacts.

5.4: RECIPES FOR LIVING AND LOVING

Archera’s influence on *Island* has not been adequately acknowledged, especially regarding Pala’s hypnotic techniques. This academic obscurity is forgivable considering the visibility of Huxley’s tribute to the surgeon and mesmerist James Esdaile.⁴⁷³ Dr Andrew (Dr Robert’s great-grandfather) is conspicuously based on Esdaile, insofar as he is a nineteenth-century Scottish doctor who used ‘magnetic passes’ to induce trances that were stable enough to perform surgery; with hypnosis, he was able to remove a deadly tumour that had grown in all directions from the Raja’s maxillary antrum. Based on his knowledge of Esdaile’s work, Huxley understood hypnosis (anaesthetic and therapeutic hypnosis) as a way of allowing the patient to activate their own natural healing powers, unhampered by the ‘agitated and anxious ego’.⁴⁷⁴

The archives at UCLA hold Huxley’s personal copy of Esdaile’s *Hypnosis in Medicine and Surgery*—originally titled *Mesmerism in India* (1846)—and its marginalia reveal which aspects of Esdaile’s ideas were adopted in Pala. For example, Huxley has highlighted a passage that narrates mesmerism as the ‘medicine of nature’—this is echoed by Dr Robert, who refers to hypnosis as ‘medicatrix naturae’ (p. 29). Another marked section is Esdaile’s commentary that all medical assistants ought to be trained in mesmeric techniques—in *Island* we learn that Dr Andrew ‘gave lessons in his new-found art to groups of midwives and physicians, of teachers, mothers, invalids’ (p. 156).⁴⁷⁵ However, perhaps more illuminating than the minutiae of similitudes (and unacknowledged, as far as I am aware, by any other

⁴⁷³ Poller, *Alternative Spirituality*, p. 83. See also Lecron and Bordeaux for a succinct biographical introduction to James Esdaile, which describes several of his most salient achievements, along with how he was ultimately exiled due to the controversy of his unorthodox methods and even barred from practising medicine by the British Medical Society (loc. 329).

⁴⁷⁴ Aldous Huxley, ‘A Case of Voluntary Ignorance’, *Esquire*, 1 October 1956, pp. 124-27 (p. 124).

⁴⁷⁵ James Esdaile, *Hypnosis in Medicine and Surgery* (New York: Institute for Research in Hypnosis Publication Society, 1957), p. 36.

scholar) are the minutiae of dissimilarities—where *Island*'s hypnotic practices explicitly diverge from those of Esdaile. For example, Huxley has highlighted a passage where Esdaile explains his reluctance to induce hypnosis without (physical) medical justification; 'I should as soon comply with your desire to feel the effects of opium, as mesmerise you without a cause'.⁴⁷⁶ The Palanese do not subscribe to this; in Pala, hypnosis are prosaic activities with many contexts and applications. Like Archera's recipes, they are 'for the well as well as for the not so well'.⁴⁷⁷

5.4.1: YOU ARE NOT THE TARGET

To refrain the introductory chapter, during Archera's eight years with Huxley she practiced hypnotherapy and psychedelic psychotherapy. Her datebooks from 1961-1966 (also held in the UCLA archive) suggest that these sessions were a regular occurrence.⁴⁷⁸ By the 1960s, Archera was evidently esteemed in her own right among the psychedelic-therapeutic community of this epoch, with figures like Michael Murphy (co-founder of the Esalen Institute) referring clients and requesting his own LSD session with her; 'I would of course be willing to pay the usual fee for the drug and for your time in administering it', he clarifies in one of their correspondences.⁴⁷⁹ Osmond also affirms his incorporation of Archera's techniques in his 1963 study of LSD for the treatment of alcoholism.⁴⁸⁰ However, her commercial triumph in the therapeutic realm was *Target*—an interactive volume of thirty 'recipes for living and loving' that she had been developing since the 1940s.⁴⁸¹

In an interview with author Leslie Westbrook, Archera describes the moment at which she decided to consolidate these practices into a book:

I remember this very well. It was a Sunday afternoon and two young Englishmen came to see Aldous—they were very bright and had a great deal of good will and they were trying to save the world. They spoke about all these very complicated things they were going to do, then they said, we are going to start a foundation, get money, buy a building, research, etc. and I thought my

⁴⁷⁶ Esdaile, p. 37.

⁴⁷⁷ 'Author Compiles Recipes'.

⁴⁷⁸ Laura Archera, Datebooks 1961-1966, box 80, fol. 1. These are usually marked with the note 'L.S.D', along with a name or initial, and occasionally the dosage.

⁴⁷⁹ Mike Murphy, Letter to Archera (4 November [n.d.]). Huxley papers, box 29, fol. 11. Given that the letter heading is from Big Sur Hot Springs, it is likely that this was 1962, the year that Murphy and Richard Price leased the property, but before they incorporated the name 'Esalen' in 1963.

⁴⁸⁰ Huxley and Osmond, p. 519.

⁴⁸¹ Laura Archera, 'Turning Points – Interview with Lisa Mitchell' (30 March 1981). Huxley papers, box 54, fol. 6.

goodness this would take years and years and my recipes were there already. So I said, “I am going to publish a book” and Aldous was very surprised and he said, “What a good idea”.⁴⁸²

Archera prioritised the accessibility of knowledge over the ivory tower of academia, and her use of the term ‘recipes’ was to avoid the strictures of scholarly disciplines; ‘[*Target*] is not a religion or a philosophy. Why is it necessary to have this big, big skyscraper of philosophy and religion? These recipes are just tools’.⁴⁸³

The self-help genre allowed Archera to address the reader with direct hypnotic suggestions, recurrently telling them *what* they are going to experience during the exercises: ‘you will feel how much more alive [...] how much more comfortable your body is than before you did this recipe’; ‘You will feel an increased mental activity and vigour, a physical exhilaration, a renewal of life flowing into you’.⁴⁸⁴ These recipes all share the philosophical premise that ‘the energy that activates our emotions is a neutral force’, meaning it can be rechannelled and transformed by hypnotic, linguistic, meditative, and physical practices.⁴⁸⁵ From the book’s introduction, the reader is also primed with novel and vivid metaphors of self; ‘Imagine yourself to be a diamond [...] Each recipe that you experience completely will clear one or more facets of that diamond’.⁴⁸⁶

Archera also insisted that the book be published alongside a record with two guided visualisations; ‘Cold print is not enough for these adventures in perception and creativity – for one needs the vitality and companionship of a voice’.⁴⁸⁷ Although hypnotic self-help audios were not uncommon in this era, the majority had specific applications, such as sleep induction or skills enhancement, particularly in sales and public speaking. Furthermore, they were seldom released alongside books, which only added to Archera’s publishing difficulties, as Parsons (of Chatto & Windus) told Huxley, ‘the unusual format makes the problem of selling such a book rather difficult. Booksellers don’t like handling things that don’t fit into their shelves & record shops are reluctant to handle things that are not exclusively records’—another example of literary orthodoxy that is not unlike the edits requested of *Island* (see

⁴⁸² Laura Archera, ‘Interview with Leslie Westbrook’ (1 November 1998). Huxley papers, box 54, fol. 6.

⁴⁸³ Martha MacGregor, ‘The Week in Books’, *New York Post*, 26 May 1963, p. 13.

⁴⁸⁴ Laura Archera, *You Are Not the Target* (New York: Avon Books, 1976), pp. 78, 216.

⁴⁸⁵ Archera, *Target*, p. 12.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁴⁸⁷ Archera, Letter to Huxley [n.d.]. Huxley papers, box 78, fol. 12. One of these recordings is available on Youtube; Laura Archera, “Your Favourite Flower” *Guided Meditation*, YouTube, 30 March 2014, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zrWlQhoL5pl&t=516s>> [accessed 19 January 2021].

1.5.2).⁴⁸⁸ However, although Archera's manuscript was 'refused by every publisher', she was unwilling to compromise on the inclusion of the recording.⁴⁸⁹

Canfield (of Harper & Brothers) rejected *Target*, explaining that he and his colleagues had agreed that 'the average reader, even the fairly intelligent book reader, would fail to grasp the positive possibilities of these recipes without some preliminary oral instruction'.⁴⁹⁰ However, in-house correspondence about the manuscript betrays the conservatism and sexism of mainstream publishing that Archera was faced with. Canfield sent the following to a colleague:

I read the introduction and the sample chapters with a delirious fascination but the image of myself* cavorting naked about a locked bedroom or being a snake to the accompaniment of drums while the children peek through the keyhole proved too much for me and I laughed aloud.

I couldn't help feeling it was impractical as a self-help book for that very reason. I presume Mrs. Huxley has a personal flamboyance that would allow her to carry this off in some rare and rarefied areas but I can't see it in a bookstore except on the humor table where it could conceivably be very successful.

[...]

*Actually I'm planning to try it but it may be some months before I can arrange the necessary privacy.⁴⁹¹

Other reactions within the company are equally condescending; although '[t]he Huxley name is assurance against crack-pot experimentation', the 'combination of self-hypnosis, mysticism + yoga [...] would be a lot for a book-buyer to take in at one sitting'.⁴⁹² Despite the rising popularity of hypnosis and yoga during this period, these publishers display a disheartening degree of discord between personal intrigue and public image.

Target was finally published by Farrar & Strauss. Archera describes Roger Strauss as 'a very unorthodox man' who 'has the freedom to do what he believes in'.⁴⁹³ However, communications between Archera and Huxley indicate the abiding pressures of academic conformity and intellectual appeasement in the production of this work. During Huxley's lecturing tour in 1962, the pair were in regular correspondence about the manuscript, and Huxley's main contribution to the project

⁴⁸⁸ Huxley, Letter to Archera (7 July 1961). Huxley papers, box 79, fol. 4.

⁴⁸⁹ Archera, 'Interview with Leslie Westbrook'.

⁴⁹⁰ Canfield, Letter to Archera (30 January 1961). Huxley papers, box 6, fol. 12.

⁴⁹¹ Canfield, Letter to 'JL' (23 January 1961). Huxley papers, box 6, fol. 12.

⁴⁹² J Vergara, Memo to Canfield (26 January 1961). Huxley papers, box 6, fol. 12.

⁴⁹³ Archera, 'Interview with Leslie Westbrook'.

was providing reference material that would qualify as erudite in the eyes of the publishers—in September 1961, for instance, he sent an excerpt from one of Abraham Maslow’s books, with a note that she would find ‘things to quote (they want academic “authorities”), & because Maslow so clearly expresses so much of the philosophy implicit in the recipes’.⁴⁹⁴ Beyond illustrating Huxley’s jaded attitude towards the establishment, this was evidently a creative compromise for Archera, who stressed that she was not seeking any form of intellectual approval, nor did she even consider herself a writer.⁴⁹⁵

Following its completion, the book was widely publicised and became an instant bestseller; a letter from Virginia Addison, of New York PR company Addison, Goldstein and Walsh, Inc., explains how the press, radio and television people with whom she had spoken were enthusiastic about the concept before even seeing the book.⁴⁹⁶ Although its promotion was conspicuously centred around Archera’s person and appearance, *Target* was, on the whole, positively received. Furthermore, despite its (somewhat contrived) academic insertions, the outcome reflects Archera’s commitment to accessibility. As Christopher Isherwood extols: ‘When a book is amusing, charming and quite easy to understand, we are apt to dismiss it as lightweight. Don’t make this mistake about [Archera]. She offers you nothing less than a new life’.⁴⁹⁷

5.5: ARCHERA’S ECHOS IN PALA

In February 1963, Huxley and Archera gave a collaborative seminar for the Alpha Omega Society in Los Angeles, entitled ‘Human Potentialities and their Development’. A review of the event describes how ‘Aldous Huxley was further amplified by the presence of Mrs Huxley who as an integral part of the program complemented her husband’s theoretical statements with her charming but timely pragmatism’.⁴⁹⁸ In this section I discuss the resonances between *Island* and *Target*—specifically, their approaches to a parallel series of hypnosis-based pedagogies, and

⁴⁹⁴ Huxley, Letter to Archera (September 1961). Huxley papers, box 79, fol. 4.

⁴⁹⁵ Doris Herzig, ‘Mrs Huxley Gives Recipe’, *Newsday*, 29 May 1963.

⁴⁹⁶ Virginia Addison, Letter to Archera (1 May 1963). Huxley papers, box 30, fol. 9. In the same folder there is also a copy of Archera’s May-June 1963 publicity schedule, which shows that she was giving up to five tv, radio and newspaper interviews per day, with media platforms such as the *New York Times*, *New York Post*, *Herald Tribune*, *LA Times*, *NBC* and numerous radio stations.

⁴⁹⁷ Alice Hughes, ‘A Woman’s New York’, *Reading Eagle*, 13 June 1963,

<https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=ZuSUVyMx-TgC&dat=19630613&printsec=frontpage&hl=en> [accessed 19 January 2021].

⁴⁹⁸ Alpha Omega, Bulletin announcement, Alpha Omega alumni (February 1963). Huxley papers, box 56, fol. 3.

how these illustrate the evolution of Huxley's metaphors of memory and mind.

In his foreword to *Target*, Huxley acknowledges a literary debt to his wife; 'Some of her recipes (for example, those for the Transformation of Energy) have found their way, almost unmodified, into my phantasy'.⁴⁹⁹ For example, Susila tells Will that one doesn't have to be haunted by remorse and painful memories—that 'some of the ghosts can be laid quite easily' (p. 278), echoing Archera's 'Lay the Ghost' recipe, discussed in the following section.⁵⁰⁰ Although Bedford grants that Archera's work 'was most stimulating to Aldous', scholars tend to centralise *Island*'s resonance with Buddhism and Vedanta, and there have been no literary analyses to adequately credit her creative influence.⁵⁰¹ Furthermore, the intertextuality between these works is partially veiled by edits and paraphrasing in the published version of *Island*. In the novel's manuscript, however, several of the recipes are not 'almost unmodified', but verbatim.

Archera's 'Transformation of Energy' recipe, for example, is articulated by Pala's Mr Menon; 'you take the power generated by fear or envy or too much noradrenalin [...] and, instead of using it to do something unpleasant to someone else [...] you consciously direct it along a channel where it can do something useful' (p. 254). In *Island*'s manuscript, this technique is referred to as 'the transformation of energy'; whereas in the published version it is recast as 'the re-direction of power' (p. 254).⁵⁰²

Mrs Narayan's narration of Palanese dance classes was revised in a similar manner. The children in the manuscript learn about 'the transformation of destructive energy'—which was rephrased as 'redirecting the power generated by bad feelings' in the final iteration (p. 261).⁵⁰³ The manuscript also details how the Palanese children are instructed to turn their aggressive energy into 'five contractions of the abdominal muscles', reiterating Archera's advice on mutating 'energy from a negative emotion into a specific muscular action'.⁵⁰⁴ It is worth clarifying that these examples are not meant as a pedantic assessment of *Island*'s originality, but rather as an illustration of how language may have veiled Archera's creative contributions.

⁴⁹⁹ Archera, *Target*, p. xiii.

⁵⁰⁰ As with Lakoff and Johnson's basic metaphors, I maintain Archera's convention of capitalising the recipe titles.

⁵⁰¹ Bedford, *Vol. II*, p. 254.

⁵⁰² Huxley, *Island* MS, box 59, fol. 3, p. 132.

⁵⁰³ Huxley, *Island* MS, box 59, fol. 3, pp. 133, 152.

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 133; Archera, *Target*, p. 43.

5.5.1: FLASHBACKS & FICTION

In Western society, the ‘fallibility’ of memory is often framed negatively—as a shortcoming that renders people vulnerable to exploitation, ‘gaslighting’, or false confessions, rather than a creative or therapeutic opportunity. For Archera, however, all memory is imagination; her semantic spectrum ranges from ‘reproductive imagination’; the revival of past perceptions in particular objects, to ‘productive imagination’; the power of combining past perceptions in creative ways.⁵⁰⁵ Productive imagination refers to how we can dissect personal histories and restitch new thought patterns—mitigating the implication that memories are akin to relics in a repository. Reproductive imagination, on the other hand, evokes the stabilising of these patterns. This spectrum articulates a flexible definition of ‘memory’, and, to apply McGilchrist’s model, both aspects align with the selective and projective competence of the left hemisphere.

In her recipe ‘Lay the Ghost’ Archera describes one of her therapy sessions with a young Italian girl called Luigiana, who was haunted by ‘*l’omino verde*—the little green man’, a figure that she had seen by her bedside nine years earlier.⁵⁰⁶ Luigiana was unable to decipher whether this oppressive memory was based on a dream or a ‘real’ experience, and the trauma had been exacerbated by her parents who teased her about seeing ghosts. Archera explains that ‘[w]ith a little coaxing [Luigiana] went back more and more realistically into the incident; she relived it, and the emotion and fear in it were terrifying’.⁵⁰⁷ They repeat this process several times, with intermissions of unconnected cognitive and sensorial distractions, including blinking, stretching, yawning, drinking, touching, smelling, observing, breathing, and counting.⁵⁰⁸ Luigiana’s fear subsided with each retelling, until both she and Archera were laughing at this ambiguous entity.

On Will’s arrival in Pala, he sees a snake and falls off a precipice, which lands him in rehabilitation for the duration of the novel. *Island*’s plot begins when he is discovered in the thicket by ‘two exquisite children’, Mary Sarojini and Tom Krishna, Dr Robert’s grandchildren. After satiating Will’s hunger with some fruit, Mary (the elder of the two, around ten years old), instinctively begins a process of ‘psychological first aid’ to assuage the shock of the incident and mitigate future trauma (p. 16). Initially, Will refuses to participate, and the young stranger warns

⁵⁰⁵ Archera, *Target*, p. 228.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁵⁰⁸ Archera, *Target*, pp. 64-65.

him that if he refuses to face his ordeal then his fear will only augment, reminiscent of Luigiana's trauma in the years following *l'omino verde*; 'You can't be here and now [...] until you've got rid of those snakes [...] They'll be crawling about inside your head forever' (p. 13). Mary initiates a process of re-narration; 'Listen, Will: there was a snake, and you almost stepped on him [...] and it gave you such a fright that you lost your balance, you fell. Now say it yourself – say it!' (p. 14). He finally obliges.

On the first and second revisitations he is overwhelmed by horror, nausea, and panic, all the while attempting to hold back his tears. Mary persists until he shows signs of an emotional release:

"Say it again, Will." He was sobbing now. "Say it again," she insisted.

"I fell."

"Again."

It was tearing him to pieces, but he said it. "I fell."

"Again, Will." She was implacable. "Again."

"I fell, I fell. I fell ..."

Gradually the sobbing died down. The words came more easily and the memories they aroused were less painful. (pp. 14-15)

Like Archera's anecdote in 'Lay the Ghost', Will's psychological first aid concludes with he and Mary laughing to such a point that 'the whole universe seemed to be fairly splitting its sides over the enormous joke of existence' (p. 15).

Susila similarly evokes Will's productive imagination in their first hypnosis session, asking him whether he is familiar with the English city of Wells. Once again, he is initially unwilling to co-operate; 'Of course he knew Wells. Why did she pester him with her silly reminiscences?' (p. 32). She proceeds to guide him through a visualisation of her own visit, listening to the cathedral bells and the jackdaws in the tower—'can you hear the jackdaws?' (p. 32). This question primes him with a specific projection, and his memory (productive imagination) blends with Susila's narrative; 'Yes, he could hear the jackdaws, could hear them almost as clearly as he now heard those parrots in the trees outside his window. He was here and at the same time he was there' (p. 33). Unlike *moksha* and other meditative practices in Pala, hypnosis is not used to evoke the 'here and now', but to enhance the projective aspects of perception. The session continues until Will enters a reconciliatory sleep.

Preceding Will's *moksha* session at the climax of the novel, Susila revisits their conversation about Wells; 'about the calling of the jackdaws, about the white

swans floating between the reflections of the floating clouds. In a few minutes he too was floating’ (p. 283). From this state of relaxation, Will is more suggestible and she encourages him to narrate the grief and the guilt that he has been carrying since the accidental death of his wife Molly. She asks leading questions about the weather during his visit to the hospital—whether it was raining, and whether the rain was as hard as the tropical rain they could hear outside.

This decontextualises Will’s sensory input to such a degree that what he heard was ‘no longer this afternoon shower in the tropics, but the steady drumming on the window of the little room where Molly lay dying’ (pp. 284-85). Susila guides him through a productive imagining of his most painful confrontations with the ‘Essential Horror’, all the while sowing alternative narratives for grief and death; although Will’s memories of Molly had stagnated and frozen, they were not immutable pieces of data.

5.5.2: SEMANTIC SATIATION

In 4.2.1 I introduced the metaphor of Language as a substance, whereby different linguistic forms in different contexts may be framed via the phases of matter; solid, liquid, and gas. This can also be applied to the spectrum of memory, whereby aspects of reproductive imagination (e.g., the page numbers that Huxley was able to recite) constitute solid, frozen units, and those of the productive imagination are more fluid. In her recipe ‘Ice Cubes in a Flowing River’ Archera uses a similar metaphor as a therapeutic activity; ice cubes represent unprocessed moments of shame, trauma, grief, neglect—anything that leaves us ‘frozen in a reaction of the past’.⁵⁰⁹ Archera specifies that this also includes words/categories whose connotations have calcified in conjunction with these emotions; ‘to sum up, ice cubes stop the flow of life and energy’.⁵¹⁰ The recipe for their dissolution involves entering and embodying the metaphor itself. Building on ‘Lay the Ghost’, the reader is encouraged to locate and select one of their ice cubes to ‘relive’ as completely as possible, repeating the process until its physical repercussions recede.

This practice is related to the left-hemispheric disambiguation (uncertainty reduction) outlined in 3.4, which uses repetition to ‘reduce the emotional power of events by turning extraordinary, attention-demanding events into ordinary ones that are no longer focal in people’s thoughts and no longer trigger intense reactions’.⁵¹¹

⁵⁰⁹ Archera, *Target*, p. 208.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹¹ Wilson, Centerbar and Kermer, p. 6.

The diminishing physical stress is paired with an image of melting ice; the metaphor is acutely embodied and constitutes both the context and the catalyst for transformation. This is not secondary to the treatment; the exercise would be incoherent under the assumption that memories are objective artifacts of the past.

Likewise, in the recipe ‘Throw Words Away’, the reader is asked to make a list of words that elicit emotional responses, with examples such as ‘God’, ‘mother’, ‘ugly’, ‘sex’, and then choose one that is particularly ‘charged’; ‘Repeat that word, again and again’, while exploring all the emotions associated with it, then continue to ‘repeat this procedure with the same word until that word has become a useful tool, not a controlling dictator’.⁵¹² This experience of estrangement is referred to as ‘semantic satiation’ in psychology and linguistics—a term coined by psycholinguist Leon Jakobovits in 1962, the same year as *Island*’s publication.

Semantic satiation is the subjective and transitory experience of meaning loss after word repetition, which is believed to occur as a result of excessive activation in the semantic network.⁵¹³ The majority of the research in this field has been centred on gathering quantitative data relating to how quickly this phenomenon occurs, and demographics of susceptibility.⁵¹⁴ However, Jakobovits was primarily driven by the therapeutic implications of this curious effect, suggesting that ‘semantic satiation as an applied tool ought to work wherever some specifiable cognitive activity mediates some behaviour that one wishes to alter’.⁵¹⁵ He was building on the work of the psychiatrist Joseph Wolpe, who had successfully used the technique in the treatment of phobias, under the principle that repeated exposure often results in desensitisation.

Mitigating trauma through this method not only unifies memory, experience and language, but also emphasises the contextuality of ‘meaning’. Recent studies have measured satiation by the reaction times of subjects in semantic activation tasks, for example, judging whether words belong to the same superordinate category—temporary loss of meaning predictably correlates with slower reaction times and more mistakes.⁵¹⁶

In Chapter 2 I mentioned the power and purpose of Whitehead’s relentless refrains in *Process and Reality*, and it is worth noting that a similar technique is used

⁵¹² Archera, *Target*, pp. 177-78.

⁵¹³ Katarzyna Prochwicz, ‘Semantic Satiation in Schizophrenia. The Role of Valence of Stimuli’, *Archives of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy*, 4 (2010), 23-27 (p. 23).

⁵¹⁴ For examples see Leon Jakobovits, ‘Semantic Satiation and Cognitive Dynamics’, *The Journal of Special Education*, 2.1 (1967), 35-44. For more recent examples see Maura Pilotti and Ayesha Khurshid, ‘Semantic Satiation in Young and Older Adults’, *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 98.3 (2004), 999-1016.

⁵¹⁵ Jakobovits, p. 10.

⁵¹⁶ Prochwicz, p. 24.

by philosophers and ecologists such as Jane Bennett, who warns readers that her expositions will ‘turn the figures of “life” and “matter” around and around, worrying them until they start to seem strange, in something like the way a common word when repeated can become a foreign, nonsense sound’.⁵¹⁷ She describes how this ‘estrangement’ can be framed as a sense of spaciousness, into which a more vital (or animate) materiality may be implanted.⁵¹⁸ Stengers, too, writes on ‘the word of trance’, whereby any ‘possibility of definition is dissolved by speculative repetition’.⁵¹⁹ In Chapter 7 I try my own hand at this defamiliarisation.

Just as ‘language’ is more than the contents of a dictionary, ‘memory’ is more than a collection of data. Archera’s hypnotic recipes unify memory, narrative, and physical sensation—they accentuate the indivisibility of the mental and the material. Words are experiential-corporeal forces; metaphors are part of a physical mind-body. Metaphorical diversity is simultaneously the tool and the process for perceptual retuning.

5.6: A PERCEPTUAL SPECTRUM

5.6.1: HOURGLASS ATTENTION

From his early experiments with Erickson and Maria, Huxley’s applications of hypnosis gradually aligned with those of Archera. Alongside anaesthesia and intellectual endeavours, *Island*’s citizens also use hypnotic practices to contract their attention—a complimentary contrast to the receptivity that they cultivate through *moksha* and meditative practices. Given this evolution, Huxley’s notorious ‘filter’ metaphor justifies revisitation.

With this new context, I once again refrain Dr Robert and Vijaya’s conversation about *moksha*, where Vijaya suggests that the medicine causes ‘some kind of unusual stimulation of the brain’s areas of primary projection—the visual cortex, for example [...] somehow or other, it also does something unusual to the silent areas of the brain’ (p. 167). This biochemical exposition coheres with *the mind is a container* metaphor; the effects of *moksha* are narrated through neurological activity inside the skull. Dr Robert responds with a more embellished theory:

⁵¹⁷ Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), p. vii.

⁵¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. vii.

⁵¹⁹ Stengers, p. 504.

I say that the moksha-medicine does something to the silent areas of the brain which opens some kind of neurological sluice and so allows a larger volume of Mind with a large “M” to flow into your mind with a small “m”. You can’t demonstrate the proof of your hypothesis and I can’t demonstrate the truth of mine. And even if you could prove that I’m wrong, would it make any practical difference? (p. 168)

This is less suggestive of *the mind is a container*. The repetition of ‘Mind’ and ‘mind’ emphasises likeness; rather than a substance flowing into a container, the implication is that of a ‘larger volume’ of substance merging with another substance of a similar constitution.

The capitalisation of ‘Mind’ is present in *Doors* in the context of ‘Mind at Large’, and four of its nine instances are indeed framed by water metaphors, via images of pipelines, oozing, seeping, and funnelling.⁵²⁰ However, Dr Robert’s hypothesis is the first published example in which Huxley extends the metaphor to illustrate something about the *instrument* of reception. That is, although his theory that the mind/brain filters consciousness had been well-established since his popularisation of Bergson in the early 1950s, it left the constitution of the filter ‘itself’ ambiguous—there was space for the assumption that the filter is something distinct from the filtered.

In the world of material artifacts, a water filter is generally distinguished from the water on which it acts; the object and the substance are distinct. This is not implied in Dr Robert’s metaphor. Furthermore, he emphasises that ‘proof’ makes no difference in this context; their guesses are two coherent metaphors for an ultimately impenetrable mystery. This exchange between two of the book’s leading characters reveals how the Palanese have no fixed metaphor of mind; from a young age they are discouraged from taking words too seriously, allowing them to acknowledge multiple metaphors for even the most primary human concepts and experiences. On a pragmatic level, this metaphorical tolerance and tuning implants an immunity to the fervours of certainty and dogma.

In the same spirit, I wish to contribute another metaphor that will cohere with Palanese cultural practices, but also support the integration of *both* psychedelic and hypnotic states of consciousness: Hourglass Attention.

⁵²⁰ Huxley, *Doors*, pp. 8-11, 14, 16, 35.

PROJECTION

The musicians who were filled with fear and excitement as the curtain rose.
 These shows began as usual, until Perception began receiving chord patterns.
 Language was restricted of those meeting nights at the Club.
 Philosophy softly announced to an uneasy sense of nostalgia.
 They eventually arranged to accommodate a harmony.
 At which point, it abruptly became more subtle.
 The tempo of the music was inconsistent.
 The dynamics were different too.
 Down to the guitar's timbre.
 The rhythm was in flux.
 Thus suddenly,
 Perception
 Left
 C-Major
 Not-C-Major
 This was Not-C-Major
 Language proved to have
 Philosophy learned the basic syntax.
 The sound was simultaneously messy things:
 Striding, complex, liturgical, spiritual, overwhelming.
 They had known only fragments of Not-C-Major's arena.
 Cuddly, the musician seemed to contain the notes of C-Major.
 Yet, neither keyboard nor bass were able to find a convincing harmony.
 Only in the final act could they—perhaps—navigate their way home to C.
 After years of being ventriloquized by melody, Philosophy had learned about silence.
 But for language, this territory was altogether new and wholly unrecognizable.

RECEPTION

In this metaphor, the far-right side renders the amplification of receptive attention (i.e., ‘expanding the filter’ or ‘opening the doors of perception’ through psychedelics or meditative practices), and far the left side renders the amplification of projective attention (i.e., selective sensorial exclusion through hypnotic practices).

To invoke a panpsychist resonance, I could refer to how glass is made from sand; the casing of an hourglass and its ‘contents’ are different arrangements of the same material. To harmonise with McGilchrist’s theory that the mental and the material are ‘phases’ of consciousness, akin to water, I could render this as an image of a river flowing through ice. For a more dualistic consonance, I would only need to exclude elaboration and allow cultural-linguistic conventions to imply a contrast between ‘container’ and ‘contained’. The ‘meaning’ of any given metaphor is a matter of context and participation. However, given the ubiquity of *the mind is a container*, the one embellishment I wish to emphasise in this example is that the system is not closed. My use of an hourglass pertains more to the shape of an hourglass than to the timekeeping object.

PROJECTION

The musicians who were filled with fear and excitement as the curtain rose.
 These shows began as usual, until Perception began receiving chord patterns.
 Language was restricted of those meeting nights at the Club.
 Philosophy softly announced to an uneasy sense of nostalgia.
 They eventually arranged to accommodate a harmony.
 At which point, it abruptly became more subtle.
 The tempo of the music was inconsistent.
 The dynamics were different too.
 Down to the guitar's timbre.
 The rhythm was in flux.
 Thus suddenly,
 Perception
 Left
 C-Major
 Not-C-Major
 This was Not-C-Major
 Language proved to have
 Philosophy learned the basic syntax.
 The sound was simultaneously messy things:
 Striding, complex, liturgical, spiritual, overwhelming.
 They had known only fragments of Not-C-Major's arena.
 Cuddly, the musician seemed to contain the notes of C-Major.
 Yet, neither keyboard nor bass were able to find a convincing harmony.
 Only in the final act could they—perhaps—navigate their way home to C.
 After years of being ventriloquized by melody, Philosophy had learned about silence.
 But for language, this territory was altogether new and wholly unrecognizable.

RECEPTION

For rhetorical continuity, I have labelled the two sides in accord with McGilchrist's hemispheric characterisations. Indeed, McGilchrist observes that a conscious act of imagination is a more projective (rather than receptive) use of one's perceptual faculties and he cites a number of neuroimaging studies that confirm a 'predominance of left-sided activation' in hypnotic states.⁵²¹ In 3.4.2 I mentioned how some neuroscientists refer to the predictive-projective aspects of perception as 'priors', and outlined the current consensus view that psychedelics diminish the activity of 'top-down priors' in the brain.⁵²² The prevailing neuroscientific narrative on hypnosis is the inverse, whereby hypnotic suggestibility is understood as a measure of one's ability to enhance the activity (and thus the motor perceptual effects) of top-down priors.⁵²³

It is worth reiterating that I am not attempting to prove a scientific hypothesis, but attempting to establish a useful and accessible metaphor that can accommodate both psychedelic and hypnotic categories of awareness. Furthermore, 'psychedelic' and 'hypnotic' refer to diverse, fluctuating, highly context-dependent categories of experience—indeed, although lacking the variety of chemical catalysts that qualify as 'psychedelic', hypnosis has many levels of induction and a multitude of modalities that may or may not accompany 'the' state.⁵²⁴ In this way, the metaphor presented here is not intended to dichotomise psychedelics and hypnosis; the hourglass is intended to emphasise the projective aspects of hypnotic states, alongside the receptive aspects of psychedelic states, in a way that values them both, yet recognises enough of a tonal distinction for them to harmonise.

Accompanying McGilchrist's allegory of the left hemisphere's laser beam, Rubin Battino, a leading expert in the conjunction of metaphorical language and hypnosis, notes how hypnotised subjects tend towards literal interpretations, understanding a phrase like 'rest room', for example, as a literal a place to rest.⁵²⁵ Erickson's article about his session with Huxley furnishes this:

[Huxley] answered questions simply and briefly, giving literally and precisely no more and no less than the literal significance of the question implied. In other words, he showed the same precise literalness found in other subjects, perhaps

⁵²¹ McGilchrist, *The Master*, p. 236.

⁵²² Carhart-Harris and Friston, p. 319.

⁵²³ David Acunzo, Etzel Cardeña and David Terhune, 'Anomalous Experiences are More Prevalent Among Highly Suggestible Individuals Who are also Highly Dissociative', *Cognitive Neuropsychiatry*, 25.3 (2020), 179-89 (p. 180).

⁵²⁴ Etzel Cardeña, 'The Phenomenology of Deep Hypnosis: Quiescent and Physically Active', *International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis*, 53.1 (2005), 37-59 (p. 51).

⁵²⁵ Rubin Battino, *Metaphoria: Metaphor and Guided Metaphor for Psychotherapy and Healing* (Carmathen: Crown House Publishing, 2002), p. 82.

more so because of his knowledge of semantics.

He was asked, “What is to my right?” His answer was simply, “I don’t know.” “Why?” “I haven’t looked.” “Will you do so?” “Yes.” “Now!” “How far do you want me to look?” This was not an unexpected inquiry since I have encountered it innumerable times. Huxley was simply manifesting a characteristic phenomenon of the deep somnambulistic trance in which visual awareness is restricted in some inexplicable manner to those items pertinent to the trance situation.⁵²⁶

Erickson proceeds to explain how this ‘peculiar restriction of awareness’ is an effective way to assess the induction of hypnotic trance, and comments on how there can also be ‘an auditory restriction of such character that sounds, even those originating between the operator and the subject, seem to be totally outside the hypnotic situation’.⁵²⁷ Responses like these indicate a lack of attention to context, and a circumscription of one’s interpretative range.

At the beginning of this chapter, I introduced hypnosis as a constriction of one’s sensorial receptivity. However, in resistance to the (capitalist) cultural tendency to assume that ‘more is better’, the hourglass serves as a reminder that the hypnotic state can equally be expressed as an increase, for example, if the measure was based on the ‘amount’ of attention given to a *particular* event or object. Highly suggestible individuals can thus be framed as having an aptitude for overriding some of the more receptive aspects of perception. In Pala, this perceptual tapering is not only commended, but carefully cultivated.

5.6.2: A CATEGORICAL SPECTRUM

Dr Robert’s preferred metaphor of M/mind does not evoke the concept of a sealable container, but rather reconciles the material and the mental, which coheres with his cautions about the consequences of abstractive Platonism; ‘You worship the word and abhor matter!’ (p. 181). As outlined in previous chapters, this manifests from the myth that categories are universal. However, as discussed, the Palanese do not exile this way of knowing either; Pala’s science curriculum begins ‘prosaically with the textbook’—with six or seven weeks of ‘undiluted botany’ (p. 267). The example that Principal Narayan gives is a course centred around the gardenia flower—biologically

⁵²⁶ Erickson, pp. 22-23.

⁵²⁷ Ibid., p. 23.

speaking, ‘gardenia’ is the genus ‘under’ which there are several hundred different species.⁵²⁸ Before accommodating this pedagogy on the hourglass, the contemporary connotations of binomial nomenclature call for further elaboration.

Brent Berlin, known for his pioneering work in ethnobiology and linguistics, has conducted extensive research on how ‘folk’ taxonomies around the world correspond with Western nomenclature. Berlin and his colleagues centred their primary study on Tzeltal speakers in Chiapas, Mexico, and found that the local equivalents of Western genus-level names were the most easily elicited during their investigations, from which they hypothesise a ‘universal similarity’ within ‘ethnobiological classification and nomenclature’.⁵²⁹ Although they refer to ‘similarity’ rather than ‘sameness’, ‘universal’ remains a precarious adjective that tends to neglect the nuances of cultural diversity. Lakoff neutralises this in a parallel discussion; rather than ‘genus’, he (interchangeably) uses the terms ‘generic’ and ‘basic’ to refer to the broadest level at which members of a category appear to share forms and attributes.⁵³⁰ He suggests that a useful way of understanding generic categories is through the idea that they are ‘human sized’—i.e., physical continuities among their members are detectable via human senses.⁵³¹

In terms of language acquisition, most Western children learn ‘cat’ (genus) before ‘jaguar’ (species), or superordinates such as ‘mammal’ or ‘animal’. However, this is not without exception. Lakoff emphasises that his idea of basicness relates to ease of perception, memory, and utility, all of which are culturally variable—many people raised in urban environments treat ‘tree’ (superordinate), as their basic level of distinction when confronted with an ‘oak’ (genus).⁵³² Alternatively, ‘jaguar’ (species) would likely constitute the generic category in a community where it carried spiritual significance.⁵³³ This is important as it emphasises the interactional nature of classification—the participation of the perceiver, as well as the contours of the object being perceived.

This is also a useful lens through which to interpret Family’s study on

⁵²⁸ Huxley seemed to have particular aptitude for binomial nomenclature—writing on Huxley’s friendship dynamic with Jiddu Krishnamurti, Radha Sloss writes: ‘On their long walks they would observe together, Aldous knowing all the names in Latin and English of flowers, shrubs and butterflies. Krinsh, generally disapproving of labels, but seemingly fascinated by Aldous’s ability’ *Lives in the Shadow with J. Krishnamurti* (Lincoln: iUniverse, 2000), Scribd, p. 306.

⁵²⁹ Brent Berlin, Dennis Breedlove and Peter Raven, ‘General Principles of Classification and Nomenclature in Folk Biology’, *American Anthropologist*, 75.1 (1973), 214-42 (pp. 221, 227).

⁵³⁰ Lakoff, *Women*, p. 51.

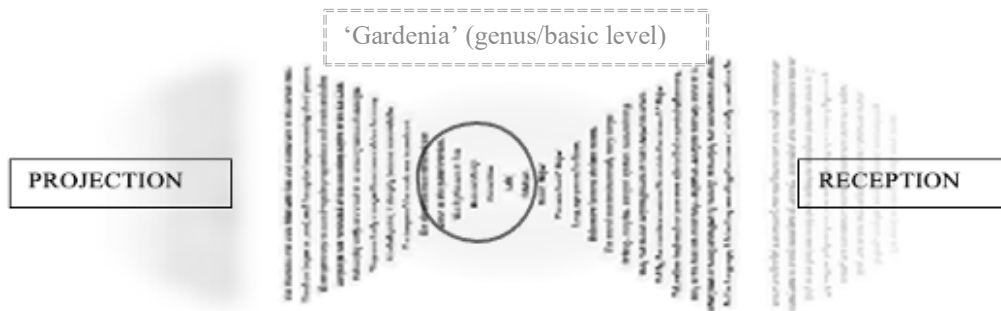
⁵³¹ *Ibid.*

⁵³² *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.

⁵³³ See also Everett, ‘Cultural Constraints’, for a discussion of how the Pirahã do not conform to Berlin’s hypothesis, consistently distinguishing plants at the species level (p. 628).

psychedelics and semantic networks (discussed in 4.1), in which subjects under LSD were more prone to mistakenly naming items with the ‘same’ category. As categories were not the focus of this study, the authors do not distinguish between different levels of categorisation. However, it is clear from their methodology and discussion that mistakes occurred most frequently between generic-level terms within a shared superordinate. For example, substituting ‘foot’ for ‘leg’ was significantly more common than mistaking ‘glove’ for ‘hand’; the subjects’ recognition of body parts remained stable.⁵³⁴ Thus, the rhetoric that ‘categories dissolve’ under the influence of psychedelics may be unhelpfully reductive—thus far, the evidence suggests that categorical levels are affected to different degrees.

The Palanese botany course begins with ‘elementary facts, tidily arranged in the standard pigeon-holes’ (p. 267)—the generic-level that dominates Western education and perceptual habits. I locate this form of attention in/on/as/at/through the tapered middle section of the hourglass.



As outlined in Chapter 3, the standard pigeon-holes are supplemented by a bridge-building session in which the children are encouraged to meditate on the gardenia genus ‘as though it has no name and belonged to no recognisable class’ (pp. 267-68). This would incorporate more of the right, ‘receptive’ section:

⁵³⁴ Family and others, p. 1323.



In the midst of Dr Robert’s account of the Raja’s life-saving hypnotic anaesthesia, ‘a large, brightly coloured mantis’ lands at the foot of Will’s bed (p. 150). Dr Robert bends forward to examine it with a magnifying glass, an extension of the standard human sensory scale.

“*Gongylus gongyloides*,” he pronounced. “It dresses itself up to look like a flower. When unwary flies and moths come sailing in to sip the nectar, it sips them. And if it’s a female, she eats her lovers.” He put the glass away and leaned back in his chair. “What one likes most about the universe,” he said to Will Farnaby, “is its wild improbability. *Gongylus gongyloides*, *Homo sapiens*, my great-grandfather’s introduction to Pala and hypnosis—what could be more unlikely?” (pp. 150-51)

I read this mantis magnification as a synecdoche of the hypnotic process that is being recounted. Hypnotic techniques, looking glasses, and species-level taxonomy are all means of surpassing the standard focal range—of ‘zooming in’. Or, equally, decreasing one’s range of sensitivity to local stimulus.



During Will’s *moksha*-experience, the mantis resurfaces and plays a pivotal part in his psychedelic integration. As Susila cautions, ‘the Void won’t do you much

good unless you can see its light in *Gongylus gongyloides*' (p. 344). This is critical to the climax of the novel—to Will's long-awaited ingress into a more materialised grace—and the implications are profound. As the generic (genus) level of attention/categorisation is the most automated, this is the level at which properties seem the most objective.⁵³⁵ As discussed, assumed objectivity, rooted in the idea that universals exist independently of their particulars, is a precursor to abstraction—a worldview that has justified a relegation of the natural world.

5.6.3: HYPNODELICS

The combination of psychedelics and hypnosis is a longstanding enquiry; Huxley and Osmond were interested in this pairing, and there were numerous addiction studies in the 1950s and the 1960s in which the combination of LSD, hypnosis and psychotherapy was found to be a more effective treatment than any two of these approaches alone.⁵³⁶ In these studies, the hypnotic state was induced directly after the ingestion of a psychedelic, coinciding with its onset. This is a salient detail. Although there are some phenomenological similarities between hypnosis and psychedelic states of consciousness, such as alterations in perception, body image, time perception and self-awareness, it seems that hypnotic induction becomes increasingly difficult at higher psychedelic doses.⁵³⁷ Indeed, as early as the 1950s, Louis J. West, CIA psychiatrist and acquaintance of Huxley, found subjects under mescaline to be 'almost unhypnotizable'.⁵³⁸ This is unsurprising given the evidence that psychedelics and hypnosis correspond with contrasting neurological activity. The hourglass metaphor, therefore, expresses how psychedelics and hypnosis may be complimentary, yet concomitantly incompatible.

Clément Lemerrier and David Terhune's 2018 article, 'Psychedelics and Hypnosis: Commonalities and Therapeutic Implications', provides a comprehensive review of the research on this intersection, which they refer to as 'hypnodeotics'. They conclude that the most effective combination of psychedelics and hypnosis is either post-hypnotic suggestion (at the end of an experience) to assist integration, or hypnotic priming, which can increase the likelihood of a 'positive response'.⁵³⁹ These findings are dramatised in *Island*, but with a crucial difference; 'positive'

⁵³⁵ Lakoff, *Women*, p. 51.

⁵³⁶ Jerome Levine and Arnold Ludwig, 'Alterations in Consciousness Produced by Combinations of LSD, Hypnosis and Psychotherapy', *Psychopharmacologia*, 7 (1965), 123-37.

⁵³⁷ Cardeña.

⁵³⁸ Huxley and Osmond, p. 653.

⁵³⁹ Clément Lemerrier and David Terhune, 'Psychedelics and Hypnosis: Commonalities and Therapeutic Implications', *Journal of Psychopharmacology*, 32.7 (2018), 1-9 (p. 6).

experiences are not prioritised over ‘negative’ experiences. Susila primes Will’s *moksha* journey by telling him that ‘[it] can take you to heaven; but it can also take you to hell. Or else to both, together or alternatively. Or else (if you’re lucky, or if you’ve made yourself ready) beyond either of them (p. 323). Will and the reader are successively guided through the synaesthetic bliss of Bach and undifferentiated eternity, to a ‘hideous certitude’ that keeps ‘opening out, opening down, into a depth below depth of malignant vulgarity, hell beyond hell of utterly pointless suffering’ (p. 340). However, this is an intentional process of harmonising polarities; Susila primes Will to experience divinity and meaning in the material realm, even in *Gongylus gongyloides*.

5.7: CLOSING

In the thesis introduction I outlined the recent resurgence of the metaphor that psychedelics ‘reset’ the brain. Building on the more basic metaphor of *the mind is a container*, this allegorises the mind as something akin to a computer, or indeed any machine that can be ‘rebooted’ or ‘rewired’—as something individual, interior, private and qualitatively different from its surrounding environment.⁵⁴⁰

The reset metaphor was inadvertently propagated by the Imperial team working on psilocybin for treatment-resistant depression. After seeing some of the repercussions of this metaphor—namely, the unrealistic expectations that it established—the team consciously incorporated a different metaphor into their treatment model for the subsequent set of trials. The day before their psilocybin session, participants were led through a guided visualisation based on diving for oysters in the ocean. As Watts explains, they might ‘find oysters that represent fear, shame, and anger, for example. They go into each one and they explore it, and then they search for the pearls in each one and [these] are used to set an intention for the next day’.⁵⁴¹ This metaphorical exercise is a way of priming people to move towards difficult emotions, and not away from them—it attends to the participatory process of recategorisation at the heart of psychedelic treatment.

Beyond its therapeutic applications, I understand the combination of

⁵⁴⁰ Abram, *Sensuous*, p. 257.

⁵⁴¹ Rosalind Watts, ‘Researching Psilocybin’s Effect on Depression’, *Adventures Through the Mind*, podcast, December 2019, <<https://open.spotify.com/episode/5VRVnoJKyAe6eO8nUzY2s?si=b49e414ab8cc4ce1>> [accessed 14 February 2022].

hypnosis and psychedelics as a way of integrating alternative metaphors for human experience. This is vividly illustrated in *Island*'s manuscript, which contains a more detailed iteration of Vijaya's sermon at the onset of the children's *moksha* initiation—(likely cut from the final version due to the same literary publishing conventions used to cull the Old Raja's sections, as discussed in 1.5.2). Vijaya primes the initiates with a highly fertile metaphor of the self:

Words, words, words. Words that an hour ago would have been utterly meaningless [...] In a few minutes you will know, you will actually be that meaning [...] Then the light will fade; but the seeds of revelation will remain within you --- ready, if you will only give them a chance, to germinate, to grow, to explore into another apocalyptic flowering. From this time onwards all the arts of awareness will be easier for you to practice.⁵⁴²

This passage is an exemplar of psychedelic facilitation and, more pertinently, a demonstration of Vijaya's metaphorical diversity. Contrary to the biological model of mind/self that he shares with Will in his earlier hypothesis of *moksha* exerting 'some kind of unusual stimulation' in the brain, the 'you' in this oration is an environment in which 'seeds of revelation' can germinate and grow into an 'apocalyptic flowering'. The mind is not allegorised as a closed hub of neurological mechanisms, but as an open, natural landscape. Vijaya holds multiple metaphors and, like Susila, uses hypnotic suggestion to disseminate them according to context. The importance of this flexibility cannot be understated. Metaphors are not retrospective descriptors, but living forces at the foundation of experience, and their diversity will be a decisive factor in the future of psychedelics, and social change more generally.

'Psychedelics reset the brain' may be no more or less 'true' than Vijaya's metaphor of *moksha* as an opportunity to sow seeds of revelation. As Lakoff and Johnson reiterate, 'truth' is not the primary issue in the poetry/science of metaphor, but rather 'the perceptions and inferences that follow from it and the actions that are sanctioned by it'.⁵⁴³

Metaphors of mind that evoke borders, possessions, wires, and data do little to nourish empathy and interconnection. In McGilchrist's model, these narratives embody a characteristically left-hemispheric approach to the concept, reflecting 'a general trend, throughout the last hundred years or so, towards the ever greater repudiation of our embodied being, in favour of an abstracted, cerebralised, machine-

⁵⁴² Huxley, *Island* MS, box 59, fol. 2, p. 58.

⁵⁴³ Lakoff and Johnson, p. 158.

like version of ourselves'.⁵⁴⁴ Psychedelics have the potential to alleviate the disconnection that we pathologise through ever-growing categories of mental afflictions—a capacity that will be increasingly undermined without a deeper appreciation of priming and the material inseparability of metaphors and experience.

The hourglass that I propose is a way of reframing: Palanese pedagogies; the interplay between psychedelics and hypnosis; and the concept of 'mind' more generally. However, this is only one of an infinitude of metaphors that may be useful for integrating more flexible ways of thinking and being—of reinstating the participatory elements of perception that have been neglected by cultures for whom categories are universal and the mind is isolated recorder of experience. As Archera repeats at the end of each recipe—'it works if you work'. Her hypnotic techniques expose the malleability of memory, emphasise the materiality of language, and encourage the act of RE-membering, all of which are enervated if we unwittingly presume that the mind is a sealable container.

In short, metaphors matter. Our default metaphors *are* our default perspectives, woven into the fabric of every narrative form. With time and repetition, they concretise. They become the comfortable path on which we walk, their contours become obscured by the languor of habit. The brain 'reset', along with the mind as a storehouse of memories, implicitly fortify the presiding metaphors that draw boundaries—that distinguish between container and contained, that abstract categories from their exemplars. Our existence on this planet will be short-lived if these myths of separation continue to be mistaken for certitudes.

Personal, cultural, and environmental transformation means diversifying the metaphors on which our experiences and actions are grounded. *Target* and *Island* unveil the power of polyphasia in such a process; they show how alternative states of consciousness can help to integrate alternative metaphors, and, reciprocally, how alternative metaphors can help to integrate alternative states of consciousness. Once again, this is a call to uncertainty—a form of resisting a reality asunder, and building knowledge systems where we are not tethered by eternal 'truths', but vitalised by the creative kindling of earthly enigmas.

⁵⁴⁴ McGilchrist, *The Master*, p. 120

CHAPTER 6: SPIRIT MATTERS

Men learn only what their passions and their metaphysical prejudices allow them to learn—Huxley.⁵⁴⁵

Belief is the death of intelligence—Robert Anton Wilson.⁵⁴⁶

6.1: OPENING

During the first phase of Will's *moksha* experience he is blissfully lost in a landscape painting on the wall—reveling in its absence of humans and basking in being 'engulfed in God' (p. 335).

"Where are you now?" Susila asked.

Without turning his head in her direction, Will answered, "In heaven, I suppose," and pointed at the landscape.

"In heaven—still? When are you going to make a landing down here?" (p. 335)

An unwelcome interruption from the animal kingdom (the sight of one of Tom Krishna's pet lizards) supplants Will's distraught ecstasy with 'the actuality of hell' (p. 337). With this, Huxley condenses his own psychedelic trajectory; he dramatises the realisation that the rapture of his first mescaline experience had been a dualistic withdrawal—that he had felt 'cut off from the human world'.⁵⁴⁷ The Palanese, as discussed, complete their *moksha* initiation after a long education in ecological and embodied practices, which primes them with a more terrestrial understanding of the divine. The concept of divinity in the material world is not intuitive to Will, whose associations with spirituality are corrupted from formative experiences with his aloof Anglican mother, for whom piety was merely a means of escape. However, *Island's* salient spiritual juxtaposition is not established through Will, but through Pala's ostentatious, 'psychic as hell' Queen Mother (p. 56).

⁵⁴⁵ Huxley, 'Voluntary Ignorance', p. 47.

⁵⁴⁶ Robert Anton Wilson, *Cosmic Trigger: The Final Secret of the Illuminati* (Las Vegas: New Falcon Publications, 2008), p. ii.

⁵⁴⁷ Huxley and Osmond, p. 217.

It is worth clarifying that psi and psychedelics do share an entangled history. As David Luke outlines, many of the people ‘most readily associated with the discovery and popularisation of psychedelics also witnessed and explored both the transpersonal and the parapsychological dimensions that these substances induced, such as Albert Hofmann, Humphrey Osmond, John Smythies, Aldous Huxley, Gordon Wasson, Timothy Leary, Ken Kesey...[and the list goes on]’.⁵⁴⁸ However, the resurgence of psychedelic parapsychology is beset with inveterate obstacles, to which Huxley’s commentaries remain salient.

This chapter uses Huxley’s satirical portrayal of psychics to expose the contours and consequences of dichotomising matter and spirit. Psychological parodies were central to Huxley’s final decade of work, progressively elucidating how systemic injustices can be veiled by eccentric façades—his satire serves as a guide for clearing the smokescreen. Through the apposition of the judicious Palanese and their unscrupulous monarchy, *Island* charts the philosophical prerequisites of cultural transformation.

Western philosophical and linguistic patterns normalise and impose a distance between mind and matter. For example, most people imbricated within a Western paradigm have a shared understanding of the concept of a person’s ‘essence’ to be something intangible—something beyond the material world.⁵⁴⁹ Likewise, although it is widely accepted that thoughts have corporeal consequences, the prototypical definition of ‘healthy’ remains skewed towards an absence of ‘physical’ symptoms. The magnitude of this myth can no longer be overlooked. In the most illustrious TED talk of all time (with over seventy million views), Ken Robinson, one of the most celebrated educators of the twenty-first century, describes how ‘as children grow up, we start to educate them progressively from the waist up. And then we focus on their heads. And slightly to one side’, then proceeds to parody the Western academics who ‘look upon their body as a form of transport for their heads [...] a way of getting their head to meetings’.⁵⁵⁰

In Western schooling, disembodiment is implicitly endorsed through disciplinary hierarchies; in most educational institutions, an aptitude for science is generally held in higher esteem than an aptitude for dance. Likewise, academic education is typically exalted beyond vocational education—on some level,

⁵⁴⁸ David Luke, ‘Psychoactive Substances and Paranormal Phenomena: A Comprehensive Review’, *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 31.1 (2012), 97-156 (p. 97).

⁵⁴⁹ Abram, *Sensuous*, p. 45.

⁵⁵⁰ Ken Robinson, *Do Schools Kill Creativity?*, TED, February 2006, <https://www.ted.com/talks/sir_ken_robinson_do_schools_kill_creativity> [accessed 29 March 2021].

‘abstraction’ is analogous to ‘sophistication’. Robinson underscores the creative fallout from this fiction, but his observations are equally applicable to wellness and ecology. To refrain Chapter 2, the division of ‘mind’ and ‘body’ has been foundational to the assumption that a ‘mental’ mastery of logic and reason is the sign of a superior species—an elevation that brings humans closer to the heavens ‘above’.

Scientific methods, in combination with illusions of grandeur, have sanctioned and expedited the manipulation of natural resources and the desecration of the material world; the ‘divine’ is left eternally unscathed on the condition that it is situated beyond, or ‘above’, the realm of matter.⁵⁵¹ This is unsustainable. However, reshaping these dualistic entrenchments entails recognising their many manifestations and modes of camouflage. In terms of metaphysical excavation and exposure, Huxley marks the ‘paranormal’ as a priority; his psychic caricatures reveal the degree to which the West has exiled spirit from matter, and why this is a matter of urgency.

It is important that Huxley’s parodies are not misinterpreted as a general mockery of mediums, parapsychology, or any related paranormal study. The subtlety of Huxley’s psychical satire has scarcely been acknowledged by scholars, perhaps due to a tension between the (so-called) supernatural and academic orthodoxy. With the exceptions of Dunaway and Sawyer, Poller summarises how the general scholarly attitude towards Huxley’s paranormal proclivities has been ‘squeamish’.⁵⁵² Indeed, even Bedford’s biography presents his parapsychological investigations as gatherings that he ‘was getting addicted to’.⁵⁵³ Poller has commendably addressed this trivialisation, providing a comprehensive historical overview of Huxley’s contact with J.B. Rhine (the founder of parapsychology), his first seances, and his hypotheses on telepathy.⁵⁵⁴ However, Poller also suggests that, for Huxley, ‘psychics and spirit mediums were the equivalent of yogis who got distracted by the *siddhis* and failed to push ahead to full enlightenment’.⁵⁵⁵ This comment is situated within a discussion of how Huxley was misappropriated by various institutions that were exploring human ‘progress’ or ‘evolution’. However, perhaps unwittingly, it understates the sophistication of Huxley’s cultural commentary. Although Poller’s corollary coheres with Vijaya’s rejection of telepathy and clairvoyance as ‘amusing pre-mystical stuff’ and the puerile personality of Pala’s Rani, over the course of this

⁵⁵¹ Lent, pp. 440-41.

⁵⁵² Jake Poller, ‘Beyond the Subliminal Mind: Psychical Research in the Work of Aldous Huxley’, *Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism*, 15 (2015), 247-66 (p. 248).

⁵⁵³ Bedford, *Vol. II*, p. 199.

⁵⁵⁴ Poller, *Alternative Spirituality*, pp. 75-77.

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 271.

chapter I will explain why it is more useful to read Huxley's abhorrent psychic caricatures as conduits for exposing the noxious by-products of undiluted dualism (p. 168).

My discussion is predominantly based on the Rani, but I will also incorporate material from *Below the Equator* (1949-50), a screenplay that Huxley wrote in collaboration with Christopher Isherwood, and 'Voices' (1955), a short story published by *Atlantic Monthly*—two texts that have received little scholarly attention. Furthermore, in terms of wider literary commentaries, this chapter will support Jerome Meckier's defence of how 'satirist and sage' continue to collaborate in Huxley's final publications—an objection to the consensus that his spiritual interests compromised his satirical aptitude.⁵⁵⁶

I frame Huxley's psychical satire as a teaching that is pertinent not only to psychedelic research, but also to wider questions of sustainability. The latter is explored in Jack Hunter's essay collection, *Greening the Paranormal: Exploring the Ecology of Extraordinary Experience* (2019), which makes a strong case for how 'the ontological assumptions underlying the rejection of the so-called paranormal by mainstream materialist science and culture are precisely the same as those that underlie the ecological crisis and our society's fractured relationship with the Earth'.⁵⁵⁷ Citing data from The Chapman University Survey of American Fears in 2018, Hunter determines that approximately seventy-five per cent of the US population holds some form of paranormal belief, while only fifty-three per cent report any fear of climate change.⁵⁵⁸ Hunter frames this as an opportunity—as a rhetorical-ontological bridge to a more serious consideration of alternative philosophical models; 'approaches emerging from the study of (and engagement with) the supernatural may ultimately help us to reconnect with the natural, and in doing so develop innovative approaches to confronting the eco-crisis'.⁵⁵⁹

This topic is potentially convoluted by its semantic vagueries; terms like 'paranormal', 'supernatural', 'psychical', 'transpersonal', and other related nominatives permit a vast array of interpretations and associations. 'Anomalous' is becoming more customary in parapsychological studies for its lack of sensationalised overtones.⁵⁶⁰ This, in itself, is a fruitful area of sociolinguistic

⁵⁵⁶ Jerome Meckier, 'Moksha Medicine', *Studies in the Novel*, 35.1 (2003), 44-67 (p. 55).

⁵⁵⁷ Jack Hunter, *Greening the Paranormal* (Derby: August Night Press, 2019), Kindle edition, p. 28.

⁵⁵⁸ Hunter, pp. 32-33.

⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁵⁶⁰ David Luke, 'Anomalous Psychedelic Experiences: At the Neurochemical Juncture of the Humanistic and the Parapsychological', *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 2020, 1-41 (p. 2).

speculation that (unfortunately) falls beyond the scope of the chapter.⁵⁶¹ On this occasion, my semantic priorities are stylistic—for the purpose of continuity I have elected to retain Huxley’s chosen vocabulary. I use terms such as supernatural and psychical interchangeably, to refer to experiences that are generally deemed to diverge from ‘ordinary’ awareness, or events that are deemed to contravene mainstream Western assumptions about the human senses and the material world.⁵⁶² I acknowledge that we have landed in a minefield of rhetorical ambiguity, but I endeavour to reveal its fertility. For the sake of streamlining, I have also elected to centralise Huxley’s representations of ‘entity encounters’ or ‘spirit communication’—*interactive* paranormal experiences—rather than the spiritual ‘oneness’ that is more notoriously associated with his psychedelic explorations.

At first glance, there appears to be a dissonance between Huxley’s personal interest in the paranormal and his perpetual psychical parodies. I begin the chapter with a return to the Huxleys’ Tuesday night gatherings, briefly introducing two of their peers, Sophia Williams—a psychic from Chicago, and Eileen Garrett—one of the most renowned mediums and parapsychologists of the twentieth century. Of this duo, I spotlight Garrett for several reasons: her longstanding personal friendship with the Huxleys; her connection with Maria; her radical agnosticism; and her (misleading) reputation as the inspiration for *Island*’s Rani. I will trace the development of the Rani through several of Huxley’s earlier psychic characters and their parallels with Helena Blavatsky, the renowned occultist who co-founded the Theosophical Society in 1875. The objective here is not to insist on more ‘accurate’ character analyses of the Rani, but to enter the chrysalis in which Huxley’s spiritual satire evolved—from shrewd cultural commentary to sophisticated synecdoche for the fractures between language, philosophy, and perception. Finally, I read the Rani’s ‘Crusade of the Spirit’ and the colonisation of Pala as a cautionary tale of how even the most extraordinary experiences can be configured to conform with prevailing paradigms. Psychedelics are no exception. Countering corporate and cultural assimilation calls for philosophical vigilance.

⁵⁶¹ Some researchers reject terms like ‘paranormal’ outright, suggesting that they semantically reinforce otherness in phenomena that ought to be considered ‘normal’, albeit less frequently encountered (Hunter, p. 141). Sheldrake similarly suggests that ‘paranormal’ experiences are more common than people tend to acknowledge, and the parameters of ‘normal’ are set by limited materialist assumptions (*Delusion*, p. 223).

⁵⁶² Nicola J. Holt and others, *Anomalistic Psychology* (London: Macmillan Education UK, 2012), p. 2.

6.2: PSYCHICAL CONTACTS

6.2.1: SOPHIA WILLIAMS

As introduced in the previous chapter, the Huxleys' Tuesday evening sessions during the 1950s were themed on the marginal; explorations and expositions with hypnotists, psychics, diviners, alternative healers—general advocates of the unorthodox. Among the flux of guests was Sophia Williams, a trance medium from Chicago, whose attendance at one of the gatherings coincided with Osmond's first visit to the Huxleys. On this particular evening, they witnessed Williams emit 'voices' during a séance, which has been acknowledged as the inspiration behind Huxley's short story of the same title, a topic to which I return in 6.3.⁵⁶³ However, as a historical note, the demonstration left a profound impression on Osmond, whose praise for Williams recurred for several years in his correspondence with Huxley.⁵⁶⁴

Although little has been published on her life, a copy of Williams' book *You Are Psychic* (1946) has been preserved by The International Association for the Preservation of Spiritualist and Occult Periodicals. Williams describes it as an instructive artifact of resistance, motivated by the ever-growing need to identify and oppose 'an extremely lucrative 'racket' participated in by fortune-tellers of numerous kinds who prey upon a grief stricken but misguided clientele'.⁵⁶⁵ She felt that fraudulent psychics were capitalising on the existential distress of an increasingly secular society. Williams proclaims that psychic ability is simply an extension of one's 'normal' sensory capacities. As such, it can be cultivated (to a greater or lesser degree) by anybody with the inclination and the determination.

The Huxleys' Tuesday sessions may have even been motivated by Williams, who emphasises that an effective way to develop one's intuition is to 'form a small group of interested people, say from two to ten people, who will spend one evening

⁵⁶³ Poller, *Alternative Spirituality*, p. 85.

⁵⁶⁴ Huxley and Osmond, pp. 130, 202, 446.

The event was an example of what Williams terms 'physical manifestation', which is where voices are heard collectively and assumed to come from an external source (i.e., not from the medium). Although Osmond mentions that the demonstration was recorded on Gray Audograph, I have been unable to locate the recording or any further written accounts of this event (p. 446). However, the writer Maurice Zolotow recounts a similar example of 'physical manifestation' with Williams: 'And then we heard it! ... a timid etheric voice in the air. It seemed to be speaking about two feet above Mrs Williams' head. It sounded like the faint whistling rhythmic noise of a cricket'. Maurice Zolotow, 'I Witness Phenomena in Bright Light', in Sophia Williams, *You Are Psychic* (Hollywood: Murray & Gee, 1946), p. 16.

⁵⁶⁵ Sophia Williams, *You Are Psychic* (Hollywood: Murray & Gee, 1946), p. i.

a week [...] in an experimental circle'.⁵⁶⁶ While this is certainly not an original model in psychical research, she stresses that any such practice should not become a pursuit of paranormal 'proof', (like the Palanese, Williams' intention is to share perceptual practices that stimulate one's humanitarian and ecological sensibilities), in her own words; 'By such development our relationship to the whole of humanity becomes greatly defined'.⁵⁶⁷

6.2.2: EILEEN GARRETT (& THE ART OF DYING)

Another attendee of the Tuesday gatherings was Eileen Garrett, a trance medium whom Huxley met while she was running a tearoom in Hampstead, popular with the London literati in the years following World War I.⁵⁶⁸ This friendship deepened during the 1950s when the Huxleys (including Matthew and Francis—their son and nephew, respectively) became more interested in parapsychology. In his personal diary, Huxley describes her as '[t]he medium who is profoundly sceptical about mediumship, suspicious of all occultists, spiritualists & pretenders to spirituality'.⁵⁶⁹ Like Huxley, Garrett also, to a degree, advocated empirical research. She viewed parapsychology as 'the scientific study of the human personality beyond the threshold of what man calls his conscious mind', with the caveat that this would inevitably expose the limitations of scientific orthodoxy.⁵⁷⁰ As the Palanese curriculum exemplifies, empirical methodologies ought to co-exist with an ongoing critique of their ontological assumptions; Garrett's approach to psychical research encapsulates one of Pala's principal proverbs: 'Give us this day our daily Faith, but deliver us, dear God, from Belief' (p. 101). Later discussion will expand on this resonance. First, for historical and literary orientation, it will be useful to introduce Garrett's connection with Pala's 'art of dying', or, as Susila explains, how they help one another to 'go on practising the art of living even while they're dying' (pp. 294-95).

Towards the end of the novel, we see Dr Robert acting as a guide for his wife Lakshmi; 'Let go of this poor old body. You don't need it anymore. Let it fall away from you. Leave it lying here like a pile of worn-out clothes' (p. 321). During Maria's final days in February 1955, Huxley offered similar pacification—'I would suggest that she was feeling, and would continue to feel, comfortable, free from pain

⁵⁶⁶ Williams, p. 36.

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁵⁶⁸ Dunaway, *Hollywood*, loc. 5707.

⁵⁶⁹ Huxley, *Diary*, workbook 1961, 24 June 1961. Huxley papers, box 50, fol. 1.

⁵⁷⁰ Eileen Garrett, *Adventures in the Supernormal* (New York: Helix Press, 2002), p. 173.

and nausea, desirous of taking water'.⁵⁷¹ He read passages to her from *The Bardo Thodol (The Tibetan Book of the Dead)* and Meister Eckhart, and, when it was time, encouraged her to 'let go, to forget the body, to leave it lying here like a bundle of old clothes'.⁵⁷²

Following this event, Garrett received an extraordinary psychic message. Huxley's account of this has been reproduced and cited in numerous sources.⁵⁷³ Garrett's version, however, is not only more detailed, but also conveys the intimacy of her friendship with Maria, a salient factor in her own understanding of psychic phenomena.

[Maria] and I had a special working relationship on a deep subconscious level. After she became ill, she depended on me to "know" when the time would come for us to have our last meeting. [...] One night I dreamed that the threads of Maria's life were shortening. I called her in Paris. Against her doctor's advice, she came to me for a last visit, to hold talks and make our farewells. It was a heart-breaking time. But at one point, when I asked what would happen to Aldous, she replied with surprising nonchalance: "It won't be too long before he joins me...time enough for me to strengthen myself for the day of his 'homecoming'."

On the day Maria died, I had attended a play on Broadway. As I got into my automobile to drive away, I felt a warm presence in the car and heard a voice say: "It's Maria. I'm safely over and have seen Pepe". (Pepe was a friend of the Huxleys whom I had once met, but I did not know he had died).

For the next three days I was very much aware of Maria's presence. Petite and thoughtful, she told me she wanted Aldous to know that she had heard him reading aloud from the Bardo, and that he had talked of their happy days in Italy and at "Victorville". She impressed on me that he must be told how she had been helped over by his loving and understanding during the unconscious period preceding her death.⁵⁷⁴

In a letter to Osmond, Huxley expresses his conviction that this demonstrates 'at the least a great deal of very far ranging ESP – so far ranging that the survival [of

⁵⁷¹ *Letters of Aldous Huxley*, p. 749.

⁵⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 736.

⁵⁷³ Huxley and Osmond, p. 465; Bedford, *Vol. II*, p. 195; Poller, *Alternative Spirituality*, p. 84.

⁵⁷⁴ Eileen Garrett, *Many Voices: The Autobiography of a Medium* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1968), pp. 171-72.

consciousness] hypothesis seems simpler'.⁵⁷⁵ Aside from its reproduction in *Island*, this experience was likely a key factor in Huxley's proposal that Timothy Leary, Ralph Metzner and Richard Alpert ought to write a psychedelic guidebook based on *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*—this became *The Psychedelic Experience* (1964), one of the most influential books in the psychedelic canon.

I have relayed the details here, however, in order to establish the personal and emotional context of Huxley's satirical treatment of psychics. He had a deep respect for Garrett, a sincere interest in parapsychology, and a genuine faith in some form of consciousness survival, yet his fictional portrayal of mediums is almost entirely unforgiving. However, beneath the surface of this apparent contradiction is a wealth of insights regarding the maladies of Western monophasia. In the following section I explore this dissonance; along with how Huxley sensed that mainstream society was too immature to integrate psychical practices into its prevailing paradigms.

6.3: THEOSOPHICAL SATIRE

6.3.1: THE CHOSEN ONES

In 1951 Garrett founded The Parapsychology Foundation, a non-profit organisation that continues to support the scientific study of the paranormal, and that hosted an international symposium for over four decades.⁵⁷⁶ In Allene Symons' *Aldous Huxley's Hands: Quest for Perception and the Origin and Return of Psychedelic Science* (2015), she describes a conversation with John Smythies, in which he recalls 'how Huxley's forthcoming novel *Island* was the talk of Garrett's parapsychology conference that summer of 1961 [...] the word spread that their hostess was the model for the outsized oracular character Huxley called the Rani'.⁵⁷⁷ But, he clarifies, Garrett 'didn't mind' her fictionalisation as a 'flamboyant spiritual leader'.⁵⁷⁸

That same summer, Osmond was considering a year of leave from the psychiatry circuit in order to write Garrett's biography. 'Do you think I write well enough to convey the richness, strangeness and oddness of Eileen's shimmering

⁵⁷⁵ Huxley and Osmond, p. 199.

⁵⁷⁶ Carlos S. Alvarado and others, 'Fifty Years of Supporting Parapsychology: The Parapsychology Foundation (1951-2001)', *International Journal of Parapsychology*, 12.2 (2001), 1-26.

⁵⁷⁷ Symons, p. 206.

⁵⁷⁸ *Ibid.*.

personae?', he asked Huxley in a letter, she who 'misleads the unwary. Sentimental but shrewd, cunning but kind, unscrupulous but usually gentle, passionate but remarkably controlled, sensuous yet abstinent, hasty but patient, luxurious yet simple, credulous yet immensely sharp, almost cynical'.⁵⁷⁹ Huxley, who was in the final months of writing *Island*, endorses the idea in his response, offering advice based on his experience of writing *The Devils of Loudun* a decade earlier—that is, he does not mention having attempted any such task with the character of the Rani. Indeed, if one were to remove all the positives, paradoxes, and poetry from Osmond's outline of Garrett then the residue would constitute a vivid vignette of Pala's Queen Mother. However, this particular association is misleading, as it not only misrepresents Huxley's respect for Garrett, but also overlooks the impetus behind his satire.

In her first dialogue with Will, the Rani reveals that she was naturally psychic since birth, but developed her abilities while she was living in Switzerland with a geology professor and his wife Mme Buloz, a 'newly-converted and intensely ardent Theosophist' (p. 58). As observed elsewhere, *Island*'s Rani is predominantly modelled on H. P. Blavatsky.⁵⁸⁰ Like Blavatsky, Buloz was communicating with 'Koot Hoomi', one of Theosophy's 'Ascended Masters'—a group of highly evolved spiritual beings who are said to bestow wisdom on select individuals. As Poller highlights, the Rani 'quickly proved to be an adept, and, in a manner reminiscent of the young [Jiddu] Krishnamurti and H.P. Blavatsky, began to take instruction from the Master'.⁵⁸¹

This parody is even more transparent in the novel's manuscript, where Huxley directly cites his source—while indulging one of the Rani's self-aggrandising soliloquys, Will narrates himself as 'someone who couldn't swallow Blavatsky'.⁵⁸² Furthermore, he immediately laments the force of conditioning; 'What I say three times is true; what I say thirty thousand times is dogma; and when dogma gets into the fancy, there's a presence'.⁵⁸³ Like the Rani, Will was born, raised, and educated in the West, and therefore lacks the Palanese level of resistance to hidden beliefs, and he continues to reflect on how these convictions establish presences which are more than just figments of the imagination—as he concedes, the Rani's

⁵⁷⁹ Huxley and Osmond, p. 480.

⁵⁸⁰ Jerome Meckier, 'Enemies of Utopia: Young Krishnamurti and Madame Blavatsky', *Aldous Huxley Annual*, 10/11 (2011), 299-316; Poller, *Alternative Spirituality*, p. 254 (see also pp. 179-96 for a lively historical introduction to the Theosophical Society).

⁵⁸¹ Poller, *Alternative Spirituality*, p. 254.

⁵⁸² Huxley, *Island* MS, box 59, fol. 1, p. 103.

⁵⁸³ *Ibid.*.

Master was ‘just as real and unescapable as his own uninvited obsessions’.⁵⁸⁴ None of the Palanese characters explicitly take issue with, or even question the plausibility of the Rani’s entity encounters. The point of contention is their tyrannical application—the Rani’s ‘World-Wide Crusade of the Spirit’, a movement like ‘Early Christianity’ that she and Murugan believed would ‘Save the World’ (pp. 50, 59). The dynamics of this delusion were sown at the onset of the Rani’s exposure to these ideas.

Mme Buloz, unable to keep her secret, inducted the Rani into a course of instruction with her own Ascended Master, but ‘[i]n a very short time Koot Hoomi was bestowing greater favours upon the novice than upon her teacher’ (p. 58). She continues:

“Here’s one example of what He’s done for me,” the Rani went on. “Eight years ago—to be exact, on the twenty-third of November 1953—the Master came to me in my morning Meditation. Came in Person, came in Glory. ‘A great Crusade is to be launched,’ He said, ‘a World-Movement to save Humanity from self-destruction. And you, my child, are the Appointed Instrument’.” (p. 59)

Despite its unconventional veneer, the Rani is reproducing a tale of the ‘Chosen One’, with herself at the centre. Poller also describes how Charles Leadbeater, one of Theosophy’s key figures, was initially only able to contact Master Koot Hoomi with the help of Blavatsky. In her absence, the Master began to appear in person and helped Leadbeater to cultivate his latent clairvoyant powers, much to his teacher’s chagrin.⁵⁸⁵

Cultural historian Richard Tarnas offers a poignant portrayal of how ‘the West’s belief in itself as the most historically significant and favored culture echoes the Judaeo-Christian theme of the Chosen People’, and considers the how this self-aggrandising assumption underwrites social hierarchies, colonisation and ecological exploitation.⁵⁸⁶ The Palanese do not permit this trope to prosper among themselves. As discussed, they begin their science education with ecology, and symbiosis in nature serves as their ethical foundation; as the Principal explains, ‘[t]here are no Chosen People in nature, no Holy Lands, no Unique Historical Revelations. Conservation-morality gives nobody an excuse for feeling superior, or claiming special privileges’ (p. 261).

⁵⁸⁴ Huxley, *Island* MS, box 59, fol. 1, p. 103.

⁵⁸⁵ Poller, *Alternative Spirituality*, p. 181.

⁵⁸⁶ Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the Ideas That Have Shaped Our World View* (London: Pimlico, 2010), Kindle edition, p. 321.

Privilege runs counter to community. In the Rani's case, psychic experiences further augment her sense of entitlement. Her son Murugan, whom she has 'protected' from Palanese education and cultural practices, follows his mother's example and attempts to boast that she has completed the 'Fourth Initiation' (p. 57). This refers to a Theosophist ideology, developed by Leadbeater and Alice Bailey, that recognises ten levels of spiritual advancement—after the fifth initiation one qualifies as an 'Ascended Master'. This parody may have also been prompted by Williams, who had long been scrutinising the premise of 'higher' and 'lower' planes.

I have read many books and heard numerous people say that they cannot come in contact with persons long gone because these persons have progressed to the fourth or seventh or tenth plane, as the case may be, and are thus unable to come back. Think how illogical such a statement is. Planes are not places; *they are planes of mental and spiritual development*. A kindergarten student is on a different mental plane than is a college graduate, yet they may sit together in the same room and speak to one another.⁵⁸⁷

There is a perilous elitism to the metaphor that spiritual 'planes' are hierarchically spatialised and therefore accessible only to 'Chosen' individuals. It unleashes an unjust social paradigm upon the most mysterious ontologies of human existence; the precarious and ambiguities of life and death, matter, and spirit, become tempered by the familiar categorical frameworks of Western social structures. Huxley is not satirising the Rani's claims to psychical experiences per se, but the frameworks from which they arise.

6.3.2: CORRUPTION & BELOW THE EQUATOR

The Rani's character ripened through Huxley's recurrent attention to the intersection between corruption and spiritual over-declaration. A milder prototype is sketched in Huxley and Isherwood's screenplay *Below the Equator*. Although this was never produced or published, a full draft is held at UCLA. Akin to *Island's* expatriated journalist who gets embroiled within an oil-fuelled invasion, the story follows Moira Tarn, a twenty-two-year-old amateur reporter. Moira is in the Andes with her father who is investigating cases of tuberculosis in the tin mines, and her uncle, the editor of *Middle Western* newspaper, has agreed to print any story from the trip that satisfies

⁵⁸⁷ Williams, p. 58.

his publishing standards.⁵⁸⁸ As a further point of intertextuality, *Island's* Lord Aldehyde (the Chairman of the Board for South-East Asia Petroleum and owner of the newspaper that employs Will) also has a side business in copper mining.

During her visit to an Inca ruin, Moira meets Elaine Fitzherbert, a bombastic quasi-mystical pop writer in her early forties, who immediately launches into a tale about her recent psychic awakening:

‘Well --- I was down at that big museum in the Capital --- just strolling around like any other tourist --- and, suddenly, in one of the cases, I saw a little knife, made of --- obsidian, I think they call it. And then ---’ The woman paused dramatically: ‘I fainted dead away.’

‘What made you do that?’

‘Because I recognised it! It was the very same knife they cut my throat with, after the Emperor died!’

‘How awful!’

‘Oh, I didn’t really mind, at the time, I remember. You see it was quite customary. Naturally, I had to accompany my husband to the underworld’.⁵⁸⁹

Anticipating Pala’s Queen mother, Elaine declares that she was an Inca princess in this particular incarnation.⁵⁹⁰ Furthermore, like the Rani—the ‘Appointed Instrument’ of the ‘World-Wide Crusade of the Spirit’—Elaine pronounces herself as ‘merely the instrument’ of something from the ‘Beyond’.⁵⁹¹ She asserts that the information she received was dictated by the ‘High Priest himself’, however, instead of the despotic spiritual mission that the Rani pursues, she opts to channel this into a book.

In his biography of Huxley, Nicholas Murray suggests that Isherwood was the main hand in this work, and cites a letter that Isherwood sent to Gerald Heard in 1950 in which he names Garrett as one of the story’s personalities.⁵⁹² Although Elaine is more of a sympathetic character than the Rani, and the specific contributions of each author remain unclear, this comparison is misrepresentative. Garrett was sceptical and pragmatic, never entirely convinced that the entities with whom she communicated existed independently.

Elaine’s ‘automatic writing’, for instance, is likely a reference to Blavatsky,

⁵⁸⁸ Aldous Huxley and Christopher Isherwood, *Below the Equator*, box 56, fol. 6, pp. 1-2.

⁵⁸⁹ Huxley and Isherwood, p. 20. I have retained the formatting of the script.

⁵⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁵⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁵⁹² Nicholas Murray, *Aldous Huxley: An English Intellectual* (New York: Hachette Digital, 2009), Kindle edition, p. 381.

whose esoteric philosophy book, *Isis Unveiled* (1877), was allegedly dictated to her by the Ascended Masters. Krishnamurti provides a plausible incentive for this topic of satire—indeed, both Archera and Alan Watts felt that Huxley was more influenced by Krishnamurti than any other ‘religious’ figure.⁵⁹³ In addition, Radha Sloss, who grew up with Krishnamurti, recalls how he was especially critical about Theosophy in Huxley’s presence; ‘[w]hen Aldous Huxley came into our life, he maintained that Blavatsky was a complete charlatan’.⁵⁹⁴

To briefly contextualise this, Krishnamurti was ‘discovered’ in Madras as a young teenager, where Koot Hoomi communicated to Leadbeater that the youngster would be the next ‘World Teacher’.⁵⁹⁵ Hoomi/Leadbeater believed that this was the body, or ‘vehicle’ in whom Lord Maitreya (another advanced spiritual master) would manifest. During Krishnamurti’s training he was directed to make ‘nightly astral journeys to the Master Kuthumi’s house in the Himalayas for instruction’ and would spend the following mornings ‘painstakingly recording these meetings in notes that would become his first book, *At the Feet of the Master* (1910)’.⁵⁹⁶ However, as Sloss notes, Krishnamurti spoke little English at the time and some sentences were ‘remarkably similar to those in one of Leadbeater’s own books about to go to press’.⁵⁹⁷

Elaine similarly yearns for publicity. She had been ‘simply bursting to tell someone’ about her experience and implores Moira to photograph her doing a sun-worship ritual.⁵⁹⁸ This ostentatious need for validation is amplified in the Rani, who desires nothing short of global theocracy—a ‘World Reconstruction’ funded by pillaging Pala’s oil reserves with Lord Aldehyde (p. 50). Prior to his arrival in Pala, Will had been attending Aldehyde’s weekly seances, through which he would obtain advice about stocks and investments; ‘Buy Australian cement; don’t be alarmed by the fall in Breakfast Foods; unload forty per cent of your rubber shares and invest the money in IBM and Westinghouse (p. 68). The Rani calls him a ‘Beginner’ for centralising these affairs and asserts that ‘economics and politics are not [her] strong point’, before revealing that the ‘Little Voice’ of her Master also talks ‘distinctly’ about South-East Asia Petroleum (pp. 64, 68). Her ‘Crusade of the Spirit’ is inseparable from Aldehyde’s avarice—the lens through which she is first introduced:

⁵⁹³ Alan Watts, *Alan Watts – Conversation with Laura Huxley*, YouTube, 3 June 2011, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zM8YaiYxBRk>> [accessed 23 September 2021].

⁵⁹⁴ Sloss, pp. 27, 31.

⁵⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁵⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 57-58.

⁵⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁵⁹⁸ Huxley and Isherwood, pp. 19, 21.

She reminded [Will] in a curious way of Joe Aldehyde. Joe was one of those happy tycoons who feel no qualms, but rejoice without inhibition in their money and in all that their money will buy in the way of influence and power. And here—albeit clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful—was another of Joe Aldehyde’s breed: a female tycoon who had cornered the market, not in soya beans or copper, but in Pure Spirituality and the Ascended Masters, and was now happily rubbing her hands over the exploit (p. 59).

The Rani’s puritanical, abstracted religious beliefs are succeeded by her son’s obsession with industrialisation—an allegory of the history of the West. Although their monarchical authority is curtailed by Palanese constitution, their sense of superiority remains unscathed, and these delusions of grandeur are at the foundation of Pala’s requisition. In the progression from Elaine to the Rani, spiritualised self-absorption is a precursor to pure corruption. I resist further analysis for now as my main objective for outlining this is to introduce the notion that systemic reform requires attending to all iterations of hierarchy.

6.3.3: DOWNWARD DOGMA

In *Island*’s manuscript, the Rani is more forthcoming about her industrial enterprises:

‘[She] began to talk about oil --- to talk about it, for an Initiate whose strong point was not economics, in a remarkably business-like and well-informed way. The advantages and disadvantages. Shallow wells, proximity to the coast’.⁵⁹⁹

By omitting this from the published version, Huxley places more emphasis on her devotion to Koot Hoomi, and the dangers of unadulterated compliance. For Huxley, mitigating dogmas was a prerequisite to a better world—another imperative that was fortified by his friendship with Krishnmurti, whose wholesale rejection of gurus epitomises the main pillars of Palanese pedagogy. After two decades of Theosophical initiation and indoctrination, Krishnamurti left the society and claimed no memory of his early years with them. Although Sloss doubts the plausibility of this amnesia, she highlights its role in his interpretation of freedom; ‘In order for the mind to be liberated, there can be no psychological memory of all the sticky miseries that society imposes on those who seek respectability’.⁶⁰⁰

⁵⁹⁹ Huxley, *Island* MS, box 59, fol. 1, p. 110.

⁶⁰⁰ Sloss, p. 217.

Despite his controversial renouncement of Theosophy, Krishnamurti did not retract his nomination as a world teacher, and he spent his life preaching about consciousness, freedom, and the dangers of dogma.⁶⁰¹ In Huxley's personal copy of Krishnamurti's *Commentaries on Living* (1956) he has highlighted several passages regarding the latter:

The very function of idea is to separate people. Belief, religious or political sets man against man [...] You murder and liquidate each other, all for a better world. Neither of you is interested in a better world, but shaping the world according to your idea.⁶⁰²

The Rani is a prime example of this despotism, however, more subtly, Krishnamurti illuminates the pedagogical value of the island's invasion; Pala could not possess the means to maintain its autonomy without undermining its foundational immunity to dogma. As Dr Robert clarifies, 'we have no established church, and our religion stresses immediate experience and deplores belief in unverifiable dogmas and the emotions which that belief inspires' (p. 179). Pala is a presentation of the principle that paradigms should not be enforced. Palanese ways of being and knowing are appropriate for their context—a tropical island that is not overpopulated. Despite the prevailing view that the outside world has become little more than conglomerate of organised insanity, the Palanese have no interest in cultural exportation.

One of Huxley's fomentations was the hubris and intransigence of Western science—as Mr Menon explains to Will, '[t]he old eternal verities are merely a high degree of likeliness; the immutable laws of nature are just statistical averages' (p. 258). Sheldrake has written extensively on the tendency for Western scientists to 'take it for granted that the laws of nature are fixed', and how this assumption mirrors the myth of 'God as a kind of cosmic emperor'—nature's 'habits', he suggests, is a concept that preserves the great ontological mystery.⁶⁰³ *Moksha* helps the Palanese to 'inhale' this mystery, to learn to look with 'innocence' at whatever is before them (p. 268). It is no coincidence that *Island's* uncompromising autocrats (namely, the Rani, Murugan, and Lord Aldehyde) were all educated outside Pala and refuse to participate in the ceremonies. Through this juxtaposition, Huxley articulates how aberrance does not imply openness. Although the Rani's unconventional interests offer a counterpoint to many aspects of Western scientific and religious orthodoxy,

⁶⁰¹ Sloss, p. 174.

⁶⁰² Jiddu Krishnamurti, *Commentaries on Living 2nd Series* (New York: Harpers, 1958), p. 17.

⁶⁰³ Sheldrake, *Delusion*, p. 84.

she is oblivious to uncertainty—unyielding in her assumption that Koot Hoomi objectively exists beyond their encounters.

This is an echo of Theosophical convention, and not a reflection of the mediums with whom Huxley associated. Despite also receiving psychic information from intermediaries (or ‘control personalities’) both Williams and Garrett were agnostic about the ontological status of such entities. Williams describes how the information she receives ‘seems’ to come from distinct personalities.⁶⁰⁴ Garrett, famous for her incredulity, similarly foregrounds this ambiguity; ‘Either the control personalities were parts of my subconscious, or the subconscious might be far more vast and profound than anyone had yet imagined. It was impossible for me to determine this subtle and extensive problem’.⁶⁰⁵ Even after decades of continuous interaction with an intermediary named ‘Uvani’, Garrett never assumed his autonomous actuality; ‘I often voiced my doubts about “Uvani’s” individuality and my suspicion that he might not be a separate personality but only a split-off of my own subconscious mind’.⁶⁰⁶ This hypothesis entails an unresolved ontology that requires the self to be neither bound, nor singular.⁶⁰⁷ In this respect, Garrett has more in common with the Palanese than the Rani, and explicitly celebrates the ‘paradoxical position of doubting the reality of the controls while recognising the validity of the source from which they drew their supernormal knowledge’.⁶⁰⁸

As discussed, ‘psychedelics can bring about the revision of other heavily-weighted high-level priors [...] such as those underlying partisan and/or overly-confident political, religious and/or philosophical perspectives’.⁶⁰⁹ However, ‘can’ is the critical term here. That is, the revision of ‘priors’ is not infallibly intrinsic to psychedelics; *moksha*-medicine reliably nurtures uncertainty because the Palanese are primed for this outcome. In a discussion of attention, interpretation, and ESP, Garrett encapsulates several of *Island*’s pedagogical priorities. She begins by establishing a contrast between ‘written’ language, which requires observation and

⁶⁰⁴ Williams, p. 16.

⁶⁰⁵ Garrett, *Adventures*, p. 100.

⁶⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁶⁰⁷ As part of my research for this chapter, I wrote to John Constable, a.k.a., John Crow, the author of *The Southwark Mysteries*—a long poem that he credits to a dictation by ‘The Goose’, a medieval sex worker who was allegedly buried at the Crossbones Graveyard in Southwark, London. Intrigued by this modern, literary example, I queried whether he attributed autonomous existence to this entity. The grace of his response was illuminating: ‘Over the past 23+ years I’ve entertained many interpretations of The Goose - at one extreme, that she’s an autonomous part of my own psyche; at the other, that she already existed and intervened from The Astral using my own psychic architecture to reveal and delineate herself more clearly. In the end, I reconciled these contraries in a both and neither’. *Email correspondence* (21 April 2020).

⁶⁰⁸ Garrett, *Adventures*, p. 118.

⁶⁰⁹ Carhart-Harris and Friston, p. 317.

categorisation, and the ‘unwritten’ language of psychic experiences, which ‘translates itself from an inner light which needs an outward feeling of passivity but an inner and very active perception, causing the most delicate cognitions to be translated into ideas’.⁶¹⁰ ‘Unwritten’ language is not a stock of inanimate symbols. It ‘translates itself’—it has an agency akin to an organism. Yet, this translation process also requires the activation of a participant in a very particular state of awareness.

Garrett narrates a synergistic gestalt between language and attention which resonates with the experiential-interactive emphasis of panpsychism. This is a natural deterrent against dogmas, which have less opportunity to calcify in a context where meaning is understood as a fleeting collaboration. Without the assumption that categories are fixed in an abstracted realm of ideas, ‘fact’ and ‘fantasy’ are more entwined. Thus, although the Palanese do not prioritise psychic development, Garrett’s presence on the island is tangible—and not via the Rani’s militant crusade. Rather, Garrett encapsulates many of Pala’s most defining cultural concepts: the metaphor of ‘Mind with a large ‘M’’ (p. 168); the ontology of ‘I’ as a ‘crowd’ (p. 78); a reverence for paradox; an understanding of the organismic qualities of language and, above all, an aversion to any ‘belief in unverifiable dogmas’ (p. 178).

6.4: GROUNDING THE SPIRIT

The history of the Theosophical Society is replete with scandals. In 1885, for example, a former servant of Blavatsky admitted to having facilitated in the distribution of a series of letters that were allegedly sent to society members by the Ascended Masters.⁶¹¹ Despite this disclosure, many followers continued to believe that these messages came directly from the spirit realms. Considered both a spiritual pioneer and a con artist, Blavatsky left a unique legacy. Sloss speculates that the combination of hypnosis and the powerful, magnetic charisma of both Blavatsky and Leadbeater created an overwhelming suspension of disbelief in their followers.⁶¹² The paranormal provides a rich context for considering the reciprocity between narrative and experience.

⁶¹⁰ Garrett, *Adventures*, p. 106.

⁶¹¹ John L. Crow, ‘Taming the Astral Body: The Theosophical Society’s Ongoing Problem of Emotion and Control’, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 80.3 (2012), 691-717 (p. 695).

⁶¹² Sloss, p. 58

6.4.1: 'VOICES'

Huxley's short story 'Voices' (1955) captures the confluence between narrative and experience, along with some of the core paradoxes in Western interpretations of the paranormal. The plot follows Pamela, a nihilistic orphaned youth, over the course of a dinner party hosted by her Aunt Eleanor. The meal is attended by a psychic named Moira Dillon who, like Williams, used to work in vaudeville and now specialises in 'physical' mediumship via the manifestation of audible voices.⁶¹³ Unlike the other female mediums in Huxley's fiction of this era however, Dillon is a graceful agnostic.⁶¹⁴ She warns Pamela about the ways in which 'words turn into facts'—an iteration of Vijaya's observation that 'in this very odd psycho-physical world of ours, ideas have a tendency, if you concentrate your mind on them, to get themselves realised' (p. 221).⁶¹⁵ Dillon exemplifies the linguistic sensitivity that later became one of Pala's indispensable pedagogies. As the evening unfolds, the material interchange between language and attention is exposed through a 'trick' that Pamela plays on her aunt, and both characters ultimately meet their fate as a result of their egotistical inflexibilities.

During the dinner, Pamela becomes aware of 'a strange little piping whisper that seemed to come from somewhere between the top of Miss Dillon's head and the red-shaded candles at the center of the table. "It's Kapila," Mrs [Eleanor] Marsden cried'.⁶¹⁶ Dudley, one of the guests, queries this identification:

"Who's Kapila?"

He looked at Mrs. Marsden, who looked at Miss Dillon. "That," said the latter, "is what I've been trying to figure out for the last sixteen years. Ever since this thing began to happen."

"Kapila's a Hindu," Mrs Marsden explained.

"You mean he *says* he's a Hindu," Miss Dillon qualified. "But is he? He could just be a part of me. Or perhaps he's something entirely different".⁶¹⁷

Along with Williams' theatrical background and séance style, Dillon also

⁶¹³ Williams was a vaudeville stage-dancer for Harry Houdini and others in her youth. Williams, p. 12.

⁶¹⁴ I henceforth refer to this character by her surname to avoid any potential confusion with the Moira of *Below the Equator*.

⁶¹⁵ Aldous Huxley, 'Voices', *Atlantic Monthly*, 196 (July 1955), 33-45 (p. 36).

⁶¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.

⁶¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

encapsulates Garrett's ontological pluralism regarding Uvani, offsetting Aunt Eleanor's insistence that Kapila is not of this earth—that he 'comes from the Outside'.⁶¹⁸

In anticipation of the Rani's 'Crusade of the Spirit', Aunt Eleanor becomes suddenly imperious before this elevated presence—she becomes 'the crusader, the mouthpiece of a cause'.⁶¹⁹ Pamela, who dismisses the demonstration as a hoax, begins to practice ventriloquy with the intention of tormenting her aunt. After some practice, she vocalises this imitation and Aunt Eleanor is elated by 'the thrilling fact that, though Dillon had gone, Kapila had remained – for *her*'.⁶²⁰ She revels in a sense of having been 'chosen' as the privileged recipient of attention from another realm and leaves the room in pursuit of privacy with the voice; 'Another minute or two and she'd be alone, the door locked, the lights turned out, in touch at last, with the Beyond'.⁶²¹ Her interpretation of spirit is conspicuously abstracted, an ironic frame for the rapid turn of fate that follows—the 'disembodied' voice begins to utter callous obscenities and the shock causes her to fall down the stairs to her death. However, the culmination of the 'trick', already foreshadowed by Dillon, is that Pamela is equally unequipped to navigate the veil between words and facts.

In bed that night, Pamela attempts to absolve her sense of accountability for Eleanor's death:

From the pillow beside her came the kind of amused whistle with which one greets an all too obvious fib. Then the little voice whispered "Filthy, filthy!"
"But that wasn't me," Pamela protested. "I swear it wasn't. It was..." [...]
"Unconscious verbalization," she tried to say. But the comforting magic of science had lost its power. "You do *this*," Miss Dillon had said as she breached the barrier that surrounded the wineglass. "And you run the risk of *this*" – of attack, of invasion, of a knife at the very heart of your being.⁶²²

She is punished for being reckless with the alchemy that binds ideas and matter. Her effort to externalise the cause of her aunt's death erodes her previous paradigm to such a degree that her sanity is compromised. She resolutely protests when the 'little voice' recites her former belief—'you and me – it's the same'.⁶²³ One certainty is replaced by another. 'Voices' epitomises the perils of neglecting the materiality of

⁶¹⁸ Huxley, 'Voices', p. 37.

⁶¹⁹ Ibid., p. 38.

⁶²⁰ Ibid., p. 42.

⁶²¹ Ibid.

⁶²² Ibid., pp. 44-45.

⁶²³ Ibid., p. 45.

words—of discounting the reality of performance. As the story ends, the little voice is laughing as Pamela obediently obliges its request for a coil of rope.

6.4.2: TRICK AS TECHNIQUE

In a letter to Huxley, Osmond entertains the possibility that Williams may have been employing ventriloquy or parlour tricks during her demonstration at the Tuesday night session he attended, but ultimately deems this irrelevant; ‘That the manifestation of a particular phenomenon should be trivial or sometimes associated with trickery has nothing to do with it’.⁶²⁴ Anthropologist Michael Taussig has outlined these tensions in his discussion of shamanism among the Kwakiutl, an indigenous group native to Canada’s Pacific coast.

1. All concerned know that a great part of shamanistic procedure is a fraud.
2. Yet shaman, patient, and friends all believe in shamanism.
3. Moreover, exposure of shamanism’s fraudulence does not weaken belief in it.
4. But contrary to points 2 and 3, the presence of fraud does make the shaman doubt his or her worth.
5. Point 4 has the effect that the shaman resorts to (further) fraud. Now start with point 1 again.⁶²⁵

This is a complex topic whose discussion would ideally incorporate Kwakiutl concepts and paradigms. This would be tangential to the current chapter, and I use Taussig’s example rather for its expository elegance and relevance to some of the Western connotations of mediumship and psi phenomena. Taussig implores that we ‘pause and cast an eye over the strategies one might pursue to understand fraud as somehow not fraudulent at all but something true and even efficacious [...] the *trick as technique*’.⁶²⁶

This does not comfortably align with English language patterns; ‘trick’ is negatively associated with ‘deceit’, deceit implies concealment—darkness, rather than illumination. Recalling Chapter 3, for trickery to be deemed fruitful, we must accommodate ambiguity. At the same time, this is reciprocal; the ‘trick as technique’ can stimulate an embodied uncertainty that anchors paranormal phenomena to the

⁶²⁴ Huxley and Osmond, p. 446.

⁶²⁵ Michael Taussig, *Walter Benjamin’s Grave* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 132.

⁶²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

material world. Pamela's vindictive ventriloquy 'trick' is inspired by 'a phrase that had been used in her psychology class at UCLA – "Unconscious verbalisation"'.⁶²⁷ She uses a psychological explanation to 'debunk' or 'demystify' Dillon's demonstration. Indeed (exempting the ambitions of parapsychology) 'psychology' tends to centralise the 'internal' human mind, whereas 'paranormal' tends to be associated with an 'external', non-human world.

Milton Erickson encapsulates this dichotomisation, dismissing supernatural and ESP experiences as being 'based on trickery, illusion, or highly developed observational powers'.⁶²⁸ He wrote the following note to an associate in 1979:

I feel that I should inform you that I do not believe that the field of parapsychology is scientifically established and I also feel that the so-called evidence for the existence of these faculties is based on mathematical logic, misinterpretation of data, overlooking of minimal sensory cues, biased interpretation, and, frequently, on outright fraud.⁶²⁹

On one occasion, Erickson successfully located a hidden pin in a building at Cornell University by walking hand in hand with someone who knew its location and interpreting their subtle muscular tensions. He hypothesised that many instances of telepathy could likewise be explained by delicate changes in the larynx. Ironically, this aptitude for reading minimal sensory cues compounded his reputation as a psychic.⁶³⁰ Given the nuanced portrayal of the 'trick as technique' in 'Voices', it is unlikely that Huxley would interpret these theories as adequate grounds on which to dismiss paranormal phenomena. First and foremost, Erickson's 'counter' demonstrations only invalidate interpretations of ESP that are entirely immaterial.

Like Erickson, both Garrett and Williams viewed psychic ability as an extension of one's 'normal' sensory capacities. Williams explicitly wrote her book to challenge the 'mistaken belief that psychics are born and not made'.⁶³¹ She uses relatable analogies to normalise concepts such as clairvoyance and clairaudience— '[t]hey are more nearly like pictures and conversations one recalls as having taken place in the past'.⁶³² Huxley was evidently convinced by this perspective, and suggested to Osmond that 'one might pass from ordinary SP to ESP by steadily

⁶²⁷ Huxley, 'Voices', p. 41

⁶²⁸ Sidney Rosen, *My Voice Will Go with You: The Teaching Tales of Milton H. Erickson* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1982), p. 191.

⁶²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 191-2.

⁶³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

⁶³¹ Williams, p. 4.

⁶³² Williams, p. 28.

pushing the Bates procedure to the point where it would be physically impossible to see in the ordinary way'.⁶³³ Tricks/techniques can be used to tune one's mind-body to the mind-body of another. This does not disallow paranormal phenomena, but rather situates it within the sensorial, material world.

'Voices' leaves ontology untouched; the origin of the sound, the status of Kapila, the 'authenticity' of Dillon, are all redundant questions. The animus behind Huxley's psychical satire is to kindle a more terrestrial understanding of psychical phenomena and challenge the power imbalances around 'chosen' individuals. Trickery combines sensitivity, storytelling, and uncertainty to nourish enriching mysteries that may entice material change. Western assumptions about the paranormal are predominantly based on dualistic paradigms in which 'heaven' is metaphorically spatialised as 'above' (and thus separate from) the material 'earth'. Aunt Eleanor and Pamela share the same fatal flaws: delusions of grandeur, and excessive certainty. These negative examples exhibit the symptoms and side effects of draconian hierarchies and spiritual abstraction; they show the cost of metaphysical negligence and in doing so present vigilance as a defence against the excesses and extremes of modern culture.

6.4.3: MIND MATTERS

Huxley's fiction from this period exposes the extent to which dualism and abstraction pervade Western culture; even entity encounters do not bridge the conceptual distance between matter and spirit. The Rani caricatures the disembodied Westerner, or in Dr Robert's terms, the 'repulsively unwholesome' sitting addict who spends nine-tenths of their time on foam rubber (p. 173). She is introduced as a hefty woman of a hundred kilograms whose Little Voice exonerates her from any form of physical activity. The Palanese, on the other hand, learn to mitigate the myth of 'Mind abstracted from body' (p. 79). During the children's *moksha* initiation, Dr Robert describes Shiva-Nataraja (the Lord of the Dance) '[d]ancing and dancing in all the worlds at once [...] all the worlds. And first of all in the world of matter' (p. 204). This hypnotic induction continues for several pages; 'Nataraja dances in all the worlds at once—in the world of physics and chemistry, in the world of ordinary, all-too-human experience, in the world finally of Suchness, of Mind, of the Clear Light' (p. 207). In Will's subsequent conversation with the Rani, she insists that the

⁶³³ Huxley and Osmond, p. 421. The Bates method is an alternative therapy for visual impairment based on relaxing the eyes and the mind.

ceremony is a ‘Blasphemous Caricature of TRUE Initiation’, because the Palanese have ‘never learned to make the elementary distinction between the Natural Order and the Supernatural’ (p. 213).

Likewise, Blavatsky asserted that the infinite cannot be ‘sensed by the finite Self’, only that ‘divine essence could be communicated to the higher Spiritual Self in a state of ecstasy. This condition can hardly be attained, like *hypnotism*, by “physical and chemical means”’.⁶³⁴ Notwithstanding the improbability that a ‘true’ state of ecstasy would have absolutely no physio-chemical counterpart, it also fortifies the trope of the ‘chosen’ individuals by minimising the accessibility of spiritual experience. Timothy Leary astutely observed how ‘[i]t’s a lot easier to be a holy man if your sacrament doesn’t work. You just keep exhorting and threatening and promising and, of course, blaming the failure on the shortcomings of the disciple’.⁶³⁵ This aligns with the Judeo-Christian tradition of a clergy, which acts as an intermediary between God and the (divorced) corporeal world. I draw no conclusions on the similitude between ‘supernatural’ and ‘spiritual’ experiences—both are vast categories that I am using to expose the dualistic frameworks that dominate Western notions of the ‘immaterial’. These conventions preclude spirituality from psychedelics, or indeed any ‘altering’ practice, on the following grounds: matter and spirit are distinct ‘realms’; humans are singular entities that cannot be in two places simultaneously; changing the physio-chemical composition of the body is a material gesture; the body does not qualify as a valid recipient of anything truly divine.

In contrast, Huxley’s personal notes on preparing for supernatural experimentation include ‘[e]xercises in being aware of what one is perceiving in the outside world, of visual and muscular sensations, of taste, smell etc [...] Dancing, being aware of movement, paying attention to breathing’.⁶³⁶ For Garrett and Williams, the so-called ‘immaterial’ was inseparable from the body. Indeed, both identify the solar plexus their most active centre of psychic-perceptual awareness.⁶³⁷ Reminiscent of the time distortion for which psychedelics are notorious, Garrett details the muscular contractions and breathing techniques that allow her to ‘conceive of yesterday, today and tomorrow as a single curve [...] on the in-drawn breath time loses reality and the past and future are present in one instant’.⁶³⁸ These

⁶³⁴ Helena P. Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy* (London: The Theosophical Publishing Company, 1889), p. 10.

⁶³⁵ Timothy Leary, *High Priest* (Oakland: Ronin Publishing, 1995), Kindle edition, p. 159.

⁶³⁶ Huxley, Handwritten note [n.d.]. Huxley papers, box 45, fol. 19.

⁶³⁷ Williams, p. 13; Garrett, *Adventures*, p. 122.

⁶³⁸ Garrett, *Adventures*, p. 105.

physical practices are indispensable:

Control of the breathing plays a most important part in all of my supernormal work. It develops a sense of excitement and eagerness, such as one feels on entering some unknown or forbidden territory. Without this “acceleration,” I can make no claim to working supernormally.⁶³⁹

The reference to territory is clearly signalled as an expository convenience, and the inverted commas around ‘acceleration’ emphasise that motion is being used as a metaphor. Garrett is not narrating a departure from her material body—much like Erickson’s pin ‘trick’, her reception of knowledge requires consummate physical sensitivity.

Although it is not applied to psychical practices, this level of embodiment is central to Palanese education and culture. Poller has commented on Pala’s absence of a ‘spiritual Superman endowed with *siddhis* such as telepathy or precognition’ and speculates that Huxley interpreted these activities as distractions.⁶⁴⁰ Indeed, Vijaya explicitly informs Will that the *moksha* effect is not one related to ‘telepathy or clairvoyance or any other kind of parapsychological performance. None of that amusing pre-mystical stuff’ (p. 168). However, I do not read this as a reflection of either Huxley’s perspective, or of a Palanese consensus; Vijaya’s metaphysical inclinations are conspicuously more materialist than many of the island’s other representatives, as indicated by his understanding of *moksha* as a means of stimulating the ‘silent areas of the brain’. Despite its elegant juxtaposition with the Rani’s psychical self-indulgence, I maintain that this flippancy should not be construed as a reproval of mediums or parapsychological performance generally.

Spotlighting Huxley’s satirical sleight of hand, Vijaya’s wife Shanta explains to Will that her husband is not the father of their third child, but (through Deep Freeze and Artificial Insemination) the deceased painter Gobind Singh, whose ‘maternal grandmother was a gifted medium and lived to ninety-six’ (p. 223). This is mentioned among the factors that contributed to their decision to choose Singh; “So you see”, said Shanta, “we may even have a centenarian clairvoyant in the family” (p. 233). The difference is that this child would be embedded in Palanese culture, which curbs the probability of one becoming an abstracted evangelist. Although characters like Shanta, or Moira Dillon, may be overshadowed by their ostentatious counterpoints, they are integral to appreciating Huxley’s satirical

⁶³⁹ Ibid., pp. 120-21.

⁶⁴⁰ Poller, *Alternative Spirituality*, p. 277.

ingenuity and its enduring relevance. His caricatures allegorise the polluted progenies of mind-body dualism, whose remission calls for two prerequisites: an embodied interpretation of ‘spirit’ and an effective antidote to dogma.

6.5: PROCESSING PSI

6.5.1: PSI EXPERIMENTATION

Unlike Vijaya, Huxley was indeed intrigued by the theory that psychedelics could enhance psychic ability, and this intersection was fundamental to his evolving emphasis on embodied spiritual practices.⁶⁴¹ One of the many prominent individuals pursuing this confluence was Al Hubbard (a.k.a., The Captain), president of Vancouver’s Uranium Corporation, who mysteriously invited Osmond to lunch at the Vancouver Yacht Club having learned about his work with Smythies and obtained a supply of mescaline for himself.⁶⁴² Hubbard was convinced that ESP could be developed through psychedelics, and not only laid personal claim to this, but also had the financial means to arrange experiments.⁶⁴³

Hubbard, Huxley, Heard and Bill Forthman⁶⁴⁴ all took mescaline together in January 1955. As highlighted in the thesis introduction, this was Huxley’s first psychedelic session in a group setting and the first time he reported having ‘a transcendental experience within *this* world and with human references’.⁶⁴⁵ Later that year, the same collective orchestrated a session to explore whether LSD could facilitate paranormal phenomena. Huxley wrote to Osmond that ‘Al [Hubbard] reported *psi* awareness of the others in the group, and Gerald exhibited the same kind of prophetic discernment of spirits, which characterised his first mescaline experience’, but that their attempts ‘to induce *psi* deliberately seemed after a few minutes so artificial and bogus that we gave up’ and that ‘if future experiments

⁶⁴¹ For a historical overview of Western experimentation with psychedelics and ESP, starting with Alexandre Rouhier’s experiment with mescaline in the 1920s, see Luke, ‘Psychoactive Substances’ (p. 129).

⁶⁴² Stevens, p. 45.

⁶⁴³ Krippner shares the stories told by Professor Dean Brown, who allegedly witnessed a series of such feats; these include telling Brown the serial numbers of the dollar bills in his wallet and using psychokinesis to influence casino gaming machines. The legend goes that Hubbard was eventually escorted from the casino for winning too much money. Stanley Krippner, ‘LSD and Parapsychological Experiences’, delivered at *LSD: Problem Child and Wonder Drug* (Basel, January 2006), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TMvkfCkg9SY>> [accessed 8 April 2021].

⁶⁴⁴ A student at UCLA.

⁶⁴⁵ Huxley and Osmond, p. 150.

should turn out to be like these last two, I should feel that such experiments were merely childish and pointless'.⁶⁴⁶ Osmond had recently cautioned Huxley about the futility of predetermined psychedelic-psi trials; 'Zener card guessing etc. without exploration is a waste of time [...] It is a bore and so the skills drop off. The high levels of the mind are not going to waste much energy on something so trivial'.⁶⁴⁷

For this very reason, it has been difficult to even design studies that yield quantifiable results. Robert Masters and Jean Houston explain the oft-reported dissonance between the LSD state and the assigned tasks; ESP capacities tend to decline as subjects become bored with the activities—one participant candidly described the discord as 'psychedelically immoral'.⁶⁴⁸ This particular comment was made in reference to a card-guessing task, and it is not a unique reaction—John Whittlesey used a similar experimental model, which his subjects described as 'ridiculous, petty, mundane' in the context of a psychedelic experience.⁶⁴⁹ However, the guide (or 'sitter') in the Masters and Houston study observed that her participants 'often seemed to pick up random images that crossed her mind'—especially those with some kind of 'emotogenic force'.⁶⁵⁰

Garrett, who was amenable to empirical studies, participated in an LSD-psi experiment with Osmond in 1958. Osmond wrote to Huxley that this was 'notably successful', but does not elaborate.⁶⁵¹ David Luke's elaboration of this occasion offers a different narrative; he summarises how Garrett felt that LSD had increased her sensitivity, and compared some aspects of the experience to her pre-trance euphoria, but ultimately concluded that the two states were quite distinct.⁶⁵² Garrett's own commentary is more transparent—she celebrates the therapeutic potential of psychedelics, but despite having 'enjoyed the work immensely' had 'no evidence to offer that these chemical compounds brought forth more paranormal events'.⁶⁵³ However, despite her generative incertitude, it is worth reiterating that much of Garrett's psychical work was contingent on retaining a meticulous command of her own state of awareness. Her subsequent commentary on this exemplifies a more 'grounded' discourse than any pertaining to a 'super' natural, but also enriches and

⁶⁴⁶ Huxley and Osmond, p. 238.

⁶⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 238. Designed by Karl Zener in the 1930s and most famously used by J. B. Rhine in his ESP experiments, Zener cards come in sets of 25, with each displaying one of five coloured symbols.

⁶⁴⁸ Robert Masters and Jean Houston, *The Varieties of Psychedelic Experience* (London: Turnstone, 1966), p. 90.

⁶⁴⁹ John Whittlesey, 'Some Curious ESP Results in Terms of Variance', *Journal of Parapsychology*, 24 (1960), 220-22 (p. 221).

⁶⁵⁰ Masters and Houston, p. 90.

⁶⁵¹ Huxley and Osmond, p. 403.

⁶⁵² Luke, 'Comprehensive Review', p. 99.

⁶⁵³ Garrett, *Many Voices*, p. 302.

contextualises the paradigm by which Huxley eventually framed his psychedelic experiences.

6.5.2: PHILOSOPHICAL SYNCOPATION

Garrett frequently collaborated with J.B. Rhine, who established parapsychology as an academic discipline in the 1930s. One of Rhine's standard ESP research methodologies was the use of Zener cards, with which he conducted over ninety thousand laboratory trials.⁶⁵⁴ Garrett was initially 'unsuccessful' in these trials, and felt that the format inhibited her intuitions; 'Dr Rhine's ESP cards lacked the energy stimulus which would enable me to see their symbols clairvoyantly'.⁶⁵⁵ She encouraged Rhine to modify his experimental model so that the cards were being observed by another participant. In this way she was able to 'receive the symbols from the mind of the transmitter, where they acquired vitality and provided the energy stimulus necessary for [her] perception'—'passed through the mind of another, the symbols came alive'.⁶⁵⁶ Unlike the disembodied voices that command Huxley's misguided dualists, Garrett's framing is closer to panpsychism, emphasising the 'active emanation registering between two people or between an individual and an object'.⁶⁵⁷ Although her objection to the cards-only format of the trail may seem at odds with the ubiquitous sentience assumed by panpsychism, she is not asserting that the cards are inanimate, only that they are not *sufficiently* stimulating in this context. Like Whitehead, she implies that there are 'degrees' of sentience—that everything in the material world emits a frequency that, to a greater or lesser degree, may incite an encounter that brings something new into being.

A panpsychist perspective offers some relief from the reflexive cultural tendency to spatialise the supernatural as something 'beyond' the natural. For Whitehead, the body's awareness/cognition is not strictly limited to the 'immediate' environment.

Your perception takes place where you are, and is entirely dependent on how your body is functioning. But this functioning of the body in one place, exhibits for your cognisance an aspect of the distant environment, fading away into the general knowledge that there are things beyond. If this cognisance conveys knowledge of a transcendent world, it must be because the event which is the

⁶⁵⁴ Symons, p. 38.

⁶⁵⁵ Garrett, *Adventures*, p. 116.

⁶⁵⁶ *Ibid.*.

⁶⁵⁷ Garrett, *Adventures*, p. 116.

bodily life unifies in itself aspects of the universe.⁶⁵⁸

‘Transcendent’ cognisance is explicitly physical; although the body is confined to a single point in space, it is approached as a site of encounter rather than a bound object. Distant events may be less evident, but they are not fundamentally inaccessible. This is a harmonious baseline over which to place Garrett, who elaborates on the interplay between external stimulation and participatory interpretation:

Clairvoyance (as I knew it then) cannot be directed peremptorily to any particular object [...] I can do so only if I receive the response of an adequate energy stimulus from the individual or object in question. When this energy stimulus exists, I sense and see simultaneously by means of a series of images, animated but simple, like a child’s drawings. After I have received impressions and visions in this way, I then interpret them to the listener.⁶⁵⁹

ESP is framed as an interpretation of subtle sensations that are not markedly distinct from ‘normal’ perception. Garrett suggests that our lack of perceptual training leads to a view of life as it would be seen ‘through a keyhole’.⁶⁶⁰ Like Huxley’s brain-as-filter trope, the consequences of her breathing techniques and attentional shifts are allegorised as an ‘expansion’, a model that implies the omnipresence of consciousness—that consciousness is not an emergent property but a fundamental constituent of reality. Williams agrees that if we can learn to ‘release the mind from the confines of our present interests’ then we may discover that ‘consciousness is ubiquitous with time and space’.⁶⁶¹

Philosopher Bernardo Kastrup proffers the brain-as-filter theory as an alternative metaphysic that is more coherent with psychical phenomena; it trusts in a ‘shared repository of potential experiences that far transcends the mere genetic predispositions of a species’.⁶⁶² Curiously, Kastrup also lists a series of examples in which transpersonal or ‘non-local’ experiences have been found to correlate with a reduction in brain activity, and compares this to the contemporary neuroscientific

⁶⁵⁸ Whitehead, *Science*, p. 114.

⁶⁵⁹ Garrett, *Adventures*, p. 116.

⁶⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 135; Williams, p. 71.

⁶⁶¹ Williams, p. 71.

⁶⁶² Bernardo Kastrup, ‘A Paradigm-Breaking Hypothesis for Solving the Mind-Body Problem’, *Paranthropology: Journal of Anthropological Approaches to the Paranormal*, 3.3 (2012), 4-12.

observations on psychedelics.⁶⁶³ I am not sufficiently qualified to validate this, nor am I suggesting that the (extensive) categories that constitute ‘psychedelic’ and ‘transpersonal’ experiences are phenomenologically similar. However, these associations and comparisons can be useful as a united front against excessively atomistic worldviews.

However, Huxley’s satire cautions us not to overestimate this potential. Unlike Garrett and Williams, his psychic caricatures communicate with incorporeal sources whose dictations require no critical nuance; they do not see themselves as active participants in the creation of meaning, but the beneficiaries of explicit instructions. Analogous to the detached bliss of Huxley’s first psychedelic experiences, they also abstract their encounters by emphasising ‘Other’ worlds and ‘the elementary distinction between the Natural Order and the Supernatural’ (p. 213). The separation of body and spirit, earth and heaven, natural and supernatural was the predecessor to the modern estrangement of matter from mind—where humans have the privilege of consciousness, amidst a wasteland of inanimate material.⁶⁶⁴ The Rani’s philosophical assumptions do not deviate from this model—her eccentricity is little more than misdirection.

6.6: CLOSING

Objectivism abides at the bedrock of Western culture. An inventory of measurable objects has overshadowed the enigmatic reciprocity of the natural world. Extraordinary experiences have the potential to evoke a sophisticated consideration of alternative philosophies, but priming remains paramount. As the Rani exemplifies, prescriptive constructs can shape even the most exceptional encounters. Even when experiences (whether ‘paranormal’, ‘psychedelic’, or any other variety) seem incongruous with Western cultural conventions, we cannot assume that they will prevent us from relapsing into the comfort and convenience of abstraction.

Despite its progressive potential, parapsychological experimentation is still dominated by testing single individuals in laboratory conditions. Over sixty years ago, Huxley and Osmond were discussing the same limitations; ‘I have suggested to [Garrett] that what is needed is a very thorough scrutiny of parapsychological method. Too often it seems like a solvent which destroys what it is supposed to

⁶⁶³ Bernardo Kastrup, *Why Materialism is Baloney* (Winchester: Iff Books, 2014), Kindle edition, p. 51.

⁶⁶⁴ Tarnas, p. 286.

dissolve'.⁶⁶⁵ On a wider scale, dogmas of any kind are vitalised by metaphysical and linguistic negligence. Through physical practices, linguistic awareness, ecological engagement, and *moksha*, the Palanese routinely dilute the fervours of dualism. Although I have argued that panpsychism constitutes their closest philosophical ally, the Palanese do not endeavour to scientifically 'validate' their metaphysical or spiritual inclinations. Their sensual take on the spirit is socially substantiated—a carnal divine has practical benefits in terms of reciprocity, sustainability, community, and kindness.

The Rani's iteration of the 'supernatural', in contrast, relegates anything and everything earthly. After a tirade about the blasphemous *moksha* ceremony, she clarifies her priorities:

I didn't call you [...] to discuss the difference between the Natural and the Supernatural—Supremely Important as that difference is. No, I called you about a more urgent matter."

"Oil?"

"Oil," she confirmed (p. 213).

For the Rani, the natural world is a repository of resources that will serve her 'Crusade of the Spirit', through which the covetous invasion of Pala is framed as a spiritual enterprise. Through her dogmatic devotion to Koot Hoomi, she outsources her desires and absolves herself of moral accountability. Her ideologies epitomise the intractable substructures of stratified institutions. She is a bastion of mind-body dualism—a custodian for the hegemony of outdated cultural monoliths. The Rani's beguiling mediumship and mystical discourse is merely a cosmetic heterodoxy.

Huxley is not presenting a pessimistic projection; he is attempting to mitigate an interminable cultural pattern. For example, while the Theosophical Society undeniably antagonised a legion of scientific and religious praxis, they represent little subversion at a philosophical level. The Rani has 'cornered the market, not in soya beans or copper, but in Pure Spirituality and the Ascended Masters' (p. 59). *Island* is, from one perspective, a parable of the symptomatic shockwaves of undiluted dualism: mining; exploitation; oppression; the myth of infinite economic growth. Any plausible armed defence against Pala's colonisation would require resources that the people neither require, nor desire; having access to such resources would imply that Pala carries the seeds of the same conceited elitism

⁶⁶⁵ Huxley and Osmond, p. 727.

that has justified imperialism for millennia.

Huxley's psychical satire simulates the potential for unorthodox practices to be homogenised by the very structures that they have the power to diversify. As discussed throughout this thesis, conventional collaborations and metaphorical mainstreaming have been fundamental to the resurgence of psychedelic research. However, 'medical legitimacy' and 'positive publicity' have also signalled 'investment opportunity'—another opening for the wealthy and powerful to generate more wealth and power. By embellishing the symptoms of a dogmatic and dualistic divinity, Huxley's parodies can help us to tune our attention to the undercurrents—to supersede the seductive spiritual narratives that shroud the alienating immoderations of antiquity.

CHAPTER 7: A MUSICAL OFFERING

Isolated and substantial things exist only in books, conversation and thought. In nature there are only interweaving processes, some of them as brief as a flash of lightening, others as long drawn-out as a galaxy. The universe is a counterpoint of innumerable tunes. To be understood, a tune must be heard from beginning to end.

In regard to short tunes, listened to in isolation, science is adequate. About the unobservable beginnings and endings of long tunes, about the total counterpoint and about the ways in which their position in the total counterpoint affects the observable short tunes, science can hazard only the vaguest guesses—Huxley,

‘Notes on What’s What’ (manuscript).⁶⁶⁶

7.1: CLOSING

It would be difficult to overstate Huxley’s conviction about music’s unparalleled expressive potential—it was fundamental to his narrative rendering of the psychedelic experience. The objective of this closing chapter, however, is not to analyse his application of musical concepts, several commentaries on this topic are already in circulation,⁶⁶⁷ but to give the overtures of this thesis—largely based on Pala’s pedagogies—a trial run. Although the final pages of *Island* are bleak, with engine after engine roaring into action as the land is seized, Pala is not destroyed—the ideas and potential contained with the novel will be encountered and realised for years to come.

Huxley underscores the difference between revolutionary rhetoric and systemic change—between unorthodox notions and flexible thinking in motion. Perfection is not the intention; Pala is a paragon of a type of caring cultural vigilance whose relevance has only ripened in light of the psychedelic resurgence. Once again there is a mass movement in support of their cultural and medical inclusion, and, once again, matters of how the industrialised West might accommodate these

⁶⁶⁶ Huxley, *Island* MS, box 59, fol. 2, p. 73.

⁶⁶⁷ Aplin, p. 32.

practices have been neglected for the simple reason that most people are blind to their own underlying predispositions and preclusions, many of which are impressed by culture; in Dr Robert's words, people are 'at once the beneficiaries and the victims of their culture. It brings them to flower; but it also nips them in the bud or plants a canker at the heart of the blossom' (p. 155). As this thesis has explored, the myths that extract spirit from matter require urgent dilution; the left hemisphere's drive towards ever more quantification needs emergency mitigation.

The medicalisation of psychedelics has assisted the mental health treatment outcomes for many individuals, but this model must not be implemented to the exclusion of other psychedelic practices, particularly given the reductive mainstream Western paradigms that have shaped the categories of wealth, health, and self. As indicated, placing something in a category effectively determines how one behaves towards that event or entity, and any serious consideration of psychedelic integration must acknowledge and account for the ontological structures and linguistic patterning that shape individual and cultural identities.

As the previous six chapters have indicated, any action towards polyphasia is likely to be undermined without accompanying pedagogies to disentangle the assumption that categories are universal—a central ideological ballast behind the myth of objectivism. Positive change will require an active engagement with the cultural categories that whittle and carve our worlds—beginning with a willingness and a capacity to recognise our semantic, perceptual, and philosophical inclinations and incertitude.

The original 'Notes on What's What' delivers unique insights into how Huxley considered the relationships between these three aspects. The cuts to the manuscript have somewhat obscured the consequence of this nexus; understanding the synergies between Language, Perception, and Belief is the foundation of Pala's polyphasia and its agnosticism—it is their front line of defence against the immoderations of their surrounding nations.

However, it is not simply that the Palanese reintegrate a few aspects of experience that have lost touch with one another—the message is more nuanced than simply one of interconnection. The Palanese understand how to feel, express, and attend to their experiences both holistically and atomistically; they can equally isolate and modulate sections of their experience with ease and intention, while understanding how these movements will affect the texture of the others. By recognising this power, their language patterns and philosophical paradigms are neither disassociated from, nor at the whim of, their perceptual alterations. Each aspect of the experiential system can, to some degree, be active or passive, lead as

well as follow, move and be moved. There are multiscale benefits—individually, socially, and environmentally—that become realisable when Language, Perception, and Belief can synchronise their versatilities.

However, while this may resonate theoretically, living it is another matter. Between educational indoctrination, media polarisation, social disconnection, and a wealth of other customs, Westerners are wont to indulge and idolise their left-hemispheric compulsions. Recategorisation is no small feat and psychedelics can function as an adjunct to this process; they can help us to challenge the strange reality that allows our paradigms to become inseparable from our pathologies. Moreover, given the West's proclivities towards abstraction and absolutes, any process of unlearning will likely require regular reiteration.

Underlying each chapter of this thesis is a version of the question: how do we vitalise flexible ways of being that might mitigate the excesses of megalithic monocultures? Heeding the pedagogical approaches presented in *Island*, I will reiterate the various answers to this through a multidisciplinary, metaphorical story.

In the next (and final) section I present an allegorical rendering of the main themes covered: categorisation; monophasia; scientific objectivism; modern psychedelic myths; monolingualism; ineffability, to name only the most salient. This is an activation of what has, until now, been a more theoretical exposition of defamiliarisation and recategorisation. Furthermore, in order to appeal to a more right-hemisphere-based language style (and to impress Pala's Old Raja), the metaphor is written almost entirely in verse. It will also constitute this thesis' last word—an act of resistance to suggest that the trope of the neat and pithy conclusion is little more than a fantastical illusion.

To call upon Archera's technique of direct suggestion, if only two insights were to impress themselves from the following poem, may the first be notion that perhaps the value of psychedelics is not bound to their neurological action, but hinges on the simple fact that they can reliably incite a significant perceptual reaction. The second is less content-based, and more centred on the familiarisation of a process—some internalisation of how metaphor can function as means of recategorisation.

I allegorise Language, Perception, and Philosophy as three members of a musical ensemble. While the musicians of any collective may have differing levels of adaptability and skill, the bare minimum we can expect is that they understand their interdependency, and that they make some attempt to harmonise with one another and with their surroundings.

Language, Perception, and Philosophy have now entered the stage of: RECATEGORISING. To ensure that this *raison d'être* remains conspicuous, it has been incorporated into the name of the musical group: SIGNARE ERGOTIC. ('Signare', from the Latin 'to sign', and 'Ergotic', as pertaining to ergot, a family of fungus that targets rye, and from which LSD was famously synthesised.)

SIGNARE ERGOTIC's trio consists of the following members:

Philosophy \approx Bass

Perception \approx Guitar

Language \approx Keys

For narrative coherence, these avatars are personified. However, it is important that they can be ambiguated and reconceived—that the bass, the guitar, and the keys can be considered in their multiplicity of meanings even after their characters have been established. In this context, polysemy can be an advantage. In English, for example, 'the keyboard' could signify any of the following: a specific example of a musical instrument ('the keyboard is red'); the category of instruments ('she's learning to play the keyboard'); a specific sonic example ('the keyboard is offbeat'); the sonic category ('the keyboard is always my favourite part'); or a similar range of general and specific examples of the panel of keys on a computer or typewriter. This ambiguity can be intentionally evoked for cognitive modulations. Finally, the tale assumes no prior knowledge of music, but will incorporate some basic theoretical concepts, such as scales and key changes. Important technical terms are elaborated in the main text, and supplementary terms in the footnotes. In the anomalous cases where jargon appears without an explanation, it is functioning as a literary device.

Furthermore, although this allegory spotlights only three melodic instruments, there is a rhythm section implied, occupied by the human body—the beating heart that is continually responding to the vibrations and frequencies of its surroundings. However, I have opted to leave this detail out of the main narrative thread in order to avoid unwittingly reinforcing the divisions between the carnal body and its perceptual, ideological, and linguistic homestead. Through the medium of a short story with no (submittable) audio counterpart, casting the physical body as the rhythm section of (a subset of) human experience would be too segregating and open to misinterpretation.⁶⁶⁸

⁶⁶⁸ These are only three of the many possible instruments/aspects that contribute to the orchestra of voices in the tonal fabric of lived realities. This metaphorical model is meant to be interactive and easily

I use this poem to return to the platitudes of contemporary psychedelic discourse, outlined in the introductory chapter and intermittently discussed throughout the thesis: psychedelics ‘reset’ the brain; psychedelics dissolve boundaries; and the psychedelic ‘ineffable’—but these reiterations equally satirise Western educational and ontological orthodoxies. Again, using this as the final comment is an intentional tribute to the reality that ambiguity and uncertainty are not a failing—that creative wordplay is an act of unveiling.

transferrable to other contexts, where other instruments might represent additional or alternative sets of experiential categories. My use of a trio is only to reflect the main thematic delineations of this particular thesis.

7.2: CODA: SIGNARE ERGOTIC

THE TALE OF A TRIO

*A musical scale is simply a sequence of vibrational frequency.
Vibrational frequencies that have been organised into sequences.
Strictly speaking, there's an infinity of possibilities.
(Granted, with quite differing harmonic facilities.)*

Movement I: MUSIC SCHOOL

From the first day of music school, the three youngsters of our tale:

Language, Philosophy, and Perception,
Learned about the one—and *only*—real musical scale,
"C Major—without exception".⁶⁶⁹

For the human ear, they were told:

'Non-C Major is a sonic dead zone'.

'Though in savage cultures, they wager,

There are still some sects of Non-C Major,

That's right – No, I really mean it - even to this day'.

'Fear not children, extensive global efforts are underway,

To distribute the superior standards of the C(elestial) scale'—

All in the name of harmony and progress, to be sure,

All to help our fellow humans evolve and mature.

Although the youngsters would always play as a three,

They were disciplined apart, as part of their decree.

On guitar, Perception had the strictest scale drills,

Off-pitch errors were treated with nauseating pink pills.

And as for repeated or enduring transgressions,

The school granted very few concessions.

It was: Detection-Inspection-Injection.

(And in the event of objection)

Rejection-Ejection, and lastly,

The House of Correction.

⁶⁶⁹ C major is a distribution of seven notes that are characterised by their relationship to C; in this scale, C is the 'tonic' or 'central' pitch that contextualises the other sonic intervals. It uses only the seven white keys of a piano: C, D, E, F, G, A, B. 'C Major' is capitalised in the story because, from the perspective of the characters, it is a proper noun (i.e., 'major' is not acting as a modifier).

On bass, Philosophy's deviations were noticed, but as a felt sensation.
At these lower frequencies, pitch appears secondary to vibration.
And it's difficult to follow an aberration directly to its source.
When the ground is rumbling as a matter of course.

On keyboard, Language had some special rights,
(Likely because pianos had a history of grand sonic heights).
The faculty had *Six Society*, an optional club for 'A'-centred arranging.⁶⁷⁰
'By starting with the sixth note of Celestial Major's chart,
Melodies are able to express the sentiments of a broken heart'.
Six Society could be 'A'musing, but like other frivolous art,
It was futile compared with what C Major could impart.

As novices, all three would blunder off key and into the wilderness.
Years of drills, recitals, and rehearsals thankfully minimised this—
a labour of devotion that they could not dismiss.

¶

But then one year, there was a special performance for C-Mas.
Language arrived at fever pitch, taxed and tense.
Burning the midnight oil 'til it oozed through their pores,
Burdening all the bears and chewing all the doors.
In the final solo, Language tried to put the medal to the petal.
Flew sharply overboard at high seas.
Fell flat from the apex of artless revery.
A single error became an eternity of unholy terror.

Language was tormented by the trauma of public shame.
Yet solaced by the nature of the public trauma game.
Tragedy, after all, can make us feel alive.
Grief can grant meaning through which we can collaterally thrive.
But Language had begun to whirl the same thought around and around:
*'Why are keyboards still made with the indecencies of the un-C-ing ages?
Shouldn't our products be updated to reflect the modern sages?'*

⁶⁷⁰ If a piece of music uses the notes of C major but places A (the sixth note of the scale) at its tonal centre, then the piece is said to be in A minor. With A as the 'tonic' or 'home' sound, the same seven frequencies are framed by another context—the notes relate to one another in different ways, and this changes the 'mood' or 'colour' of the sound. One of the most common metaphors in this discourse is that major scales generally sound 'brighter' or 'happier' than 'darker' or more 'melancholic' minor scales. The characters in the allegory do not have the concept of a minor key in their paradigm.

In a feverish state of diabolical unease,
Language disconnected all the black keys.
It wasn't possible to exempt musical errors, no...
It would exile the sonic scums of Non-C Major though.
And as Language had the only key to this claviature,
The severance wouldn't even show.
Nobody ever had to know.

As expected, there were no further cacophonies, big or small.
Perception and Philosophy felt the change that followed Language's fall.
'Bolder and self-assured, even bordering on brazen sometimes',
Keyboard solos became a game of speed and repetition,
—a mesmeric race that accepts no loss of rhythm.
Only absolute accuracy and pin-hole precision.
As if played by a sophisticated mechanism.
It was courageous.
...contagious.

The trio became the jewels of the Conservatory.
They were accelerated, accredited, extoled, and elevated.
At their musical ordination there was a ceremony of certification.
Where their superior successes were sealed with an official nomination:
SIGNARE ERGOTIC.

¶

The trio amassed accolades and eminence.
Rising stars known for raising the bar.
Powered by the ace up their sleeve:
Language's solos were stunning.
They tuned their sleight of hand.
Becoming strategic and cunning.
With Perception beside the crowd,
Signalling to Philosophy on the ground.
Together they analysed what their audience wanted.
Deploying prearranged harmonies based on how they responded.
Paving the way for Language to tease and entice, without ever rolling the dice,
To produce infallible incantations that could stir and spellbind entire nations.

Movement II: THE MELODIC RESET

Years passed with little stress or worry.
Indulging strangers with their fast-paced flurry.
Blitzing them with melodies: snappy, happy, clappy.
They had a devout following who knew just what to expect
SIGNARE ERGOTIC were initially fulfilled: they had money and retweets,
They were spreading the divine scale and getting people onto their feet.
But one member had been succumbing to a sense of loneliness and defeat.
It was a Saturday midsummer morning when Perception announced:
‘I’ll be making some alterations in the show tomorrow’.
‘How uncharacteristic’, thought Philosophy.
‘What alterations?’ asked Language.
Perception wasn’t sure;
‘Improvisation’.

¶¶¶

After Perception announced the impending recalibration,
The other two went scouring the libraries for a sound explanation.
In the heat of the limelight, Language objected to most improvisation,
(Philosophy went along, if only to retain a reputation for contemplation).
Alteration and improvisation, Perception had quite suddenly declared.
And now Language would have to ensure that they were thoroughly prepared.
They ruled out fever, tumours, schizophrenia, malaria, and stroke.
But what they were left with seemed like riddles and smoke.

¶

They found a long-lost legend of an improv-based cult band,
Who made memories vanish with the wave of a hand:
Their followers came from wide and far,
To attend shows that were quite bizarre,
They came with musical palettes intact,
But left with craving absences they couldn’t exact,
Every melody they had hummed or heard,
Was replaced by a silence undeterred.
‘Quite absurd,’ Language slurred.
Philosophy was trying to reason,
Was this amnesia what they desired,
Or just a side effect that always transpired?

Movement III: THE BELLY OF THE WHALE

SIGNARE ERGOTIC were filled with trepidation about their lack of rehearsal.
The show began as usual, until Perception began doing elaborate chord reversals,
From somewhere and nowhere entered more erratic melodies, odd progressions.
Language was carried off by the distant memory of a *Six Society* brass procession.
Philosophy strummed to the spontaneous and strangely supernatural sounds.
Perception was playing exquisitely; elegance, style, and nuance abound.
But together, as soon as they thought they had found a groove,
The guitarist would disrupt the pattern with a countermove.
Another melody suddenly enters with an exotic timbre.
And the music becomes more and more limber.
And is that the mixer giving off static?
The dynamics seem quite erratic.
Vibrant and polychromatic.
The rhythms are in flux.
Yet, richly deluxe.
And suddenly
Perception
Quits.
C-Major.
Non-C Major.
This is Non-C Major.
Superb they pause to listen.
Belief instinctually lowers the reverb.
Sound sounds simultaneously many situations:
Striking, complex, intrepid, spirited, mutation, creation.
They knew only fragments of Non-C Major via strict negation.
The maelstrom seems to contain all the notes of the natural scale.
Yet neither keys nor bass are able to track and trace Perception's trail.
Only in the final set does Perception start to home back towards C Major.
After so many years of being upstaged by fast frequencies and 'higher' sounds,
Philosophy found it relatively regular to step back and blend into the background.
For Language; so used to running with the hounds; this is uncharted unground.

But after the show, they sustained no signs of cognitive erasure.
They were neither robbed of their plastic-fantastic repertoire,
Nor were they unshackled from the binds of C Major.
There was no writing on the walls,
Or blood on the front door.
Not a single forth horseman thundered past on their steed;
SIGNARE ERGOTIC had to concede,
That they had been disproportionately neurotic.

Movement IV: BOUNDARIES

The problem now, was that their creative dynamics had become quite chaotic,
Perception could reproduce nothing that resembled the original performance.
Language tried every keyboard setting for every conceivable circumstance,
Thousands of configurations of 'knee', 'gain', 'attack', and 'delay',
With varying levels of 'sustain', 'chorus', 'release', and 'decay'.
Trials with 'enveloping', 'flanging', 'phasing', and 'panning'.
Eccentric voicings, polyrhythms, and sonic caravanning.
But still Language couldn't evade C Major's givens.
Perception requested a break from the experimentation,
It was causing feedback across all the input channels of sensation.
'Does anyone matter?' Philosophy intermittently murmured with mystification.
'If no one minds, I'm going to the archives', Language said with indignation.

C MAJOR: THE TRUE TONES



- THE DISTANCE BETWEEN TWO CONSECUTIVE WHITE NOTES IS A **tone**.
- C MAJOR HAS 5 TONES AND 2 **ANOMALIES** (E-F AND B-C).

**FROM C4, THE CLOSEST C TO THE MIDDLE OF THE PIANO,
TRUE TUNING FOLLOWS:**

| NOTE | FREQUENCY (HZ) | |
|-------------|---------------------------|----------------|
| C4 | 261.63 | |
| D | 293.66 | |
| E | 329.63 | |
| F | 349.23 | ANOMALY |
| G | 392.00 | |
| A | 440.00 | |
| B | 493.88 | |
| C5 | 523.25 | ANOMALY |

(These are based on a mathematical formula to calculate ratios. Due to corporeal fallibility, divergences within 0.2% of any truth note are indistinguishable to most humans, and therefore permissible. Eg. C4 allows 261.11hz-262.15hz.)

The 0.2% divergence had been irrelevant since the instrument's digitisation.

The frequencies, on the other hand, Language still knew them by heart.

But reciting them now, they suddenly seemed hollow and stark.

SIGNARE ERGOTIC had witnessed this dissolve.

But what did that even really involve?

Sure, as a band they were left lost and blind.

But it's not like it was pandemonium or wholly undefined.

New questions were beginning to percolate and crystalise.

Why did the seven truths start counting at 'C' and not 'A'?

How could truth have a +/-0.2% fallibility margin and still be truth?

Why were there anomalies in a sanctified system?

And why was it called C 'Major'?

Was there a C 'Minor'?

Movement V: 'UNPLAYABLE'

'It simply cannot be done—
It's a categorically impossible task.
Keyboards can't sound the frequencies you ask.'
As Language announced this, a pressure began to lift.
It was substantial enough to notice a curious cognitive shift,
But there had been something—something based on D-E-A-F.
Exasperated by the oblivion, Philosophy was willing to cede.
Unconvinced but outnumbered, Perception finally agreed.
They kept the song simple.
They made it catchy.
Happy and snappy.
A hit, no doubt.
It was recorded.
Produced.
Fixed.
Mixed.
Mastered.
Advertised.
It was hackneyed.
It was an instant hit.
\$\$\$\$\$ \$\$\$\$\$
Was this everything—was this it?
But there had been an oversight.
In that, what Language had said,
Was only partially correct.
A lost piece of the mystery,
Had been left adrift in C-Mas history.
What Language severed in a dire state of mind,
Was exactly what the trio were now unable to find.
Neither Philosophy nor Perception got wind of the fact
That there was something major that Language now lacked;
That all these years, much of the keyboard had not been intact.
A part of the story, left to waste and rot like a broken artifact.

Movement VI: HERE AND NOW

Language has work to do,
Re-activating one note at time,
And as new intervals gradually come into view,
SIGNARE ERGOTIC have the chance to discover music anew.
First, they might learn to harmonise C Major with the pentatonic blues.
But there are more scales than any of them ever imagined could be true,
Each with its own unique beauty and innumerable contexts of potential use.
Defaulting back to C Major will, of course, be difficult to resist.
The entanglements of past habits can be gruelling to untwist.
But the trio will keep trying—they'll persist and push through.
Diversifying their scales and songs, for a harmonious hullabaloo.

To leave aside the myth of mindless matter and objectivity.
To balance the scales between projection and receptivity.
To disentangle value from the stuff of productivity.
To pacify the loneliness of excessive reflexivity.

To counter the curses that divide and deride
The necessary distinctions that keep us distinctly alive.
To get out of our personal depth and into community breadth,
And make the suffering of this mono-hell a hell of a lot less.

To raise the baton and drop the iron curtain,
That makes us assume that tomorrow holds anything certain.
To get out of our mirror maze and move into another phase,
Into a present where whole towns may count nothing for days.

To let categories become stories that invite us to dance,

To give the symphony that keeps us alive

An upscaled stab at a fighting chance.

¶¶¶

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