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Ten theses on the politics of psychedelics

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ABSTRACT

This article liberates discussion of the politics of psychedelics from its present impasse. Across ten theses, it asserts that psychedelics are interruptive deautomating political technologies, which makes them conducive to democratic politics, in the radical sense: rather than consolidating liberal-democratic systems of representative or managed democracy, psychedelic experience tends to open such regimes up to the ferment of radical democracy. To conceptualise the political ramifications of psychedelics requires that psychedelic mysticism and the phenomenology of psychedelic experience be reconceived in ways which give due recognition to their embodied, agential and politically potentiating dimensions, which involves correcting restrictively neuro-centric conceptions of psychedelic mysticism and expanding incomplete phenomenologies. It further requires that the "deautomating" dimensions of psychedelic experience be conceptualised alongside an analysis of the prevailing anti-democratic forces of automation, administrative reason and computationalist abstraction.

During a pause in the US-Israeli attacks on Iran, amid tension between US civilian and military leaders, Donald Trump issued an Executive Order on 18th April 2026 to accelerate research into psychedelic treatments for serious mental health conditions. The announcement was framed in terms of helping veterans overcome PTSD, just as a large-scale ground offensive was being discussed. Three companies were given priority vouchers to accelerate the passage of their products to market and another was given Phase I clinical trial approval for an ibogaine derivative (White House, 2026; FDA US Food and Drug Administration, 2026). The sympathies for psychedelics among key figures in the Trump administration, especially Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., had long been public knowledge but this development, in its bellicose context, brought into sharp focus longstanding anxieties about the right's growing interest in psychedelics. It is to these concerns, as well as to the wider question of how to envisage theoretically the political ramifications of psychedelics, that the following ten theses respond.

Thesis 1. Psychedelics tend to amplify already held political beliefs; clustering at the extremes of the political spectrum is a distorting effect of Prohibition

For the contingent reason of their historical entanglement with a left-leaning counterculture in the Sixties, it was once widely assumed – by detractors and enthusiasts alike – that psychedelics are conducive to greater openness to other people and cultures. It has also long been thought that psychedelics can produce a profound realisation of human interconnectedness with other species and the natural environment, as for example in the suggestion that psychedelics are also "ecodelics" (Doyle, 2011: 20), a succinct theoretical translation of many Indigenous cultures' understandings of plant medicines. This way of thinking has been reflected in more recent theorisations of "Acid Communism" by the late Mark Fisher (Stamm, 2019) and "Psychedelic Socialism" by Jeremy Gilbert (Gilbert, 2017), as well as some outlying biomedical research (Nour et al., 2017; Lyons & Carhart-Harris, 2018). However, scepticism about such utopian claims first found limited expression in the early 1970s, which Erik Davis characterises evocatively as a "Slough of Despond perhaps unprecedented in American history" and a "melancholic aftermath" of the previous decade's dreams of social and political transformation (Davis, 2019: 45, 46). News of the exploits of Charles Manson – psychopath, white supremacist, murderer, cult-leader and psychedelic enthusiast – "bloodied the Aquarian dream in the minds of the silent majority" (Davis, 2019: 47) and talk turned to "acid fascism" (Felton, 1972); the left's despondent mood was further soured by revelations that the CIA had been experimenting with LSD, the counterculture's "sacrament", for mind-control in the 1950s as part of its MKULTRA programme, albeit without success (Davis, 2019: 51).

As Davis indicates, instructive parallels can be drawn between the disillusioned despondency of the American left in the early 1970s and today's pervasive sense of shock and disbelief in the face of the rise of a violently authoritarian radical right globally. Despite promising new

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biomedical research, today too the fear on the left that psychedelics may prove to be more part of the problem than the solution is gaining ground, as scholars point to the fascination with these substances among right-wing ideologues historically, such as Albert Hofmann's friend Ernst Jünger (Piper, 2015), the wider phenomenon of "Rightist Psychedelia" (Langlitz, 2020) and the interest in psychedelics in some murky corners of the radical right today (Pace & Devenot, 2021). Anxieties coalesced initially around Jake Angeli, the 'Q Anon shaman' – an outlandish figurehead for the mob which stormed the US Capitol at the end of the first Trump presidency, who had claimed some experience of psychedelics – before the abovementioned Executive Order of 18th April 2026 brought the radical right's interest in psychedelics to the surface.

Attempts to conceptualise the politics of psychedelics would thus appear to have reached an impasse: the substances seem to be conducive to either extreme, or a number of extreme positions or affiliations, with anecdotal research to date suggesting that the most we can say is that they eschew the centrist middle-ground and are politically versatile, or "pluripotent" (Lonergan, 2021), enabling the entrenchment of all manner of already held beliefs. When facing this impasse, we should be mindful of the significant distorting effect created by Prohibition: in most jurisdictions from which our current understanding of the politics of psychedelics is drawn, these are largely still banned substances. That many of the political expressions of psychedelic experience under these conditions may seem 'extreme' is to be expected, since the majority of the population does not wilfully defy the law or cavort in cavalier fashion with what doctors still mainly tell them are drugs fraught with danger: drug use under Prohibition has always been the pursuit of a small minority, whose defiance of the law is inimical to the consensual centre-ground and whose radicalism (part of their "set") we should expect to be amplified by the use of psychedelics. However, this tells us little about the likely political ramifications of a future mainstreaming of psychedelics, with the easing of Prohibition. To conceptualise that scenario, I relinquish as futile attempts to correlate the use of psychedelics with determinate political positions and step back to consider the prior question about the conditions of possibility for such a politics: since we do not generally think of taking aspirin or anti-depressants having political consequences, what reasons are there for thinking that our experience of psychedelics can be different?

Thesis 2. Psychedelics are redundant for authoritarian political organisation

While their use in numerous Indigenous cultures as agents of socio-cultural consolidation and reproduction is well documented in the anthropological literature (for instance Furst, 1976; Dobkin de Rios, 1990), in a social setting that is already heterogeneous, pluralist, dissensual or fractured, it is unlikely that psychedelics could readily serve the same consolidating purpose. Their "wildness" (Langlitz, 2012: 131) – the difficulty of predicting and stabilising their effects – militates against this. There are a number of signal moments in the history of their use in the West when psychedelics have demonstrated an astonishing propensity to break the frame in which they were originally confined and veer off in other directions, including the way in which Ken Kesey's exposure to LSD and mescaline, among other substances – during experiments funded at arm's length by the CIA – sparked a staggeringly inventive countercultural movement (Lee & Shlain, 1985: 119–134). Such moments are precious demonstrations of psychedelic wildness and the possibility of unpredictable outcomes is an inherent risk of deploying psychedelics in culturally pluralist conditions where the setting and set are already profoundly mixed. When thinking about the political implications of these substances, it is important to distinguish between the very different ways in which psychedelics typically function in relatively homogeneous traditional or Indigenous societies, as against the way in which they are generally used in heterogeneous or pluralist societies. As anthropologist Peter Furst observed, in Indigenous or traditional use,

> The magic plants, then, act to validate and reify the culture, not to afford some temporary means of escape from it. The Huichol of Mexico, like the Cahuilla of Southern California or the Tukano of Colombia, returns from his initiatory 'trip' to exclaim, 'It is as my fathers explained it to me!' One takes peyote, he says, 'to learn how one goes being Huichol.' It is hardly to learn 'how one goes being American' (or German, or English, or Mexican) in the conventional sense that LSD or DMT are employed in the West. (Furst, 1976: 16).[1]

For psychedelics to function reliably as agents of socio-political and cultural reproduction in a heterogeneous or pluralist culture would require that setting and set already be controlled so comprehensively as to make the use of psychedelics redundant: if a system of rule already had control of its subjects' mindset and environment to such an extent – if the system were functionally totalitarian, in other words – there would be no need to call on the amplificatory effects of psychedelics. I formulate this redundancy thesis in an effort to calm anxieties in the psychedelic humanities in the face of anecdotal examples of rightist (Langlitz, 2020) and technocratic or technofascist (Devenot, 2023) psychedelia, anxieties which have been amplified into the wider culture in a way that is now inhibiting new experimentation with psychedelics on the left.

Thesis 3. The political ramifications of psychedelic experience should be conceptualised in terms of the "aesthetic turn" in political theory, in terms of radical democracy – as distinct from liberal or managed democracy – and political sensibilities

My account draws on three interrelated concepts within the "aesthetic turn" in political theory, a movement inspired to a significant extent by the work of philosopher Jacques Rancière (Rancière, 2004) and recently supplemented by recourse to other thinkers, notably the later Wittgenstein (Norval, 2007). For political theory of the aesthetic turn, forms of perception play a significant role in the way collective political subjects come into being with their determinate political sensibilities, deeply anchored embodied dispositions to forms of thought, feeling and action (Panagia, 2018). For this way of thinking about politics, in which moments of metamorphosis and emergence are valued over patterns of stability, those political systems we routinely refer to as "democracies" (as distinct, say, from "autocracies") are only democratic in quite a limited sense: such systems of liberal and representative democracy are in fact founded on an originary limitation of the full power of a *demos* in which all are equal, such that they are aptly described as *managed* democracies. The significant moments in politics occur, for theorists of the aesthetic turn, when liberal-managed-representative democracies are interrupted and broken open by the irruptive manifestation of new subjects and causes within an apparently settled field, reshaping that field. Thus, while the French Revolution's *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen* (1789) proclaimed that all citizens were equal, implicitly and in practice this did not extend to women, the enslaved, or imply economic equality. Such foundational limitations are exposed by political acts such as Olympe de Gouges's publication of a *Declaration of the Rights of Woman* (1791) or Babeuf's Conspiracy of Equals (1796). To give a more recent example, explicit formal and constitutional commitments to equality in the United States were long restricted in practice by customary segregation, especially in the South. The refusal by Rosa Parks in 1955 to give up her seat on an Alabama bus and the wave of protests which ensued were foundational for the civil rights movement. For theorists of the aesthetic turn, no political order can ever be complete yet political orders tend to assert their own completeness and closure to new claims; however, all are prone to the irruptive manifestation of new claims by newly emerging political

[1] I am grateful to Nick Langlitz for impressing upon me the significance of this passage.

subjects. Conditions of perception are key to understanding such moments of emergence in the aesthetic turn, as Nikolas Kompridis outlines:

> If politics is also about what can appear and how it appears to sense, about what can be seen and heard and what can't be seen and heard; if it is about what we are able to see and hear and about what we are unable to see and hear, then *democratic* politics is about letting what could not be seen and heard *be* seen and heard by cultivating new ways of seeing and hearing. Put in slightly different language, politics takes place under given conditions of intelligibility and possibility that enable and disable the capacities of human agents to see what is at stake in what is seen and heard in the space of everyday experience. It is the task of democratic politics to open up and redisclose these conditions of intelligibility and possibility, creating alternative possibilities for thought and action. Such *reflective redisclosure* requires much more than argument, perception and the conditions of perception, a transformation of sensibility as well as of rationality. (Kompridis, 2014, pp. xvii-xviii, emphasis original)

Democracy, in the radical sense, depends on this "aesthetic" (perceptual) capacity to see how we see and, in turn, to see the world anew. That which develops our capacity to reflect upon and modify the conditions of intelligibility and possibility which determine what and who gets to appear as a political cause, or subject, is conducive to democratic politics in this substantial and "aesthetic" sense. In framing my account of the politics of psychedelics in such terms, I am also returning to Herbert Marcuse's early appreciation of the capacity of psychedelics to nurture political sensibilities:

> the rupture with the continuum of aggression and exploitation would also break with the sensibility geared to this universe. Today's rebels want to see, hear, feel new things in a new way: they link liberation with the dissolution of originary and orderly perception. The 'trip' involves the dissolution of the ego shaped by the established society – an artificial and short-lived dissolution. But the artificial and 'private' liberation anticipates, in a distorted manner, an exigency of the social liberation: the revolution must be at the same time a revolution in perception which will accompany the material and intellectual reconstruction of society, creating the new aesthetic movement. (Marcuse, 1969: 37)

Although the thinkers who have shaped the "aesthetic turn" generally speak from the left, radical democracy is not inherently left-wing: in fact, the aesthetic turn is better understood as an indeterminate analytic, or a technics of political emergence. In summary, my conceptualisation of the political ramifications of psychedelic experience draws from the aesthetic turn: (i) the principle that all ostensibly democratic systems are in fact limitations of radical democracy which must be repeatedly opened up to new causes and subjects they initially refuse to recognise; (ii) the unavoidable agonism involved; (iii) the belief that conditions of perception are decisive for the emergence of new subjects and, finally, (iv) that embodied political sensibilities constitute the material basis of politics. To understand how political sensibilities are shaped in psychedelic experience requires correction of the disembodying mentalistic bias wired into contemporary psychedelic science and medicine.

Thesis 4. The understanding of psychedelic mysticism prevalent in the psychedelic renaissance must be corrected – it is mentalistic or neuro-centric, dualist and proto-computationalist

In *The Doors of Perception*, Aldous Huxley surveyed centuries of Christian and 'Oriental' ascetic, meditative and mystical practice from the lofty height of the "perennialist" perspective on world religions he had elaborated in the preceding decade:

> most contemplatives worked systematically to modify their body chemistry, with a view to creating the internal conditions favourable to spiritual insight. When they were not starving themselves into low blood sugar and a vitamin deficiency, or beating themselves into intoxication by histamine, adrenalin and decomposed protein, they were cultivating insomnia and praying for long periods in uncomfortable positions, in order to create the psycho-physical symptoms of stress. […] Today we know how to lower the efficiency of the cerebral reducing valve by direct chemical action, and without the risk of inflicting serious damage on the psycho-physical organism. (Huxley, 2004: 100)

Although some of the physiological language Huxley used has dated, the underlying contention – that ascetic and meditative practices alter body and brain chemistry in ways which resemble the effects of psychedelics – has been foundational for contemporary understanding of psychedelics and has provided a frame of intelligibility which reciprocally illuminated both the action of psychedelics and the work of ascetic self-transformation by understanding both in terms of neurochemical change. Huxley thus asserted the continuity of psychedelic experience in the mid-twentieth-century West with centuries of mystical practice across the globe, but also suggested that psychedelics, because they are capable of "direct" action on brain chemistry, constitute a less risky future, thereby relegating ascetic practices of bodily self-mortification to the dangerous past. Historically speaking, Huxley's neurochemical vision of psychedelics as relatively low-risk biotechnologies capable of "direct chemical action" on the *brain* was about four decades ahead of its time, better anticipating the neurobiological orientation of the psychedelic renaissance in the 1990s than the more eclectic and embodied preoccupations prevailing in the immediate aftermath of his writing. Huxley's vision informs today's biomedical understanding of psychedelics and their therapeutic uses: despite Huxley's mention of mystics modifying their "body chemistry", for him this was clearly part and parcel of their *indirectness*, since such changes implicitly only have impact when they affect the brain, whereas psychedelics act directly on the brain. In other words, Huxley's vision of the ascetic past and the psychedelic future alike are centred in mentalisitic or neuro-centric fashion on the human brain and the psychedelic future is one in which the protracted messiness of indirect action on brain via body will no longer be necessary. Huxley's vision of the psychedelic mysticism of the future is thus one in which the body will be further eclipsed, widening the Cartesian dualist divide between body and soul/mind, intensifying our culture's longstanding denigration of embodied existence and preparing the ground for a technocratic and computationalist future in which information treated by the brain can be readily plugged into other machinic circuits. By "computationalism" I refer to a nexus of beliefs about cognition, politics, society and (dis)embodiment which prioritise abstraction from the messy materiality of embodied human existence and a concatenating series of objectionable hierarchisations:

> a commitment to a set a views that are not at all new to Western or other imperial cultures in our history: views according to which cognition is a process of abstracting away from the embeddedness of material culture, and human beings can not merely be separated hierarchically from animals but also amongst themselves in terms of their cultural deployment of abstract rationality, of so-called 'reason'. (Golumbia, 2009: 8)

Computationalism emerges, according to David Golumbia (Golumbia, 2009: 8), from "a terrible anxiety about exactly the ambiguity that characterizes human experience", a constitutive ambiguity broached in the next thesis. Huxley's conception of psychedelic mysticism also presupposes an inherently solitary, isolated, autarkic subject: "every embodied spirit is doomed to suffer and enjoy in solitude" (Huxley, 2004: 3). This heroically separate subject was often already a masculinist abstraction from real networks of care, as Erika Dyck (2021) has shown in work on the hidden emotional and intellectual labour performed by the wives of psychedelic pioneers in the 1950s. In the psychedelic renaissance, such a view of the inherent experiential isolation of individual subjects marries easily with the individualism of

psychiatry to yield a conception of psychedelically assisted psychotherapy as an intervention oriented principally towards "an isolated brain on drugs" (Petrement, 2023: 2) – mental illness is individualised brain pathology which can be remedied by individualised neuropharmacological treatment. When Huxley construed psychedelic mysticism within William James's psychologising framework and apprehended Eckhart's cerebral mysticism through that lens, not only did he give prominence to a dominant tradition of mentalistic and proto-computationalist mysticism, which tended to ignore embodied experience, but he made psychedelic experience a matter of private subjective inner experience, a mere intensity of feeling already blocked from any possibility of political or social effects.[2]

It could be objected that the above critique ignores the fact that biomedical researchers working with neurocomputationalist models have delivered hundreds of compelling studies of psychedelic efficacy and impressive clinical outcomes. Yet it does not follow from the fact that a given scientific paradigm is functionally effective and deemed adequate in explanatory terms at a given moment, with respect to a limited range of questions (for example, do psychedelics outperform SSRIs in treating depression and anxiety and how do they work?), that there are no other questions or phenomena which might have been captured with a more expansive model. The success of neurocomputationalist biomedical research in identifying the transdiagnostic therapeutic efficacy of psychedelics in relieving a range of mental health conditions does not in itself mean that there are not also other effects of psychedelics – for example, social and political effects – which barely register within the individualised frame of that model and the narrower set of questions researchers have deployed it to address. Although still largely articulated within the dominant neurocomputationalist paradigm, some recent studies have identified curious side-effects of therapeutic use in changes to "nature relatedness" (Kettner et al., 2019), "metaphysical" beliefs (Timmermann et al., 2021) and "connectedness to natural and social worlds" (Forstmann & Sagioglou, 2025). These phenomena do not in themselves invalidate the neurocomputationalist model but they may suggest it is straining to account for some of the more intriguing effects of these substances and that the narrow set of questions and purposes it has been deployed to address should be significantly widened. The neurocomputationalist model has sat at the apex of Western technoscience for around three decades now and its vision of the brain as an organic computer is all too well aligned with extractive and abstracting computationalist forces in the wider culture, as I discuss in Thesis 6, below. Nevertheless, recent research in the epistemology of science has begun to question the "digital imperialism" (Longo & Lassègue, 2025) by which neurocomputationalism reduces cognition to calculation; similarly, theorists of "the new biology" such as Philip Ball, in *How Life Works* (2023), now cast doubt on the adequacy of the computationalist paradigm and argue that mind, agency and autopoiesis should be recognised within every biological structure from the cell upwards.[3] Paradigms may already be shifting, in other words. Furthermore, if the suggestibility-enhancing effects of psychedelics mean that they can be understood as "superplacebos" (Strassman, 2017; Dupuis & Veissière, 2022), then there is a danger that the neurocomputationalist paradigm – along with the unfortunate computationalist socio-political ramifications with which it is enmeshed – is being artificially re-entrenched within psychedelic studies, indeed psychedelically amplified, at precisely the moment when it is being questioned, qualified and perhaps gradually superseded elsewhere in science.

Thesis 5. The ecstatic bodymind centred in minoritised traditions of female mysticism reveals thoughts and feelings in inextricable imbrication with the body

By deconstructing the dominant disembodying Eckhart-James-Huxley paradigm of psychedelic mysticism and learning instead from the minoritised and feminine traditions of Christian mysticism which it overshadowed, we can arrive at a coherent conceptualisation of psychedelic political sensibility. In the Medieval and Early Modern periods, mysticism involved a claim to political authority, since a direct connection with the divine could circumvent the intermediaries of clerical institutions. For women, whose bodies were sequestered, cloistered, fettered, policed and monitored and who were excluded from the exercise of priestly power and institutions of scholarly religious learning, which remained largely the preserve of men, a mysticism of the ecstatic body was an ingeniously creative sidestep which allowed an alternative claim to mystical, "prophetic" or "charismatic" authority to be voiced (Bynum, 1991: 135; Jantzen, 1995: xv), though I am not suggesting this was a deliberate tactic. The fact that women gradually came to be aligned in Christian theology with the corruption of the body – or 'flesh' – and deemed far less capable, if not entirely incapable, of transcending that prison by the exercise of spiritual or intellectual effort, meant that women mystics were starting out from a particularly unpromising position and their achievement of reversal was all the more remarkable. I turn to one exemplary late figure from that minoritised tradition, the sixteenth-century Spanish mystic, writer, Carmelite nun and exceptionally energetic founder of new institutions, Teresa of Avila, as apprehended in a secularising psychoanalytic translation of her life by Julia Kristeva in the lengthy essay-novel, *Thérèse mon amour* (2008).[4] The author-narrator remarks: "The *Ego Cogito* of Descartes gradually seeped into Christian mysticism to eclipse the *Ego amo* and *Ego affectus est* of the Christian subject" (Kristeva, 2008: 690). According to Kristeva, who is clearly familiar with Michel de Certeau's *The Mystic Fable* (1995 [1982]), Flemish and Rhineland mystics of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, most famously among them Meister Eckhart, practised a form of mysticism which was cerebral and premised on a denial of the body. Kristeva also places Teresa's contemporary John of the Cross within that lineage. By contrast, Teresa offers a radically different vision of embodied thinking and feeling: she "introduced the sensible into the intellect to weave in this way an intermediate space [*un espace tiers*]" (254), a form of embodied thinking-feeling which can form the basis for a new psychedelic politics. If we start out from this energised *bodymind*, rather than from the prevalent but fictional construct of the isolated brain on drugs imagined as a malfunctioning organic computer requiring neurochemical reset, a new psychedelic politics regrounded in embodied political sensibility is within reach.

Thesis 6. Psychedelics are deautomating political technologies

The capacity of psychedelics to "deautomate" habitual ways of thinking, to break fixation within existing patterns of thought and feeling and to increase openness to experience has been observed in empirical and theoretical research on their role in creativity or creative problem-solving (Harman et al., 1966; Gandy et al., 2022; Davis, 2023). This "deautomating" propensity of psychedelics also develops the capacity to imagine new political sensibilities and solutions. Social and political reproduction function by constraining – containing, restricting

[2] The extent to which the term "mysticism" names a coherent array of ideas and practices lies beyond the scope of this article but it is worth noting that even some enthusiasts express scepticism on this point, for instance Simon Critchley (2024), who also suggests that religious mysticism may have transformed into "aesthetic experience" (9). The legitimacy of Huxley's even bolder condensation of centuries of different religious traditions' mystical practice has often been contested but is nevertheless foundational for psychedelic science.

[3] I am grateful to Ian James for helping me to see the significance of this body of work.

[4] While the book has been translated into English, by Lorna Scott Fox, as *Teresa, My Love: An Imagined Life of the Saint of Avila* (Columbia University Press, 2014), the translations given here are my own.

and channelling – the vast imaginative potential for creative reinvention implicit in masses of bodyminds equipped with the deautomating plastic capacity to change both themselves and their world. Digitally driven bureaucracies of rule seek to administer human and other animal life by disposing the cognitive and other biological matter of populations in accordance with impersonal scripts of procedures and processes, often administering 'us' dividually or subpersonally, in ways which bypass or undercut juridical and ethical individuality and autonomy (Rouvroy & Berns, 2013), or by reaching over the singular embodied subject in conspiratorially secretive ways which conceal the basic information we would need to make good democratic decisions. Human decision-makers in managed liberal-democratic society increasingly find their freedom of movement or discretion constrained by bureaucratic processes, procedures, systems and pressures operating according to a calculus of risk and a scale of economic value which they are powerless to modify. The digital revolution seems to be turning out largely as the late Bernard Stiegler (2010) predicted: even middle-class vocational labour in the privileged West, or Global North, is increasingly proletarianised within a computationalist frame. Our society and the judgments it makes in ordering and reproducing itself is becoming increasingly automated.

Psychedelics can disrupt the computationalist script, which conspires to administer a social life voided of politics, by strengthening the capacity for deautomation. Digital systems and the proletarianised-bureaucratised people with whom they form assemblages increasingly try to foist on us their readymade, habitual, solutions, procedures and processes; yet politics in the radically democratic sense of the term requires the capacity for a deautomating and emancipatory stepping back from such reflex remedies reproduced from the past. Biomedical research into the role of psychedelics in enhancing creativity provides indications of how exactly psychedelics might function as emancipatory political technologies. Creativity is usually conceptualised in the psychological literature in terms of an interplay between Convergent Thinking (CT) and Divergent Thinking (DT). In effective creative problem-solving, DT prevails in the early phases, as established solutions are opened up and a range of new possibilities envisaged, whereas CT becomes more important later as thought converges or coalesces around one single solution. An integrative review of biomedical studies investigating the role which serotonergic psychedelics play in creative problem-solving (Costa, 2023) noted a variety of different impacts on DT in the early phase and that there is to date insufficient research to draw reliable conclusions. I would speculate that control of setting and set has a constraining and containing effect on this early enhancement of DT and the opening up involved. It is this early enhancement of DT which corresponds most closely to what I have conceptualised as "deautomation". The review study is somewhat less tentative about the enhancement of CT in later phases, including the "afterglow" period, "resulting in increased capacity for development of previously generated ideas after the acute effects subside" (Costa, 2023: 307). This consolidation of CT in the later phases may well worry those readers inclined to receive these Theses as a recipe for 'radicalisation' and certainly in a clinical context there is growing concern around possibilities of iatrogenic harm arising from the "sense of authority and heightened validation" (Timmermann et al., 2022) accruing to the "noetic" insights of psychedelic experience, sometimes amounting to "epistemic injury", as therapist and theorist Timmy Davis argues. My strongly held but increasingly minoritarian conviction is that there just is no political equivalent to iatrogenic harm of this type: determinate political positions are not amenable to bioethical or other safeguarding but rather engage human freedom radically and absolutely.[5] Nevertheless, just as clinicians seeking to help patients integrate difficult psychedelic experiences are beginning to ask patients to suspend belief in the specific *content* of the 'memory' or feeling and ask after the functional effects of having had that experience under psychedelics, my suggestion in the thesis that follows is that to conceptualise the politics of psychedelics requires a new approach to the phenomenology of psychedelic experience which emphasises the effects of its form over the impressions made by its content.

Thesis 7. We need a new phenomenology of psychedelic experience: the bodymind's agential experiencing of its own plasticity under psychedelics is more important (for politics) than the phenomenal content of the trip

In his phenomenological account of psychedelically-assisted psychotherapy, Mateo Sanchez Petrement observes that psychedelics are drugs which, once ingested, "pretty much force you to experience the world – and yourself – from a different angle" and "show us that we can still make contact with a larger world that harbours room and reasons for us to be different" (Petrement, 2023: 4). Taking these drugs involves a radical, sometimes wildly unpredictable, change of perspective on our selves and the world for the duration of the trip, indeed often multiple changes of perspective as the trip unfolds. The effectiveness of psychedelically-assisted psychotherapy in treating depression is understood phenomenologically, in Petrement's non-dualist account, to follow from the ecstatic apprehension of "multiple possibilities" as possible "orientations" of our bodymind towards the world: if to be depressed is to experience the world as "bereft of possibilities", psychedelic therapy "imbues the world with an expanded sense of possibility" (Petrement, 2023: 6). If we can describe such a re-orientation of our bodymind towards the world in terms of self-transformative knowledge, can we also claim that this experience is transformative of the world beyond the minimal sense in which bodyminds are part of the world and that to be relieved of depression, or addiction, or other pathologies of limited possibility constitutes a change to at least that one small part of the world? That is, how do we get from a descriptive non-dualist phenomenology of psychedelic therapy to a compelling conceptualization of psychedelic politics? A second and related question arising from Petrement's account concerns its ambiguity, or agnosticism, about the extent to which the 'content' of the experience – *what* I see, think and feel on the trip, what we might call its *phenomenal content* – is significant. In other words, is the transformative effect of the trip dependent on the specific content of the "new perspective" (or perspectives) it supplies: does the trip furnish a deployable new perspective which indicates, as it were, a specific path leading the person undergoing it out of their depression, or other form of pathological or unwanted stuckness? Or is it something else about psychedelic experience and, if so, what?

How we answer these two questions not only determines whether we can envisage substantial political effects arising from psychedelic experience but will also inform our understanding of which kinds of questions, problems, dangers, worries and opportunities matter within psychedelic studies and the psychedelic renaissance. If we believe that the specific phenomenal content of the psychedelic experience matters more and that the function of psychedelic experience is to furnish us with a new perspective that can be adopted or deployed, in the manner of a set of coordinates or directions leading us from the maze of stuckness, then we will likely also worry very much about the risk of being

[5] There is a decadent liberal-democratic assumption driving the current boom in research into "conspiracy theory" and dis/misinformation in behavioural psychology, sociology, philosophy and political science – and the media narrative it nourishes – namely that people would converge around the correct political position if only they had the right information.

misled: about bad trips, about psychedelic apophenia and conspiracism, about false memories and generally about the ways in which bad individual or corporate actors, or insufficiently well trained guides, might abuse the heightened suggestibility of the psychedelic state in a way which violates the tripper's autonomy, whether deliberately or not. If we believe that the trip's phenomenal contents constitute a set of coordinates or a specific orientation, we will understandably worry about the possibility of being supplied with the wrong coordinates or sent off in a harmful or imprudent direction. And we might also be particularly preoccupied with metaphysical questions around the reality, or otherwise, of some of those phenomenal contents: "Do DMT elves exist?", "Is psychedelic experience evidence for panpsychism?", etc. It seems to me, however, that the underlying view such worries and questions presuppose about the status of phenomenal content in the transformative psychedelic trip is ill conceived.

For politics it is mainly not the specific phenomenal content of the psychedelic experience which matters in a transformative trip but rather something else about that trip: *the experiencing* in psychedelic experience. What matters politically about transformative psychedelic experience is the intense appreciation it affords of my own plasticity, of my being plastic, by which I mean an experience of my being simultaneously the object and the subject of remoulding, of my being both the shaper or artist of my own reinvention and the material being thus reformed. Because the psychedelic trip, even a lengthy nine or so hours with LSD, is still transitory, it is sufficiently condensed to constitute a concentrated experience of my passing from one state into another, or through a series of states, as in the various stages and degrees figured and mapped in canonical manuals of psychedelic experience, and out again into 'the real world'. Provided that I chose to take the psychedelic, am aware of having done so and however bizarre or immersively 'life-like' the content of the experiences I undergo may be, I will retain some awareness that they have been occasioned by my decision to ingest the psychedelic – or, if the phenomenal content of the trip is particularly intense, I will recover that awareness as I emerge from it. However heteronomous the phenomena I experience during the trip may seem to be, it is significant that I remain aware, or will once again become aware as the trip fades, that my experiencing such phenomena proceeded from my own decision vis-à-vis the drug and speaks of my autonomy, or a delicate interplay between autonomy and heteronomy which I have conceptualised elsewhere in terms of "autoheteronomy" (Davis, 2022). Over and above the specific content of the trip, what I experience over its duration, including as it subsides, is my own malleability consequent to my prior decision. Whatever I may see, think or feel during the trip – its phenomenal content – what it offers is an intense experiencing of my own plasticity, my capacity for self-transformation.

By analogy, when we read a novel we may become engrossed in the plot and character of the fiction (its representational or phenomenal content); yet at the same time the formal features of the text may also delight and my practices of reading and consuming it will help to (self-) constitute me as a particular kind of subject – indeed, it is the capacity of the book to enable such a work of self-cultivation that leads Peter Sloterdijk to characterise books as the paradigmatic anthropological instruments of the humanities in the sense in which the nineteenth century invented them. To be sure, literary scholarship finds it much more difficult to access, conceptualise and articulate what goes on in that second domain of form and subjectification – our coming into being as certain kinds of subject through the practice of reading, of encountering a particular formal disposition – and mainly prefers to dwell instead in the first domain of representational/phenomenal content, yet the neglected question of how particular forms of text and particular practices of reading shape or give form to subjects is vital, far too important to be outsourced to any crude sociology of literature. By analogy, while we are well equipped by such prevailing traditions of cultural interpretation to engage with – and worry about – the phenomenal contents of the trip, we are far less well equipped to think about the way in which the formal qualities of the psychedelic trip shape particular types of subject. To collapse the analogy and put matters more simply, we might speculate that it is, in part, because we have never fully understood how the reading of books cultivates subjects (in the humanities), even though we have reason to believe it does, that we have struggled to understand how psychedelic experience might cultivate political sensibilities (in the psychedelic humanities).

Danny Forde's (2025) recent phenomenological account rightly emphasises the way in which everyday ('automated') perception is suspended under higher doses of psychedelics, in

> a creative and participatory act where the perceiver, embedded in physical, social, and cultural environments, contextualises the percept according not only to the aforementioned environments but also to the temperament, character, interests, and projects of the perceiver, the actions or potential actions that the perceiver is taking or plans on taking, and the emotional state of the perceiver. (Forde, 2025: 82)

This implies that suspending habitual (automated) modes of perception involves more than just altering or distorting the way we see the world; it also interrupts (deautomates) the nexus of purposes, intentions and actions bound up both with ordinary perception and collective reproduction of the social world. While Forde's reliance on a spiritualising Germanic phenomenology leads him to develop a dualist account of psychedelic experience as a transcending of the "physiological happenstances of an embodied ego" (Forde, 2025: 98), the work of French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty encourages us instead to redirect attention towards the agential non-dualism required to conceptualise the politics of psychedelics: the political imaginary enlivened under psychedelics is "in my body as a diagram of the life of the actual" (1993: 126).[6]

Thesis 8. Bodymind's experiencing of microperceptions under psychedelics goes hand in hand with metaperceptual awareness of its perspective as perspective, including its embodied and situated position in the world

What matters in transformative trips is less the specific phenomenal content than an experience dependent on the formal features of the trip: the experience of departure from everyday reality and of passing through different states of alternate reality, all of this consequent to my initial decision to take the psychedelic although not necessarily controllable at every moment thereafter. This constitutes an experience of my own plasticity, my malleability to my own actions and intentions: a rare experience of being both shaper and shaped. This amounts to an account of transformative psychedelic experience in terms of *the function of its form*. We are effectively undergoing an experience of what sociologists and political scientists call, in another register, agency: of our being selves with the capacity to modify our own being, our lives and our world. While we may be aware in a more diffuse sense that our choices shape our destiny and that (auto)biographical reflection or psychoanalytic therapy can gradually reveal how we came to be what we are, and in turn how we might become different, the very much longer *durée* over which the effects of our choices on our lives become manifest is such that this will at best be a slow, distanced and reflectively mediated experience, lacking intensity. The more temporally compressed experience of our own plasticity under psychedelics is much more intense and direct than such slower and longer-distance reflectively-mediated apprehension. Under psychedelics, we experience

[6] I acknowledge the need for further work to specify precisely how the agential body is involved in psychedelic experience and explore this in a forthcoming article. As Kasper Levin (2016) has argued, Merleau-Ponty's writings on art are central rather than peripheral to understanding how the body constitutes a pre-reflective organising principle in perception, consciousness, experience, language and culture.

directly our own malleability to ourselves and to our environment, our being both shaper and shaped. This approaches, from a different angle, the longstanding recognition in psychedelic science of the importance of "set" and "setting" in influencing the quality of the trip. Transformative psychedelic experiences are transformative because they are an intense experience of the reality of self-transformation. Transformative psychedelic trips are transformative by virtue of the direct and intense experience of our plasticity which they involve – of our capacity to shape and be shaped by own shaping – of our malleability and our capacity to fashion our experience and this experience is more a function of the general form of the trip than of its specific phenomenal content.

My formal-functionalist account of the transformative trip as an experience of our own plasticity and capacity for self-shaping does not imply that the phenomenal contents of the trip are worthless, meaningless epiphenomena of chemical change with no intrinsic meaning. It may well be that aspects of the phenomenal content will hold deep personal meaning for me, may harbour previously unimagined insight into my self and my situation, into my unconscious motivations and investments, or my unconscious *tout court*, of the sort which psychoanalytically-literate post-trip integration is well equipped to explore. At the same time, the phenomenal content of the trip may well be insignificant, frivolous or, in the case of a 'bad trip', senselessly terrifying: phenomenal content is not necessarily meaningful and the noetic experience of specific meanings it involves may sometimes be misleading.

While therapeutic uses of psychedelics may want to focus on the personal dimensions legible in the phenomenal content, for the politics of psychedelics what matters about the transformative trip is the direct, intense and potentiating experience it offers of our plasticity, our being both shaper and shaped: of our malleability to our own intentions. Having a direct and intense experience of our own plasticity in this way is qualitatively very different from, and far more potent in its functional effects than, merely believing oneself to be plastic and capable of change over time, of making new 'life choices' and resolutions to live differently. At stake is a far more profoundly and intensely felt transformative conviction about our own capacity for self-shaping.

At this point it is helpful to consider the emphasis which Henri Michaux and other intelligent and productive psychonauts, such as Kary Mullis, have placed on psychedelic experience being one of "microperceptions" (Davis, 2023; Doyle, 2011: 193). Michaux marvelled at the way in which, during the trip, he not only became suddenly aware of minute but significant facets of his way of perceiving the world which usually exist below the threshold of awareness, as automatisms permitting perception but not themselves objects of perception – but also, in tandem, he became aware of the way in which he was looking at the world, or looked at his very looking. In other words, in tandem with a capacity to see the microperceptual came a reflective, metacognitive or metaperceptual apprehending of his way of looking, or what we might call a seeing of his perspective *as* a perspective.[7] Attending to microperceptions during psychedelic experience entails a metaperceptual or metacognitive seeing of my way of seeing, a seeing of my perspective as a perspective. Rather than a solipsistic, narcissistic or, as it were, onanistic absorption in the flotsam and jetsam of their own affects and percepts, when grasped in terms of a seeing of my way of seeing, or a seeing of my perspective as perspective, one enabled by the deautomation of perceptual and cognitive automatisms, the cultivated psychonaut's activity can be politically fruitful. The account I am advancing here is compatible with neuroscientific models of psychedelic action, which understand the effect of these drugs in terms of a relaxation of the predictive and ordering grip of "hyperpriors" over inflowing sense and other data (Carhart-Harris & Friston, 2019). What those models lack, however, is an adequate grasp of the decisive difference which microperceptual and metaperceptual awareness make in phenomenological – that is, experiential, human and ultimately political – terms.

Thesis 9. The psychedelic cultivation of political sensibilities across the left-right spectrum will lead to a renascence of democracy

Democratic political systems flourish when a wide spectrum of different views are authentically held and passionately advanced. "All change is a miracle to contemplate; but it is a miracle which is taking place every instant", Thoreau (1983: 53) remarked. Psychedelics offer an intensely immersive experience of such second-by-second changes, an appreciation of that which is miraculous about change, in tandem with a deeply felt sense of our agency as shaper of those changes. To experience oneself in this way, as the agent and object of one's own self-transformation, is profoundly potentiating: this deeply felt experiencing of my own plasticity, or agency, during the trip is potentiating in a way in which holding merely propositional knowledge about my being plastic or agential is not. This part of my account of the politics of psychedelics might recall the way in which Stoic meditations function, in particular in Michel Foucault's analysis of them as technologies of the self: as *ethopoietic* "virtual gymnastics", ways of transforming the subject's ethos, or way of being in the world, ways which cultivate the subject's capacity to live purposefully and confront adversity: "virtual gymnastics in which the subject tests its capacity to respond to specific events and measured its progress in developing these capacities" (Pottage, 2015: 83).

Does this imply that psychedelics are political only in so far as experiencing them is, as it were, a rehearsal which readies us for political action – if so, might they better be described as 'proto-political'? It is true that having psychedelic experience is not the same as doing politics, in the sense of taking political action in pursuit of a particular objective, and indeed being high on psychedelics might very well be a serious obstacle to taking such action in any given moment. Yet it would be an error to neglect the insistence within the "aesthetic turn" on the cultivation of a particular democratic sensibility as essential for the practice of radically democratic politics – such a work of cultivation cannot simply be relegated to the proto-political if it is, in fact, a vital potentiating condition of political action. Consider an analogy with the invaluable developmental yield of "imaginative play" in child development: to the half-observant onlooker, such play is easily dismissed as charming but pointless makebelieve. However, developmental psychology, or more careful observation, teach us that such imaginative play is a vital way in which children develop the invaluable capacity to understand themselves, others and the world. In other words, imaginative play for children is a potentiating and developmentally vital form of *ethopoiesis*. However, as some psychologists have noted, some adults also play and the capacity for "playful play" is, for adults, "an evolved biological adaptation that enables the individual to escape from local optima and discover better solutions", enabling the individual "to discover new approaches to dealing with the world" (Bateson & Martin, 2013: 3, 5). Such playful play is thought to be an essential component in creativity and innovation.

Daybreak can figure renascence. "All memorable events, I should say, transpire in morning time and in a morning atmosphere" (Thoreau, 1983: 233). In his reading of *Walden*, Stanley Cavell (1981: 60) places

[7] I mean "seeing as" in the Wittgensteinian sense, which has informed a wider body of work in the "aesthetic turn" of political theory, where it has encountered Jacques Rancière's differently derived emphasis on the role of aesthetics in politics, in the wide sense of "aesthetics" pertaining to modes of perception. Translating my account of the transformative trip into the Wittgensteinian register prevalent within the aesthetic turn, I could say that the function of the form of the trip is to precipitate "aspect change", the political ramifications of which are well established by Arletta Norval (2007: 126): "Aspect change allows one to notice that one is now seeing something, not just in terms of this or that picture but also as a picture. Where aspect change occurs, what becomes visible is not just the presence of a different understanding of things, but an awareness of the multiplicity of aspects under which something can be seen."

emphasis on the need for renascence as a condition for the continued growth of "grownups": "for the grownup to grow [s]he requires strangeness and transformation, i.e., birth". Psychedelic experience provides a profoundly felt sense of renascence, an opportunity to rediscover in adult life the potentiating capacity for playful play which comes naturally to most children and to revive a sense of our agency in ways which develop democratic sensibility and equip us with aptitudes essential for political action, including the capacity not only to bear but to marvel at change, a sense that we and the world might begin afresh by stepping away from accumulated past perspectives (deautomation) and that our ways of looking might thus be transformed. To have such an experience of our capacity for effective transformational change is, within the terms of the "aesthetic turn", a potentiating experience that is properly considered a vital dimension of the political. Nevertheless, it is not coextensive with the political: political disagreements are not somehow soluble in psychedelic experience – determinate causes, aims and debates in a sense remain untouched by psychedelic experience and we cannot look to psychedelics to help us adjudicate the relative merits of particular positions, or indeed, I would suggest, to supply us with any readymade orientations for political action or allow us to dispense with macropolitical structures and institutions. All such deliberation and debate, which are also essential dimensions of the political, would not be magically resolved into consensus if we were all to take psychedelics; in fact, we should expect the reverse – a much more vigorous discussion between people who not only hold differing perspectives but who feel profoundly wedded to them yet whose experience of psychedelics allows them to remain open to the possibility of seeing differently.[8] That is what democracy is. Psychedelic experience is political in so far as it nourishes the aptitudes, confidence and courage to take part in democracy in the first place. In Cavell's reading of Thoreau, this question of the will to engage in politics is central, as is its obverse in the "quiet desperation" and "silent melancholy" of the majority, which constitute forms of "political depression" and pose a threat to democracy as an instantiated form of macropolitical life:

> We can begin to see why Cavell might make the claims he does when we consider the kind of danger posed to democracy by alienation, and the extent to which Emerson and Thoreau are concerned with that danger. Democracy can be distinguished from alternative modes of political life such as fascism, oligarchy, monarchy, or aristocracy in many ways. But the most important way concerns the *activity* of the people. Only in democracy, where the people rule, are the people as a whole allowed and indeed called upon to participate in public life. […] If the citizenry or a large segment of the citizenry fail to take up the tasks of democratic life, democracy begins to decline and morph into one of the other modes of organising political power – in Plato's account, into tyranny, and, in contemporary conditions, into a more or less tyrannical form of plutocracy. (Norris, 2017: 143)

The politics of psychedelics should be understood in terms of the work of psychedelic experience in potentiating the subject for participation in democratic political action and in forging embodied democratic sensibility which can not only advance a cause with confidence but bear the prospect of changing perspective as circumstances require, or in response to the persuasiveness of new arguments. Fears that psychedelics might increase political polarisation are understandable but misplaced: the current clustering at the extremes is largely a consequence of Prohibition and as that eases we can expect to see a flourishing of psychedelics in the middle-ground of politics, which will greatly increase the extent of democratic participation across the spectrum ranging from left to right and thus invigorate our democracies. We should not expect psychedelics to function as a magical consensual solvent by relieving us of the burdens of political argument or by dissolving political positions we do not happen to agree with but we can find in psychedelic experience courage for the fight.

The causes of political depression today are, of course, to some extent different from those in Thoreau's time. They include computationalism (Golumbia, 2009), digitally driven bureaucracies of rule and latterly the "proletarianisation" of vocational labour (Stiegler, 2010), whereby supposedly intelligent people increasingly identify themselves as servants of procedures and "processes" and begin to think like robots. Computationalism is the latest guise of administrative rationality, which seeks to proliferate order and to eliminate disagreement by creating consensus expressed and enabled by one-dimensional thought and language. Administrative rationality tends towards the abolition of politics, in the sense that it presumes the field or scope of the political to be closed, localised within a sequence of decision-making processes and decided once and for all and that what matters is how the limited resources are to be distributed, ordered and arranged within that pre-constituted field. In this sense administrative rationality and the sensibilities to which it is conducive are anti-democratic: they oppose the recognition of new subjects and causes and they resist attempts to see their way of seeing as itself a political perspective susceptible to questioning.

To a significant extent my argument about the politics of psychedelics has advanced hand in hand with recognising computationalism and administrative rationality more widely as (anti-)political and as problematic. Computationalism's commitment to the possibility and desirability of completely abstracting human experience into disembodied information is resisted by a politics of psychedelics regrounded in minoritarian traditions of non-dualist mysticism, in so far as they espouse the ecstatic experience of singular bodymind and propose a rapturous experience of the intractable messiness of our embodied existence, one in which thought, language, feeling and my specific body are inextricably interconnected. To the extent that the psychedelic renaissance has favoured neurocomputationalist models, this new politics of psychedelics offers a salutary critical corrective to some of the anti-democratic assumptions rife in certain corporate and technofeudalist milieux, as in the outlandishly menacing beliefs aired in the verbiage of some billionaire entrepreneurs. Relatedly, the principle of substitutability is fundamental to administrative rationality. While from an administrative perspective my experience, needs and preferences may well be treated as substitutable for those of any other person, if I slip into such a way of thinking and feeling about myself and those around me – as the overreach of administrative rationality in its computationalist form increasingly seduces me into doing – then the result will be a depressing sense of the insignificance of lives which are entirely fungible and barely worth living. Such a way of seeing is a distinctly unpromising basis for political action.

Thesis 10. Institutions resembling Eisner's "matrix" enable the psychedelic cultivation of determinate political sensibilities

If psychedelic experience deautomates in a way which is essential for radical democracy, whereas institutions tend to impose the automatism of their 'processes' and established structures of 'governance' (bureaucratic rule), it might be thought that there could only be limited scope for developing institutions of psychedelic politics. Indeed, if psychedelics are emancipatory anthropotechnics, might they be inherently antithetical to all forms of organisation and structure? It may even be thought that the 'redundancy thesis' (Thesis 2, above) already implied an irresolvable antagonism between organised institutional forms and psychedelic anthropotechnics as practices of freedom which tend to undo authoritarian political organisation. Or, in other words, that already axiomatic was an anti-institutional destiny for the politics of psychedelics. In this final thesis, I confront such objections by outlining

[8] Reports of the recent introduction of "no psychedelics" clauses into investment contracts for Silicon Valley tech founders are revealing in this regard, even though such developments must be circumvented. Reported by Paul F. Austin, https://x.com/PaulAustin3w/status/2038644198094885335?s=20 (30 March 2026).

how the emancipatory power of psychedelic deautomation can be harnessed technically and institutionally for determinate macropolitical ends.

In a paper written in the early years of the psychedelic renaissance and revisiting her twenty-two years of earlier clinical experience, entitled "Set, Setting and Matrix", the psychotherapist and pioneering psychedelics researcher Betty Eisner (1997) significantly expanded Leary's theorisation of "setting" with what she termed the "matrix", which she presented as one further factor determining the therapeutic yield of psychedelic experience.

> By matrix is meant that environment from which the subject comes, such as family and living situation; the environment the subject is living in while having sessions; and the environment to which a patient returns after successful therapy – the everyday living space. A good matrix, like a good group or a good marriage, is a place where the best interests of the separate individuals are served within the creative context of the larger relationship. (Eisner, 1997: 215)

Although Eisner makes clear in the paper that the particular matrix she has in mind is the therapeutic community which built up around her own therapeutic practice to support it – one specific experiment in communal living – her concept can be generalised. That small community of supportive onlookers served as a halfway house of sorts, a temporary holding environment in which subjects could process or "integrate" the insights in the acute phase of the trip, "a matrix of transition back to the 'everyday' world of the subject's continuing life" and their return to the wider world. It was also "multi-generational and served as an extended family for its members" and orderly: "the therapeutic community had a certain set of rules or structure (for orderly living) which seemed to be helpful for the patient undergoing sessions; change is more easily integrated in an orderly environment than in a chaotic one" (Eisner, 1997: 215–16). Although Eisner was interested in therapeutic use, her approach was less tainted by the narrow individualism generally characterising Western psychiatry and in the theorisation of the matrix we can glimpse how a self-organizing, supportive and orderly community can be established by users of psychedelics to nurture them by allowing the insights of psychedelic experience to be iteratively incorporated – in some ways this is a secessionist community resembling a 'cult' and living its own collective life in the midst of a world largely governed by different imperatives. These matrices can also be characterised as "microclimates of set and setting" (Hartogsohn, 2022), models of psychedelically self-cultivating political communities.

Eisner's matrix is a promising starting point for thinking about the ways in which psychedelics might be harnessed to engender new communities. Just as the matrix effectively extends setting beyond the local environment of the trip, so the remaking of the wider world can be envisaged in the activity of individuals and collectives formed by the matrix. In its function, Eisner's matrix reflects its etymological origin in the womb, serving as the type of protective environment Sloterdijk would call a 'sphere'. Yet in Eisner's account, the matrix – the community of people which has grown up to surround the user of psychedelics – is birthed and rebirthed by the experience of psychedelics: the matrix not only engenders but is engendered and re-engendered by psychedelic experience. In such matrices, political sensibilities and "forms of life" (Langlitz & Gearin, 2024) take shape; such matrices mediate the connection between psychedelic experience and the social and macropolitical world. Effective matrices for the psychedelic cultivation of political sensibilities exploit the "bidirectional relationship" (Dupuis & Veissière, 2022) between psychedelics and extra-pharmacological factors: careful engineering of set and setting in the surrounding matrix promotes "containment" (Noorani, 2021) of the psychedelic experience, holding and enabling a disciplined practice of political intensification; reciprocally, the yield of the experience can be fed back into the design of the setting.

For every person who is clinically depressed and seeks medical treatment, how many more lack the motivation, confidence and self-esteem which are requisite enabling qualities for taking an active part in political life? To participate fully in democratic life requires – as Axel Honneth and Joel Anderson (Honneth & Anderson, 2005) note, in their discussion of the subjective preconditions for exercising autonomy, self-esteem and self-belief. Perhaps these ten theses mainly offer a more hopeful way of looking at the impasse which research on the politics of psychedelics has reached. Perhaps, but a new way of looking is not nothing. In relation to politics, psychedelics are obviously very different from aspirin but, by the account these theses outline, are not entirely different from, say, anti-depressants, though psychedelics do additionally bear a culturally inscribed promise of politics. My account has involved a diagrammatic and implicitly programmatic diagnosis of what it is about our contemporary predicament which blocks this promise from fuller expression and it could certainly be objected that many of the problematic elements in that diagnosis – dualism, neuro-centrism, compuationalism, the automatisms of administrative reason, the limits of exisiting phenomenologies of psychedelic experience – require fuller elaboration. Nevertheless, the succinct form of the thesis has enabled all of the key elements to be held together alongside one another, thereby plotting a conceptual line from the psychedelic renaissance in biomedicine to the psychedelic renascence of democracy.

Why does this matter? A vibrantly innovative radical right is rapidly gaining ground across the globe, re-investing old causes and reopening as questions matters we had long thought of as settled gains of emancipatory progress. This right trades in an incessant "flip-flop of fact and fantasy", to recall Erik Davis's (2019, 180) characterisation of the *Illuminatus!* trilogy and the era of disenchanted conspiracism for which it is emblematic, the 1970s; so far, the only countermeasures we seem to be capable of mustering are stern injunctions against "conspiracy theory" and "misinformation". The creativity of the radical right today has succeeded in exploiting all-too-human disenchantment with our increasingly disembodied, distanced and automated existence, even as it implements ever more invasive and constraining technologies of espionage and control and lifts environmental protections, allowing profiteering corporations to poison the natural world while holding out extravagant promises of an extra-planetary future for an elite of the species. The left and the centre have so far failed to imagine a persuasive and suitably bold alternative vision: we are completely outgunned and, at the same time, influential voices in the psychedelics field are indulging in a highly successful entrepreneurship of psychedelic negativity, explicitly addressed to the left, which is conspiring to block psychedelics ever being taken up again as political technologies in the very quarters where they are most urgently needed. The need for new ways of generating ideas could hardly be more acute. As Terence McKenna (1995) remarked some three decades ago: "It is not inevitable that we should fail […] we don't want this to end in a toxified garbage pit ruled by Nazis, which is the way we may well be headed."

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Oliver Davis: Writing – original draft.

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Oliver Davis is a member of the Drug Science Medical Psychedelics Working Group but writes in a personal capacity. He is also a member of the Editorial Board of this journal but had no role in reviewing or otherwise considering the article.

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Data availability

No data was used for the research described in the article.

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