

A new focus for transhumanism

Psychedelics as affective technology to resist affective capitalism

By Sab Xew

Intro:

Transhumanism is the practice of using scientific development to enhance human capabilities – mainly through medicine and technology. It is a theory that is becoming increasingly relevant as scientific advances make feasible the possibility of reshaping and manipulating aspects of human biology and cognition in order to ‘enhance’ us. This enhancement is broadly about making us ‘better’ in some way, and a general guide to that is in improving wellbeing. One problem with the general thread of transhumanism is that it assumes that this enhancement lies in manipulating the individual – that scientific advancement is helpful when applied to individuals, and that the enhancement-wellbeing relationship takes place in the sphere of each individual, separately. But our mental wellbeing is largely affected by forces outside of the limits of our individual human capabilities, like the kinds of societies that we live in. These issues are political, and my essay stems from this point of contention in transhumanism; that it depoliticises these issues by presupposing that wellbeing is the responsibility of the individual, and is ‘enhanced’ on an individual basis. I focus on the issue of anxiety as a challenge to mental wellbeing – as well as human functioning/flourishing in general – using the literature of ‘affective capitalism’ to show that a widespread ‘state of anxiety’ is tied into neoliberal social structures which promote the isolation of the individual. I then present psychedelic substances as ‘affective technology’ to combat this; I argue that they are uniquely placed to enable the overcoming of this anxiety in their effects on the self, which therefore effects social interactions. I draw on the pool of recent scientific resurgence of interest in psychedelics, and theorise that they induce a renewed sense of self that opposes the sense of self cultivated by neoliberalism.

After initial research into their applications was stunted in the 60s because of the countercultural associations with psychedelic drugs, there has now been a resurgence of scientific interest in using them as mental health tools, over the last decade. Cutting-edge psychiatric research is taking place into using them as therapeutic tools to help with addiction, anxiety disorders, treatment-resistant depression, PTSD, as well as personality disorders.¹ But they are helpful in ways that go beyond ‘therapy’ in this conventional sense, of helping individuals separately. I will interpret the therapeutic research, and argue that part and parcel of their therapeutic uses of combatting anxiety is an experience that deals directly with the structural issues that sustain this dominant collective anxious affect. I propose that research should start to focus on their inherently paradigm-

¹ The largest ever conference on ‘Psychedelic Science’ was held in April 2017 in California, with speakers including Tom Insel, former director of the National Institute for Mental Health, and Paul Summergrad, past president of the American Psychiatric Association. (Carhart-Harris et al 2017) Imperial College in University of London features the Psychedelic Research department within the Centre for Neuropsychopharmacology, leading research into the action of psychedelics on the brain combined with their clinical utility, including randomised control trials.

shifting nature; in their capacity to allow us to transcend the neoliberal structures that shape work, as well as, insidiously, shape our understandings of ourselves, others and our own wellbeing. I focus on how they can do this through giving individuals the capacity to transcend the anxious feelings brought about by self-image and sociality that our neoliberal paradigm promotes. They do this by providing a new affect, offering a renewed 'self', and in doing so, have the potential to disrupt the viscous cycle that exists between neoliberal anxiety and maximisation of profit, including exposing its structural nature. This essay therefore pays attention to the nuances of how individual feelings are connected to widespread structures, and proposes psychedelics as mediators in both exposing this relationship and changing its course.

1: Transhumanism:

Transhumanists believe that humanity's potential far exceeds the standards that we live at currently. They propose that we utilise science and technology in order to enhance and 'make better' the human condition by overcoming our biological and cognitive limitations. (Humanity+ 2009) This includes phenomena like nanotechnology, biotechnology and AI. Inherent in the transhumanist project is the assumption that enhancement and making us 'better' lies in using medicine and technology to manipulate human biology, with little mention of how social structures tie into this relationship, between science and enhancement. Focusing on the human limitation of mood and wellbeing, the World Transhumanist Association states that the consequences of technological advancement such as nanotechnology could lead to "the biochemical enrichment or redesign of our pleasure centres so we can enjoy a richer diversity of emotions, life-long happiness and exhilarating peak experiences every day" (Bergsma 2000:404). David Pearce (1995), who inspired the sub-discipline Hedonistic Transhumanism, claims that "over the next thousand years or so, the biological substrates of suffering will be eradicated completely" arguing that the mental correlate of pain will simply be substituted for a different signal that preserves its function, but minus the unpleasant experience. This is an example of the inherent thread that we should look to improving wellbeing by enhancing the human brain, each individual at a time. Although there is a lot of talk of 'the species' within transhumanist literature, this is in terms of our individual capacities – 'species-normal functioning' is the concept given to the standard functioning of humans, defining enhancement as interventions that go beyond this (Chadwick 2008: 28) – and not about how we interact, in social structures, and how technology could be used to enhance these structures, as a means to wellbeing. The direction of relationship between enhancement and wellbeing is presupposed to be restricted to the individual sphere, for each person, separately, rather than mediated by social structures.

Nick Bostrom (2005), a leading researcher in the ethics of human enhancement, lists ‘mood, energy and self-control’ as one of the five human limitations, as well as ‘sensory modalities, special faculties and sensibilities’ and ‘bodily functionality’. I will argue that our current socioeconomic structure (I will refer to as neoliberalism) especially constrains our mood (this is its affect), as well as our bodily functionality, and that psychedelics can be harnessed to disrupt this affect by introducing a new kind of affect, through utilising our sensory modalities and special faculties in a distinctive, *new* way. This makes them genuinely enhancing, by going ‘beyond’ our current neurological capacities, but the crucial point is that this can be used to combat the structural nexus that limits our mood and bodies. To clarify, I am not saying that neoliberalism limits our capacities in terms of their competence, but it limits their performance, by inducing a collective affect/feeling. And my argument is that psychedelics can help to change this performance in a way that can break the hold that this affect has.

I will present the literature of affective capitalism in response to the individualistic presupposition of transhumanism, to show that what stands in the way of our wellbeing has a far larger domain than the limitations of our human capacities; such as the structure of society. Although this seems obvious as anything can affect our wellbeing, obviously, the general assumption is that ultimately the significant factor is how well the individual can deal with this, which is mirrored in psychiatric understandings of mental wellbeing as being hindered by individual disorders of which therapy is needed to resume one’s ‘species-normal functioning’. Transhumanism uses the language of therapy a lot, with some definitions of enhancement as going beyond therapy, which sets the notion of therapy – as an individualistic endeavour – as a sort of starting ‘guide’ for enhancement. But affective capitalism will show that anxiety can be more than an individual dysfunction, it is a ‘dominant affect’. This is the widespread *state* of anxiety, of which solutions must lie beyond the domain of conventional therapy which deals with only the individual and largely ignores structural frameworks. My argument pushes for transhumanism to expand its focus to these structural issues to consider how science and technology could be utilised to enhance us, with these structural issues in mind. I argue that psychedelics can be utilised as such mediators, between enhancing our individual capacities but in a way that directly relates to, and can help us transcend, the interconnected structures that limit us.

2: Affective Capitalism:

‘Affect theory’ has had a recent interdisciplinary resurgence, ranging across the humanities, social sciences and neurosciences, dubbed the ‘turn to affect’. ‘Affect’ refers to ‘feeling’, and affect theory holds that this feeling is intrinsically connected to the body. The body stores everything – feelings,

sensations, memories – and this in turn effects the way that one engages with the world. Feelings are not just manifested in conscious mental states but are embodied: essentially associated with bodily comportment, denying the mind-body dualistic split. For example, working as a support worker helping people in wheelchairs or who need assistance walking might bring the affect of compassion, empathy and care. With this comes the embodied state, bundled up with a kind of interpersonal attitude: body poised ready to stretch out a hand and adapt to another body. Or practicing the Angolan dance Kuduru which features chest and bum pumping movements; this might give the subject an affect of confidence and sensuality, effecting how they carry themselves and interact. And it works the other way too as this is not a linear causal relationship; feeling and bodily comportment are necessarily tied: feeling lonely might manifest in moving and holding oneself in a closed off manner – possibly hunched shoulders that accompany awkward, restrictive interactions. Affect is feeling, and the bodily appraisal of a situation, which feels a certain way – distinct from rational, conscious, intellectual understanding of the situation. It has been described as the gut feeling, referring to the “half-second lapse between the beginning of a bodily event and its completion in an outwardly directed, active expression” (Massumi 2002:29), meaning that it has manifested unconsciously, in response to a situation before the brain has computed.

Affective capitalism is the notion that capitalism, in how it structures society around economic production, produces affects that sustain the harnessing of capital. This is the maximisation of profit: it doesn't just come with conscious actions but also feelings and bodily attitudes, shaped by the system – the maximisation of profit – and, importantly, which perpetuate the system. This is everything that is symbiotic with production outside of economics itself, like the feelings and movements that come along with it, and feed back into it. For example, feeling scared that you are not trying hard enough to compete for the promotion at your job: so you spend all your time working towards it by trying your hardest to sell as many products as possible, doing as much overtime as possible, which makes you even more stressed, which makes you buy into other areas of life such as ‘success management’ courses or ‘quick-fix’ hacks. Competition at work causes feelings of stress and fear, which makes the subject work harder (perpetuating the system), sleeping less, causing more fatigue, which causes more motivation to seek out exterior forms of help which are monetarised – also perpetuating the system.

Affect, being distinct from conscious understanding, can inspire action when we don't necessarily know it or reason about it, so it is not unexpected that such a phenomena be utilised for capitalisation. There are industries that directly invest in affect: tabloids, social media, reality tv, through their specific agendas to make you feel a certain way so that you buy into them. Often these feelings are negative, like insecurity and fear, through fear-mongering narratives. Profit is maximised

by harnessing and manipulating affect through public-facing industries: “to capitalise on affect is to capture, structure and modulate the infrastructures where it moves” (Karppi et al 2016:2). Affective capitalism is not necessarily claiming that there is someone ‘behind’ this manipulation of affect, scheming it all, but, because the system is in place, it naturally sustains itself by investing in affect. The actualities of maximising profit are naturally embedded in a plethora of feelings which all sustain this dominant structure.

Immediately this opens up debate for the transhumanist project: by reshaping and designing biological human capacities, what effect will this have on the feelings that we feel in regards to capitalism? Affect theory sees affect (feeling) as intrinsically connected to bodily comportment and interactions between the person and the world, as well as other people. So we should be thinking about modifications we are making on the mind-body in the context of this interactive embodied field of feelings, not simply as isolated causal events that either instigate a bodily or cognitive change.

The Institute for Precarious Consciousness (IPC) published the article ‘Anxiety, affective struggle, and precarity consciousness-raising’ which theorises that a ‘dominant affect of anxiety’ is present in neoliberalism’s structure. This structure is predominantly one of precarity – work is unstable. The structure of work as precarious means that there is an insecure access to the means to survive or flourish; an example of how this is manifested is in 0 hour contracts. There are no guaranteed hours and the hours one does get are often subject to constant performance management. This performance management is also true of the welfare system as well, in the form of benefit sanctions, meaning that even access to *survival* (construing benefits as the basic minimum) is insecure. This widespread insecurity causes an affect of anxiety across the general public. The necessities for living are not absent but are constantly withheld conditionally, creating a constant state of anxiety where people are “running on the spot” (IPC 2014), trying so hard just to ensure they are kept employable or even just with a bare minimum.

This precarity is manifested in feelings of anxiety, through mechanisms of effects on the self: constant self-surveillance and critique to strive to ‘be better’, as well as effects on sociality: individuals are constantly in a relation of competition, masked by a false sense of connection through social media. And crucial to this is that it is a ‘public secret’ because the dominant public narrative personalises the noticeable effects as individual rather than structural issues. My argument will be a response to these two effects – on the self and sociality – by utilising the affective potential of psychedelics to instigate new feelings that oppose them, as well as oppose the narrative of personalisation.

2.1: The Self:

This sense of self that is created by insecure access to ‘the means to survive and flourish’ is one that is ridden with self-critique. This is because the conditions for stability – constant retesting and performance management which require excessive labour² – are internalised, meaning that people continually analyse and grade themselves according to these terms, creating a sense of self which is ridden with critique: sustained anxiety over whether one is ‘good enough’ and the need to constantly prove this. This is self-surveillance, and is associated with Foucault’s concept of the panopticon, which was a prison design, by Jeremy Bentham, in which the prisoners’ cells are structured in a circle around a watch tower, where they are watched. The watchman cannot be looking at all of them simultaneously, but by giving the impression that he is – by occupying the central watchtower – the prisoners police themselves. Work is similar to this; as an employee you never really know whether you are being heard, watched, judged (even by a customer who may report to your manager) so you act as if you are all the time. We internalise the gaze of others and see ourselves accordingly, which is especially exacerbated by social media. Internalising the performance management that is experienced at work is especially easy because the means to survive and flourish rely on it – it is not something that can be easily ignored. These conditions literally act as the conditions for survival and flourishing, so implicit in this is the idea that not meeting them means you are not worthy of this. So it is easy to value yourself accordingly, and those that don’t – who have external values (maybe religion, spirituality, a sense of rebellion against the system, or even just close friends/family who give them values) – still have to ‘play the game’ for their own income. Some level of internalisation and self-surveillance is bound to happen even if you resist its wider message, just by simply ensuring that you meet the necessary targets to stay employable.

It might be argued that the existence of the welfare state undermines this, since there is a ‘safety net’ meant for those that don’t meet the conditions, ensuring their survival (and possibly flourishing). However, the benefits system actually replicates these very same structures: there are many difficult conditions one has to meet in order to even receive the benefits, and when one does, even more conditions to avoid getting sanctioned which is have your benefits stopped altogether.

² Kolinko’s 2002 enquiry into German call centres found that constant re-testing and digital metrics including number of calls were used as performance management techniques which threatened the loss of jobs. Also, workers often had to work for 6 months to even receive a job.

This means that actually 'survival' is not secured.³ There is no alternative to the wider system which perpetuates a self-critical 'self', if the 'safety net' perpetuates the very same self-surveillance through similar conditions. In the UK, the Work Capability Assessment is the condition in place in order to receive Employment Support Allowance or Personal Independence Payment (benefits for those with health needs which obstruct their ability to work); it necessitates that one must attend an assessment with a government trained professional (not a doctor) who judges whether the person is 'incapable' enough for the benefits, asking them questions demanding they prove just how incapable they are, such as "can you tell me why you haven't killed yourself yet" (Ryan 04/05/2017). In fact, one adviser in the Citizen's Advice Bureau says that she advises her clients to turn up to their assessments smelling of urine, in order to convey the level of incapability that is needed to pass.⁴ This reality shows us that the welfare system, as well as perpetuating anxiety in the same way as work, also demeans people: in order to be 'deserving' of it (pass the tests), one is made to feel worthless, which only intensifies the valuing of people in regards to their profit-making potential. A conservative estimate of 40% of work-related sickness is stress and anxiety (HSE 2016), whilst this sort of treatment is the result for sufferers who become public about it: we are forced into a work system of anxiety and stress through internalised performance targets, and then when this reaches breaking point and we need to move away from it, we internalise feelings of failure, through literally being forced to prove 'failure' in order to stay alive. This only exacerbates the need to conform and stay in the system by passing the tests, increasing anxiety, whilst cementing the idea that everyone is disposable. If you don't meet the quality metrics then you can be cast away to prove your failure, or if not, then expelled from the system completely (through benefit sanctions).

Anxiety is the product of the system as well as what keeps people locked in the system, therefore perpetuating it - a 'viscous cycle'. The example of the Work Capability Assessment is pertinent, as the precarious structure that pervades the claimants also pervades the workers: DWP call centres are subject to the same performance management ethos that creates anxiety. Whistle-blowers have exposed this, one summing it up with: "When you cry down the phone I feel like crying too, but if I speak to you for longer than 23 minutes and go off-script I risk losing my job" (Anonymous 20/08/2016), and that they can only stick to yes and no answers to all the questions people have when trying to navigate the complex benefits system. The same precarious work

³ The UK government (2015) was forced to release mortality statistics showing over 80 people a month are dying after being declared "fit for work". "These are complex figures but early analysis points to two notable facts. First that 2,380 people died between December 2011 and February 2014 shortly after being judged "fit for work" and rejected for the sickness and disability benefit, Employment and Support Allowance (ESA). We also now know that 7,200 claimants died after being awarded ESA and being placed in the work-related activity group – by definition, people whom the government had judged were able to "prepare" to get back to work." (Ryan 27/08/2015)

⁴ Personal correspondence.

structures responsible for affect of anxiety in individuals (ones of self-surveillance and performance management) directly sustain the structure's 'gatekeepers': the benefits system, supposedly *for* people who are too stressed to work, but which actually acts as a threat and 'no exit strategy', perpetuating the pressure to be successful within the work system, and exasperating the ill health of those outside it. This shows that most people are victims to the system in some sense, subject to the affect it creates to sustain itself. The DWP worker suffering from insomnia because she will lose her job if she exceeds the 23 minute limit on another phone call, yet cannot allow herself to cut short another desperate and vulnerable patient, is in the same situation as the call centre worker who also lies awake at night thinking of the vulnerable old person he managed to persuade into buying insurance, under pressure to retain his number of sales per hour after a disciplinary, who later, after eventually losing the job, is on the phone to DWP woman looking to apply for ESA when the job loss triggers a meltdown, just after DWP woman has had to hang up on our vulnerable old person who can't understand why his PIP allowance has suddenly been revoked.

2.2.: The Social:

The affect of anxiety pervades into the social sphere too, outside of professional environments. This creates both constant competition in social interrelations, as well as interacting in terms of a person's value to one's own profit-making agenda. This is a thoroughly individualistic social structure. The insecurity of work means that everyone is in a state of competition with one another: explicitly in terms of performance management and metrics, like 'caller of the week', but also in 0 hours contracts where employees are constantly in competition for hours, even if they are not told this. This competition is already set up in school at a young age. The sense of self that is created by the work place – one of self-judgment and critique – is the same self that interacts with others, applying its judgement to others, creating the compulsion to compare and compete. The need to be better – to be a better worker – naturally turns into the need to be better than x, and y, and z. The constant suspicion of being watched, and subsequent internalisation of performance behaviour, is generalised from the workplace into the social life. This is exacerbated by social media and general dissolution of the work-life boundary, meaning that it is not so easy to distinguish the two and leave this ethos at the workplace. Social media creates a constant vulnerability to judgement and comparison by others, and of ourselves with others, as well as an obligation to be constantly communicable, but of a certain kind of communication that IPC claim promotes "an appearance of simulated happiness" (IPC 2014:276) and performance. Neoliberalism also treats people as disposable – valuing in terms of profit potential – so the internalisation of this pervades how we value one another as well as ourselves. This can be seen in the obsession with 'networking', advised of children in school even, which is the connecting with others based on how they can benefit you

professionally. General precarity of work and competition makes this more important; employability may depend on the strength of one's 'network'. Again, this is the result of the self-critical self being applied to others; connecting with others in terms of one's own self-improvement.

It is argued that, before the age of globalisation and social media, 'the social' was a form of resistance against the dominant capitalist structure – through counterculture which advocated 'dropping out' and alternative lifestyles (IPC 2014). But capitalism is a macro economic system with the goal of infinite expansion of profit, so naturally it keeps evolving in pursuit of new profit. This happened in the rise of the internet age – a whole new medium for profit making. It is now much harder to simply 'drop out' when social media follows you everywhere, and globalisation has meant that the rise of outsourcing has led to a much more precarious work structure. We are more 'connected' than ever, but in a certain way – a competitive and self-interested way. Social relationships are not on their own a form of resistance as they may have been before; neoliberalism's affect of anxiety has influenced the way that we interact together, so the new resistance must reclaim the social in new ways that fight this.

2.3: Personalisation:

Feelings of anxiety on the individual are personalised – this is the assumption that they are the sole responsibility of the individual – which allows the cycle to continue. The individual emotional and physical manifestations of anxiety are pathologised as cognitive deficits or chemical imbalances, and the material social facts of precarity (lack of work) are also personalised as the fault of individuals – like immigrants.⁵ IPC states: "precarians are blamed for precarity", for both feeling anxious and causing anxiety, and this in itself creates more anxiety as individuals try harder to improve and 'manage' their wellbeing, and are demeaned for seeking financial support for it. Pathologising the dominant affect also masks the generality of precarity (that there is 'no escape' – it pervades the 'safety net' as well as the social sphere), since it frames anxiety as something that an individual has, possesses, carried around with them in all areas of life. The effects of precarity are masked by this personalisation in two ways: anxious feelings are individualised and material manifestations are blamed on individuals such as immigrants or 'benefit scroungers'. This promotes expectations that imply work is secure: expectations of getting a job, managing your own wellbeing, and community integration, against which many inevitably fail, since work is *not* secure so these expectations are not easily met, blaming themselves or 'others', thus perpetuating the anxious cycle.

⁵ Recall the industry of tabloid media capitalising on negative affect. This is another example of the system sustaining itself: industries make profit on manipulating affect, and this affect in turn protects the system from critique, by instigating the idea that individuals are blameworthy for its negative effects.

2.4: Resistance:

I will now discuss two resistance strategies to the neoliberal anxious affect, and then go on to explain how using psychedelics as affective technology meets the aims of both, and in a more efficient way. The IPC adapts the consciousness-raising framework that was used as feminist resistance to patriarchal norms and presents it as a resistance strategy to combat the affect of anxiety brought about by precarity. Consciousness-raising groups were groups of likeminded women that would meet and discuss issues in order to meet 7 functions: speak from and validate their own experience, construct their own voice, create a safe space, inspire affective or emotional transformation, promote ‘the click’ in which one understands the structural causes of personal issues, and to integrate and analyse their own experiences. The idea is that once awareness is raised of anxiety as an affect caused by neoliberalism, we will be on our way to changing this structure, in the same way that consciousness shifted to understanding personalised issues caused by patriarchy as feminist issues. For example, ‘sexual harassment’ wasn’t coined as a collective term until feminist groups got together and discovered that the unsettling experience was common amongst them and were able to attribute it to work-place patriarchy rather than their own faults, culminating in campaigning for the recognised concept and laws prohibiting it.⁶ The IPC proposes that similar groups must get together to resist neoliberal anxiety, applying the above seven functions of feminist consciousness-raising in order to combat the personalisation of anxiety and organise ‘precarians’ in solidarity against anxiety.

Consciousness-raising, however, is wholly intellectual as it assumes that neoliberal affects can be mitigated simply by being aware of them and framing them structurally rather than individually. But being aware of affective capitalism and its personalisation isn’t going to quite undermine the profound affect it has on our bodies and feelings; even if we *know* that our anxious feelings are predominantly caused by financial instability, it doesn’t stop us feeling them, accompanied with their bodily comportment: tense muscles and sore, fatigued eyes that is part and parcel of this feeling. Feelings are not just mental states but fully embodied, in an unconscious way, so consciousness-raising will not do ‘the whole job’. This bodily comportment also pervades the way we interact with each other – anxious feelings of anxious bodies create individualistic interactions. Consider the interaction that might be had in the street between a person rushing to their JSA meeting in order to not get sanctioned for being late, a mother hurrying home to cook for her children after irregular hours, and a self-employed sole-trader van-man stuck to his business

⁶ Fricker (2007) uses this as a paradigm example of hermeneutical injustice: injustice created by imbalances in power over the production of collective knowledge, causing certain concepts to (like sexual harassment) to not be recognised.

facebook account in order to maintain his 'within the hour' response rate, when they all need to squeeze through the confined roadworks-obstructed passageway. Each of these characters serve as examples of how the goal of maximising profit and the anxious affect that this has pervades people's bodily comportment.

Firth (2016) argues that the way to combat neoliberal affect is to create *new* affects, which "foster bodily creativity, connections and compassion", and transgress the mind-body dualism which is inherent in intellectually-based resistance strategies in their assumption that raising awareness of anxious affect will combat the affect itself. She sees the body itself as a site of resistance, and even goes so far as to claim that bodies may not even necessarily be individualised (as in, your skin starts where mine ends) once we appreciate the immanent emotional connections between people. Firth proposes Somatherapy as a resistive strategy; this is a series of group physical exercises designed to build body-awareness and solidarity between people, and claims that she left her own experience of the exercise "deeply connected to the other participants, and with a profound sense of euphoria" (ibid:132) – this is the new affect, which aims to "salvage spontaneity, playfulness, creativity" (Goia 2011) through movement, play and sound; breaking hierarchies on the physical and unconscious level. The aim is to directly oppose and provide an alternative way of using our bodies in interaction with one another by "using games to foster trust, cooperation and sharing, and mechanisms for dealing constructively with conflict" (Goia, 2008:56), in order to oppose and provide an alternative to the feelings of "jealousy, possessiveness and insecurity and situations (competition, betrayal and lies)" that are influenced by neoliberal structures. These are the feelings that she claims are fostered by precarity. Although I will focus explicitly on anxiety and the connections of competition and self-gain that this perpetuates, it gives an example of harnessing new affects, through social interactions, as resistance against the dominant affect.

I propose that we take this a step further; we can catalyse this method by actually harnessing the affective potential of psychedelics. This produces a direct affect on each individual which has the potential to radically alter their connections to others *by* altering their sense of self. I maintain that this mechanism of action, through inspiring a new affective sense of self, is more suited to neoliberalism's affective mechanism in its manifesting self-surveillance as the root anxiety, which perpetuates competitive and self-interested social interactions. As well as inducing *direct* affect, they also meet the functions of consciousness-raising in their effects of promoting reflection on the intellectual level.

3: Psychedelics

Psychedelic substances can be ‘affective technology’ – I have coined this term to mean technology utilized for the purpose of influencing affect in an embodied and collective way. This is in contrast to pharmaceuticals which are designed with just the individual in mind and have specific, mechanistic use. So far I have shown that neoliberalism impacts on individuals’ lives through affect, limiting individuals’ potential. This is a transhumanist concern because transhumanism cares about limitations to potential, but also because affect is manifested physically. Transhumanism applies scientific inquiry, which is interested in the material world, so the neoliberal affect of anxiety, being fully embodied and felt, is relevant to its aims. However, transhumanism – an individualistic discipline – is not set up to deal with such a phenomenon since neoliberal affect concerns the political, structural dimensions of limitations. I will now present psychedelic substances as able to bridge this gap: they work on the scientific, material level in introducing a new affect, and in doing so, can help to break the viscous cycle of neoliberal affect. Whilst Firth suggests certain kinds of collective therapy to meet the embodied needs of resistance, by rewiring how we use our bodies, I argue that affective technology can be used to catalyse this ‘rewiring’ in its literal rewiring on the cognitive level. I will show that the effects of this family of drugs are uniquely placed to specifically counter the affects of neoliberalism on the self and its relation to others, through three interlinked mechanisms: ego-dissolution, a ‘unitive experience’, and connectedness. I will use cutting-edge scientific research that is still in its underdeveloped stages and so is quite murky and unspecified, but my aim is to use conceptual tools to interpret and make sense of this.

3.1: Describing the mechanisms and phenomenological ‘contradiction’:

‘Psychedelics’ is the term given to hallucinogenic drugs that have a specific chemical makeup; they include LSD, psilocybin, ayahuasca and mescaline. They produce a unique set of subjective effects and have been used for thousands of years for religious and therapeutic purposes. I will describe some of these effects by focusing on the three mechanisms aforementioned, which I shall overview here, prior to analysing them, because they are all so interlinked conceptually as well as scientifically correlated.

Ego-dissolution is some form of compromised sense of self, and is very often experienced alongside the unitive experience, which is an experience of awe at oneness with one’s surroundings/‘the universe’/and others. The two explicitly relate, as unity with one’s surroundings is clearly associated with disturbed ego boundaries. Nour et al (2016) found that all eight of the following items were significantly present across the psychedelic experience in general, and together validate ego-dissolution as a component: “I experienced a dissolution of my ‘self’ or ego”; “I felt at

one with the universe”; “I felt a sense of union with others”; “I experienced a decrease in my sense of self-importance”; “I experienced a decrease in my sense of self-importance” ; “I experienced a disintegration of my ‘self’ or ego”; “I felt far less absorbed by my own issues and concerns”; “I lost all sense of ego” and “All notion of self and identity dissolved away”. They measured these items against items intended to signify the opposite (ego-inflation) and compared the results from cocaine use and alcohol use with psychedelics. Subjects also answered some questions from the MEQ (Mystical Experiences Questionnaire) in relation to their psychedelic experiences which have been shown to signify the ‘unitive experience’ aspect. The phenomenology of the unitive experience overlaps with that of ego-dissolution but there are yet to be formal studies to investigate exactly whether or not they necessarily entail each other – I will use ‘ego-dissolution’ to reference specifically the diminishing of the ego, and ‘unitive experience’ to mean a sense of unity. Some of the questions confirmed in the MEQ part of the study were: “freedom from the limitations of your personal self and feeling a unity or bond with what was felt to be greater than your personal self” and “experience of the fusion of your personal self into a larger whole”, and “experience of oneness or unity with objects and/or persons perceived in your surroundings”. These aspects together show that there is a general experience of ‘diminished self’ in conjunction with an experience of unity with things/people/ideas outside of the self, and that this tends to give some sort of therapeutic release from one’s usual concerns. In the further sections I will use conceptual tools to analyse this experience to try to understand what sort of ‘self’ is being diminished and relate it to the affect of neoliberal anxiety.

First though I will explicate the experience of connectedness. The connectedness experience is closely related to ego-dissolution and unity and features in many therapeutic studies of using psychedelics to treat depression, anxiety, ocd and addictions. Watts et al 2017 conducted a 6-month follow-up qualitative study after Carhart-Harris et al’s (2016) clinical trial of psilocybin use for treatment-resistant depression, asking the participants whether the treatment ‘worked’ for them, and if it did, ‘how’? The one theme that came out consistently across all 17 patients who answered positively to the treatment’s effectiveness was a ‘sense of connectedness’. This connectedness was described in terms of 3 aspects: connection to the self, others, and the world, and Carhart-Harris et al have a working hypothesis that renewed connection to the self is the ‘bedrock’ for the connection felt to others and the world. I will take connectedness to refer to this specific connection (to the self, world and others) and so is distinct from unitive experience mainly in its explicit inclusion of connection to the self – unitive experience is the general feeling of oneness with one’s surroundings. Subjects felt the sense of connectedness throughout the psychedelic trip, but also for several weeks to months afterwards.

As ego-dissolution is about one's freedom from themselves but the experience of connectedness actually connects the subject to themselves, there is a phenomenological contradiction which has not yet been raised or dealt with in the literature. In my argument I shall analyse what sort of self is being connected, and what aspects of the self is being 'dissolved' in order to understand how the two features can coexist, and applying this to affective capitalism. I argue that ego-dissolution involves a loss of the 'higher-order' self (I shall call the 'object-self'), and connectedness involves a renewed sense of self that is more in tune with embodied experience and identifies itself with larger entities.

3.2: The Self:

3.2.1: Ego-dissolution as loss of the object-self:

The psycho-analytic perspective, which is heavily involved in the therapeutic application of psychedelics, interprets the experience of ego-dissolution as a "blurring of the distinction between self-representation and object-representation, and precludes the synthesis of self-representations into a coherent whole" (Federn 1952; Savage 1955; Fischman 1983). Self-representation refers to higher-order thinking about the self as if it is an object. This is an awareness of one's being aware, and requires a 'step-back' from direct perception; it is associated with 'thinking about thinking' (metacognition) whilst object-representation is associated with perception. I propose that what is happening when one feels 'freedom from the limitations of [their] personal self' as described in the MEQ, is that their state of being is not one which is thinking about thinking – seeing themselves as the object of thought – but instead is just 'simply being' in some way. This makes sense in terms of the unitive experience too, as explains the feelings of becoming one with your surroundings, if there is a dissolution of the distinction between self-representation and object-representation. Object-representation is active in perception but self-representation is higher-order; if these two capacities become one then the self is merely perceived, like the surroundings. In relation to affective capitalism, the 'dysfunctional self' outlined is the self of constant critique and trying to 'be better', which clearly involves higher-order metacognitive processes in the constant thinking about the self as an object: an object of concern and critique. If ego-dissolution involves some sort of experience of the self as no longer an object, like a kind of disruption to metacognitive abilities (these abilities might be the 'personal self' that is described as freed from in the MEQ quote), then this is a useful tool to combat the affect of self-critique. It gives us a new lens to see the world, others and ourselves, altogether, as no longer in terms of a self-critical self-image. I will continue to develop this concept in relation to the other aspects of psychedelic experience, and show how it is corroborated

by brain imaging research. I will also, in 3.2.2, defend it against the concern that this is inconsistent with the promotion of intellectual thought that is essential to consciousness-raising.

3.2.2: Connection to self as embodied experience of identifying with larger entities:

However, it is still unclear how this fits with the experience of increased connection to the self. I will now present some findings on the experience of awe and the creation of 'the small self', to develop the idea that being in a state of awe at something larger than oneself can increase connection to the self, in a way that is not associated with the ego in terms of its seeing oneself as an object. The unitive experience is often described as one of awe, involving "experience of the insight that all is One", and "experienced eternity or infinity" (Nour et al 2016). An experience of vastness, to the point that one needs to update their mental schemas, is a definitive component of awe (Piff et al 2015). In a study about awe Piff et al (2015) found that presenting subjects with situations that inspired awe decreased their sense of entitlement, instead increasing pro-social helping behaviour. They found that this is through an experiencing of 'small self': of feeling less significant and less focused on personal concerns, instead more interested in entities vaster than the self and the "more collective dimensions of personal identity", causing more prosocial behaviour. This was in contrast to pride, which they tested it against, which increased prosocial behaviour but for reasons associated with self-achievement. If this is also true for psychedelics through the awe experience then it will directly challenge affective capitalism's competition paradigm in which one sees others in relation to their own self-interest, as it presents a mechanism that has a different way of relating to others.

Thus far the 'small self' is just decreased self-interest. This doesn't bring us any closer to understanding the enhanced connection to oneself: the "experience of oneness in relation to an inner world within", since it doesn't tell us what the small self is, positively, but only what it is not (ego). (I shall now refer to the renewed sense of self – the 'connected' self from psychedelics – as the 'small self'.) Piff et al reference studies that have associated awe with a sense that one is part of something larger than oneself, most typically larger categories like "community, a culture, the human species, or nature" (Ibid:884). Shiota et al (2007) found that people high in dispositional awe (but not pride or joy) were "less likely to define themselves using individuated terms such as 'special' or 'one-of-a-kind' and more likely to emphasize their membership in larger categories, for example, by describing themselves as 'a person' or 'an inhabitant of the Earth'" (Piff et al 2015). This self-defining in terms of universal social categories was corroborated by Van Cappellen and Saroglou (2012) who found that inciting feelings of awe in subjects caused them to feel more connected to

people in general on the 'Inclusion of the Other in the Self Scale'. This gives us an idea that the 'small self' is, positively, an identification of the self as member of something larger, so the deeper connection found with the self could literally be *through* a new perspective of the self as inextricably part of something bigger. 'The self' is inherently something more than just the object of our own concern, individuated and having value as a separate entity, if there is a new sense of connection to it which denies this individuated object aspect. This also makes sense in relation to the characteristic experience of vastness that is in awe: one sees themselves as part of an entity of vastness. Actually, that is exactly what is happening in the psychedelic experience: "feeling that you experienced eternity or infinity", and "experience of unity with ultimate reality" – the self as belonging to a larger whole. Also definitive to awe is the creation of "new mental schemas to accommodate what is being perceived" (Keltner & Haidt 2003), so the feeling of awe in the unitive experience requires subjects to invent new schemas to perceive what is going on. And because what is going on *is* an experience of ego-dissolution and unity, one must invent new schemas in order to perceive oneself *as* 'dissolved' in this sense, which ties appropriately to the invention of schemas that thus identify the self with the things, entities, or structures around it. So I propose that the renewed self is one which associates itself as part of a larger whole.

In relation to the contradiction that we are trying to understand, Haidt & Morris 2009 theorise about moral elevation and admiration of skills (as types of 'awe' feelings) as self-transcendent emotions – emotions that are about the virtues and excellences of others but not in relation to our own self-advantage: "admiration, like elevation, draws people out of their ordinary state of consciousness; the related motivational state of 'inspiration' involves feelings of transcendence, which has been defined as 'orienting one toward something that is better or more important than one's usual concerns'".(ibid:7688) Interestingly, despite this moving beyond the self, they cite research from Immordino-Yang et al (2009) which shows that brain areas related to interoceptive processing (that is the processing involved in regulating the internal body) may be more active during self-transcendence: these were internal regulation and sensing processes. While evidence isn't conclusive, they theorise that "emotions with a self-transcendent, or 'spiritual' aspect to them, such as moral elevation, may therefore turn out to be amplifications... of our carnal, embodied nature" (Haidt & Morris 2009:7688). This links to the embodied experience that psychedelics give: the subjective aspects described are very much *felt*, through sensations, and could give meaning to the idea of connection to the "inner world within" as a connection to the physically felt aspects of one's being.⁷ This is consistent with the loss of the 'object-self' as I have theorised to

⁷ Embodied experience was also one of the findings of Belser 2017 phenomenological analysis of patient experiences on psilocybin.

be the self as an object, since a deeper connection with one's physical processes does not entail ones thinking about oneself as an object – in fact, it makes sense that a more embodied connection to yourself might give you some relief from higher-order self-judgement.⁸ Then, we have a picture of the small self as an embodied self that is identified with bigger entities/structures than itself: one's consciousness of one's physical makeup *as part of something vast*.

There are also interesting findings linking the experience of awe to an altered perception of time. This is interesting since psychedelics seem to directly present an altered perception of time in their phenomenology⁹, and people directly refer to experiences of vastness of time *as awe-inspiring feelings*. Rudd et al (2012) found that subjects who felt awe in comparison with other emotions felt like they had more time available and were less impatient, and that this time perception is a mechanism for other effects of awe experiences: increased voluntary prosocial behaviour, preference of experiences over material products, and greater life satisfaction. They theorise that this is because awe induces an experience of 'being in the present moment' which decreases awareness and significance of time, resulting in 'time perception elongation'. (Vohs & Schmeichel 2003) This supports my hypothesis that the psychedelic experience reduces the 'object self', through time-elongation associated with awe. Increasing feelings of present-ness supports the experience of a dissolution away from higher-order processes, in which one is examining their concerns, thoughts and goals which are abstracted from the present moment and usually concern the future.

So, the above section analyses the unitive experience, a key component in the therapeutic use of psychedelics, in terms of its characteristic sense of awe, and uses previous research to reason about how the experience of awe can make sense of ego-dissolution and connectedness as contradictory aspects of the psychedelic experience. This is through what I call the 'small self'; a self that is experienced as embodied, in touch with its present physical and affective processes whilst simultaneously identifying as part of something larger, rather than an object in itself. The unitive experience is responsible for the fusion of one's self into a larger whole, and the embodied experience of awe that this involves inspires this to be a reinvention of the self – *as part of something vast*, rather than a total dissolution of identity.

⁸ The practice of mindfulness aims to shift one's thinking away from self-judgement and towards acceptance of the present moment, by focusing on internal bodily processes such as breathing. This is also true of many body-based therapies such as massage therapy.

⁹ Wittmann et al (2007) conducted a double-blind design study – using a control group with a placebo – to actually test whether ability to perform temporal activities (e.g. tapping to a beat, reproducing intervals of a certain number of seconds) was significantly different when subjects were under the influence of psilocybin, finding that it significantly impaired subjects temporal processing of intervals longer than 2-3 seconds as well as their voluntary control of their speed of movement.

However, an immediate worry is whether the identifying of oneself as part of something larger actually presupposes that one sees oneself as an object. Surely reinventing oneself requires some level of higher-order cognition. This would mean that actually the two experiences (of ego-dissolution and connectivity) are not consistent. In response to such a worry, I think it is important to appreciate the nuances in the process of metacognition compared to the process of perceiving oneself in a new way; *feeling* oneself to *be* a certain way. This is different from wanting to be a certain way, and intellectually assessing whether you meet that. Feeling like you are part of something larger and responding to questions about this by hinting towards this idea is not the same as higher-order cognition about your own thoughts, goals and self-image.

The affect of this ‘small self’ – embodied, in the present, and felt in terms of larger entities including communities – is the sort of self that neoliberal affect actively discourages, in its anxious affect of promoting self-surveillance and constant critique.¹⁰ Psychedelics promote this ‘small self’, and dissolve the ‘object-self’ which is the self associated with critique and self-surveillance; harnessing these direct affects would be a good resistance to the affect of neoliberal anxiety. In the same way that Firth argues we need to be creating new affect in the form of Somatherapy to resist that of neoliberalism, psychedelics could be a shortcut in their ability to actually directly induce a whole new, appropriate affect involving how we perceive ourselves. I will later explain how this effect on the self effects one’s connections to others.

3.2.3: Support for my theory on the neural level:

So far I have considered the affective, subjective level of the psychedelic experience. Psychedelics, being psychoactive drugs, obviously have mechanisms of action that take place on a neuropsychological level – on the physical brain – which underpin this. And we should want the two levels to match up well; three separate fMRI scan studies (brain scans) corroborate my theory. Carhart-Harris et al 2012, and 2014, found that psilocybin induced a reduced integrity of the Default Mode Network (DMN) which is the neural network implicated in ‘ego-identity’, activated in higher-order, self-referential thinking. This supports my theory that psychedelics induce a reduced ‘higher-order’ self. Lebedev et al (2015) found that the experience of ego-dissolution under psilocybin were associated with ‘disintegration of the salience network’. The salience network is the network responsible for deciding which inputs we prioritise with our attention, by using internal predictions of the external world to ‘filter out’ the sensations that are expected. For example, I filter out the

¹⁰ There is also ample literature that links neoliberalism to a kind of ‘state of disembodiment’ in which people feel fragmented from their bodies. For example, Kluwer (1992), Fisher (2014) and Wilkerson (2014).

input of the white wall behind me because I already predict it will be there, but prioritise the fly flying around my peripheral vision because I do not predict it. The salience network has been a focus of research in 'the self' and is hypothesised to contribute to "brain mechanisms of self-awareness, higher cognition" (ibid:3) with its impairment associated with psychoses. It is undecided exactly how this correlates to the subjective experience of ego-dissolution, but I propose that the disintegration of the system that tests internal predictions with external stimuli (the results granting attention) could signify a loss of the distinction between internal and external information, which supports my idea of the loss of the object-self as a shift to general perception of the self's processes, rather than perception of the self specifically *as* an object (this requires a distinction between the self and the external world). Furthermore, disintegration of this prediction network might generally signify a radically altered sense of self, in that many rooted predictions that the subject would otherwise leave unquestioned by the outside world may be 'shaken' and reformulated or disintegrated altogether; previously accepted mental schemas are being seriously challenged. Lastly, Tagliazucchi et al 2015 found that ego-dissolution also correlated with 'increased global functional connectivity'. In short, increased global functional connectivity is the connecting together of previously separated 'modules' in the brain: modules are neural networks that are distinct in terms of their specific functions – for example, the 'frontal lobes' have specific functions related to higher level cognitive processes such as planning according to an individual's goals. Global functional integration has also been linked to some sort of radical mental change, since it compromises the brain's usual organisation by connecting together previously distinct networks, signalling "unpredictable", "free and unconstrained" thought which corresponds to the creation of new mental schemas. Global functional connectivity has also been linked to an experience that feels more embodied, since it challenges the perceptual boundaries between the self and environment resulting in a self that is experienced as more 'in the world' (Ibid) – more perceptual and less abstract – utilising many more different brain region functions in accordance with one's dynamic environment (Kiverstein & Miller 2015). In summary, I have shown that the evidence of three separate psychedelic fMRIs corroborate my theory that psychedelics induce a diminished object-self through a dissolved distinction between perception of the self's ongoing processes and higher-order awareness of the self as an object, as well as the creation of new mental schemas and a more embodied experience.

One might have a methodological worry that this focus on brain scans assumes the dualistic mind-body split that I have argued against in the previous section, and actually confuses the claim that psychedelics encourage a more embodied experience. This could only be the case, however, if one assumes that the brain is the mind, assuming that 'the mind' is restricted to the interactions that happen on the brain level, implying some sort of neurological reductionism. However, there is

no reason to identify the mind with the brain. This allows for a non-dualistic, embodiment approach, as allows for the mind to be one with the body, involving bodily engagement with the world. The brain may have a big role to play as the mechanism for the experience, but the experience itself is one which involves the whole body, which is part and parcel with the mind. And indeed, the brain can show us evidence that shows signs of experience being felt that is more consciously embodied, such as increased global functional connectivity, as I have shown.

3.2.4: The small self has a reflective, 'consciousness-raising' component:

I would like to highlight that the small self, in its urging of the subject to contemplate the bigger structures that they are part of, has a component that is directly consciousness-raising. Subjects *feel* a renewed connection, and this is often conscious in that they are self-aware of it and can describe a new sense of connectedness to larger entities than themselves. This directly relates to challenging the personalisation of neoliberal anxious affect, since it challenges this paradigm of individualism in which our wellbeing is constrained to our own spheres and such concerns end at the individual. If getting together to raise awareness about structural affect in general can induce the seven functions that consciousness-raising intends, proposed by IPC (speaking from experience, validation, constructing voice, creating a safe space, affective/emotional transformation, 'the click' and integrating/analysing experiences), then doing this alongside affective technology that actually directly promotes feelings of belonging to a larger structure should surely have effective results. They could also be useful in inspiring consciousness-raising en-masse, when group meeting may not be initially viable or appealing. In fact, psychedelics are well placed to meet many of these functions: especially 'validation' through their promotion of collective understandings of experience, as well as 'the click' (global integration could be seen as the neural manifestation of the click – it is literally 'neural synthesis') and affective/emotional transformation – this is clear through their therapeutic use. I have aforementioned the association of psychedelics with awe and how this involves a creation of 'new mental schemas', as well as the brain-imaging which suggests such processes are taking place. In general there is a picture of psychedelics as encouraging new perspectives and new thought patterns, and linking together previously individuated issues: the cognitive processes that they inspire fits with the framework for consciousness-raising in its raising awareness of the interconnected and structural nature of personalised issues. In Carhart-Harris 2015 brain imaging study of subjects on psilocybin, one subject reported: "there was a definite sense of lubrication, of freedom, of the cogs being loosened and firing off in all sorts of unexpected directions". To clarify, this does not contradict my claim that psychedelics induce a loss of the object-self, the higher-order

self, because although it involves reflective thinking, this is not directed at the self in an analytic way. It is inherently directed beyond the self (as we know it), in its entanglement with the experience of connection and unity.

This aspect also defends psychedelic drugs as affective technology against the worry that they might end up being utilised to support, rather than resist, neoliberalism's individualistic structure. Since they are being researched into being used as medicine, one might worry that this would just perpetuate the individualistic model of therapy that frames anxiety as a personal issue (an emotional disturbance or cognitive deficit) since after all, their mechanisms of action are manifested by each individual separately, and they are consumed by individuals separately. This is fitting with the current paradigm which promotes individuals consuming medication in order to correct their individual illnesses, totally ignoring neoliberalism's power in anxiety. However, this doesn't need to be the case, since the experience that results from this individual uptake actually transcends the dominant paradigm by raising questions about its nature. Since psychedelics' method of therapeutic action is not in 'correcting' a chemical imbalance unconsciously, but is through a (often single) conscious phenomenological experience in which one 'faces inner demons' and experiences lasting shifts in perspective (including increased connectedness), they could transcend the dominant individualistic paradigm of mental health and expose its limitations. This is another way in which they are 'resistive' in providing a direct alternative affect from the neoliberal one, whilst simultaneously, in doing so, have aspects that urge us to question and critique the dominant structure. In fact, their method of uptake as individual sets them up with the possibility of being utilised to 'infiltrate' the viscous cycle of affective capitalism, as they are initially attractive from an individualised, transhumanist perspective.¹¹

3.3: Sociality:

This section is short, as the way that the renewed sense of self on psychedelics relates to others has been made evident; in the 'small self' as inherently part of a larger entity, and its renewed connectedness with others. But the crucial point is that this connection to others is in a way that is not self-interested or competitive, like the networking encouraged by neoliberalism. If people are both less concerned by their 'object-selves', involving their profit-making goals, and instead more likely to associate themselves as part of a larger collective with others, then connections to others should be genuinely helpful. Piff et al 2015 showed that experiencing awe leads to prosocial behaviour, whilst one of the criteria of the MEQ is explicitly 'the experience of oneness with others'.

¹¹ One could imagine them being presented as 'the latest new self-help craze'. In fact, this is already happening in Silicon Valley in regards to microdosing LSD – this is the ingesting of sub-perceptual amounts every third-day in order to improve creativity, energy, focus and relational skills. (Andrew 2015)

Moreover, when ego-dissolution was tested as a 'valid concept', it was tested against 'ego-inflation', and one of the ego-inflation components which subjects when on psychedelics scored explicitly negatively on was 'I felt especially keen and competitive'. (Nour et al 2016) These effects on individuals' connections to others stands in explicit contrast with the effects I highlighted are promoted by neoliberalism (competition and self-interested networking), through its affect of anxiety. Hopefully by inspiring a new kind of social connection, this can disrupt the equilibrium neoliberalism uses to sustain itself, and 'inject' new social affects into the mix, such as the "connections and compassion", and "trust, cooperation and sharing" that Firth argues for through Somatherapy. Psychedelics should be able to catalyse such affects through their direct action on individuals' cognitive makeup, and also because they do this through a renewed sense of self. This mirrors neoliberalism's mechanism more appropriately, in which dysfunctional social connections are results of our own anxious profit-driven self-critique.

4: Further Clarifications and Criticisms:

First I would like to clarify that I am putting forward this argument as a theoretical suggestion. For this to actually take place, there are many more practical considerations that I have not had scope to deal with here, including the legal framework and who would have power over distribution and production of the substances. I want to stress, though, that use of these substances would have to be in a safe setting and following detailed risk assessments, and obviously at the subject's will and consent. They have the capacity to be abused since subjects are in a vulnerable position when under the influence, so it is vital that administration follows informed research. The body of scientific evidence detailing the clinical utility of psychedelics is growing and this proposal is an expansion of that literature, looking into its application outside of the individuated 'treatment' sphere, but it is not advocating using them irresponsibly. Also, in case it is not clear, I am not advocating total eradication of the ego, of the 'object-self'; clearly it is a necessary part of existence to be able to judge oneself, and definitely necessary if we want to think about how to be better and live together better. I am just proposing that we utilise tools that can help us 'tone down' the affective grip of this psychological component that is so tied to the aims of neoliberalism - the maximisation of capital. I am applying cutting-edge, inherently paradigm-shifting scientific research to affective capitalism to offer an alternative resistance strategy that should hopefully provide some affective release from neoliberal anxiety, help to expose it, and help to disrupt its viscous cycle.

Another worry is that utilising drugs in this way might actually just instigate 'adapting' to affective capitalism rather than resisting it. Both IPC and Firth describe the rise in self-help and

wellbeing resources as normative discourses with the role of promoting individual adaptation to the system – promoting an acceptance of neoliberalism in helping individuals ‘deal’ with it without critiquing it. Psychedelics could be seen to fit into this discourse through their use as ‘medication’, and association with being ‘far out from reality’ and also acceptance: one of the ego-dissolution components was “I felt far less absorbed by my own issues and concerns”, as well as acceptance being a key feature of patients’ reports after trialling psilocybin for treatment-resistant depression (Watts et al 2017). It could also be argued that the approach I am advocating fuels an acceptance of the dominant affect because it does not directly deal with any of the structural issues which hold it in place, such as the rise of surveillance culture and poverty and high unemployment in general. People are anxious precisely because work provides the means for survival so they are locked into the viscous cycle through necessity – drugs are not going to change these structural and institutional states of affairs.

First I will address the worry about psychedelics’ inefficiency to challenge neoliberal infrastructure: I stress again that the use I am advocating is as tools to help resist the affect that helps to sustain the structural and institutional facts of poverty and surveillance culture. I have explained how this anxiety, caused by surveillance and poverty (among other factors), helps to perpetuate those structures by keeping people ‘locked in’ the system, whether that be in competition for work or fighting for benefits. My proposal has limits, obviously, in that it is aimed at disrupting that affect by directly inducing an alternative affect, which comes part and parcel with raising consciousness about the dominant affect of anxiety and its structural origins, but does not directly attack institutions. However, direct action which does attack institutions (for example, organising to shut down a prison for one day) is limited too, in that it does not challenge the wider narratives or affects which sustain such institutions in an accessible or efficient way. This sort of resistance is important, but it too has its place in often being received negatively by the masses – often *because* of neoliberal affect; fear about such events is deliberately pushed by the media. But introducing the new affect, of social connectedness that is not based on competition, might help to counter such fear and even promote disgust at it. This is where my proposal has its place – in challenging this affect which plays its part in sustaining the structures which limit so many people’s lives. The affect of anxiety is insidious, it is not so easily fightable like a particular institution or policy, as it is symptomatic of an entire socioeconomic paradigm. This makes many people its victims, even many of those who profit from neoliberalism are victims to its incessant anxiety; the self-critique and competition that this invokes is often a factor in why they have become successful and privileged by the system. Changing a whole socioeconomic paradigm is only going to be possible through changes of public perspective which needs generalised approaches; the pervasive affect of

anxiety helps to keep the general public in this paradigm so tactics are needed to resist it and offer alternatives. My proposal offers this, also in a pervasive way – literally through changing ‘hearts and minds’ (well, definitely ‘minds!’).

As for the worry that the drugs themselves would not actually produce this resistive affect but actually instigate acceptance, I am proposing them alongside frameworks of consciousness-raising. They already have a tendency to promote changes in perspective and raise awareness of the structural, interconnected aspects of existence in their evoking a sense of self that is interconnected in a larger entity, and with explicit literature about the affect of neoliberalism, they should hopefully inspire the opposite of acceptance of the paradigm, instead providing the ‘alternative affect’ that is needed alongside the intellectual knowledge of consciousness-raising frameworks. A substance that induces a state of connectedness, with ourselves as well as others, isn’t going to easily derail into functioning as a sedating ‘opium of the masses’¹² if it is promoted within a context that is critical of neoliberalism and the personalisation of its affects. And even without such a context, evidence shows that they inspire character change and transformation. The mechanisms of ego-dissolution, unity and connectedness – that I argue culminate in the ‘small self’ – have been shown to result in increased prosocial behaviour, increased ‘openness’ and even increased pro-environmental behaviour. Bit by bit, experiences of the small self should lead to changes rather than acceptance of the system, whether that be in making one’s company give out guaranteed-hour contracts, or transforming it into a cooperative. These are actions that do help to change the profit-driven, anxiety-inducing paradigm. This point relates to their generalised utility – they hold transformative potential in being used by all victims of the system, even and maybe even especially by those ‘victims’ who are rewarded by it. To sum up, they are useful in already critical contexts, in providing an alternative affect to the one that people are aware of but still feel, to help make resistance to it possible. They are also helpful without these contexts, in a general way, to inspire self-attitudes and connections to others that are not based on self-critique and competition, and this might be especially effective in instigating system change in relation to people that hold power within the neoliberal socioeconomic system, in inspiring them to rethink their own power in relation to the renewed sense of self and connection to others. I have already mentioned how they are well placed to ‘infiltrate’ the system in this way, especially from a transhumanist perspective of enhancement, and it seems that this is already at its very beginnings. At a conference in 2015, Dr Robin Carhart-Harris (leading psychedelic researcher at Imperial University who is at the forefront of clinical research into their uses) gave a talk entitled ‘How can psychedelic drugs change the world?’ in which

¹² ‘Opium of the masses’ refers to the quote by Marx in which he describes religion as making people happy but also discouraging resistance to the capitalist economic system which was keeping them in poverty.

he talked about the wider applications of their therapeutic use for treating treatment-resistant depression through initiating changes in perspective that no antidepressants are capable of, ending on the thought that they induce “an openness to change and willingness to live with uncertainty”. This marks their inherently paradigm-shifting nature: not just for an individual in terms of their sense of self, but, through having this effect on each individual, they challenge the paradigms of collective spheres of knowledge production – in this case psychiatry. This is how, hopefully and eventually, they can change the socioeconomic paradigm too.

Conclusion:

Currently there is an ongoing ‘psychedelic renaissance’ in scientific research, mainly into their therapeutic uses across a wide range of mental health issues. Three significant factors in these uses seem to be their effects of ego-dissolution, a ‘unitive experience’ and a sense of connectedness to oneself, others and their surroundings. However, the literature does not focus on how these three components are inconsistent: connection to oneself seems to contradict the losing of oneself to things outside of them. I have analysed these effects using the most recent scientific data, and interpreted them in an effort to understand better what is taking place and how the components can coexist, proposing that they initiate a renewed sense of self: the ‘small self’ which is one that is less focused on higher-order self-critique, and instead feels more embodied and identifies itself as part of a larger whole. This directly opposes the effects on the self of neoliberalism, in its bolstering of self-surveillance and self-critique, manifested by an affect of anxiety. In providing this alternative affect, psychedelics also inspire social connections that are not rooted in self-interest and competition but instead look to a common unity, resisting neoliberal sociality which is rooted in self-interest and competition in its obsession with maximising profit, sustained by the affect of anxiety. They are especially interesting because they have the potential to disrupt the viscous cycle of neoliberal anxiety, in which this affect perpetuates the system of profit maximisation: it is caused by this system but also holds individuals in it. In producing a new affect which resists this, psychedelics can help to break this hold, allowing individuals to transcend the dominant affect of neoliberalism. This transcendence makes it a transhumanist concern. In fact, affective capitalism is extremely relevant to transhumanism, as it concerns how our individual mind-bodies are effected by, and effect, dominant socio-economic paradigms, in a way that limits our potential. Transhumanism should therefore widen its scope from individual biological limitations to consider how the social, and how collective power structures prevent us from ‘evolving’, and how technology could be used to interfere with this. Psychedelics present as a promising example of such an idea, and fit well into

the transhumanist framework of enhancement through technology, each individual at a time. In fact, using drugs for enhancement purposes is already a familiar transhumanist idea. This should be developed to utilise psychedelic drugs as affective technology, to fight affective capitalism.

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