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“Riddle Coma”: Entrallment at the Neuro-receptor Theatre

Speaking of his experiences with mescaline in *The Doors of Perception*, Aldous Huxley proposed that “In life, man *proposes*, God *disposes*”. The proposition for Huxley appears to have been a provisional epistemological inquiry while the *disposition* was ontological and “objective” – “naked existence”, accessible via the direct experience of psychotropic “gratuitous grace”.

The 3,4,5-trimethoxyphenethylamine (mescaline) molecules that attached to Huxley’s dopamine receptors produced an augmented sensorium: “The great change was in the realm of the objective.” The synaptic theatre of neuro-receptivity (observed in recent MRI studies) opens with the desegregation of the rich-club higher functions of the cerebral cortex, the frontoparietal lobe, inferior temporal cortices, and bilateral thalamus, producing an increased receptivity to environmental stimuli and a globalization of the experience of ‘selfhood’.

On the one hand, the deactivation of hub hierarchies allows for increased randomization of synaptic processes, producing enhanced *subjectification*, the feeling of wholeness and universal communication. On the other hand, disintegration of brain hierarchy leads to the precarious experience of *de-subjectification* and vulnerability for the entire organism. (Huxley’s classic British understatement: “What had happened to my subjective universe was relatively unimportant.”) Indeed, the experience of ego death or psychic death is incommensurable and beyond common signifying practices. How does one describe an act of will that perilously submits will to the flames? I will consider this problem by building on the phenomenon of neuro-reception, and interleaving various performance systems and ephemera: Aldous Huxley’s *proposition* and *disposition*, Walter Benjamin’s messianic moment, Rudolf Bultmann’s eschatology, Christopher Cherniak’s “riddle coma”, and Bas Jan Ader’s negotiations with the tipping point, “the miraculous” and corporeal death.

Ray Langenbach creates conceptual performances, convenes gatherings, documents and writes on cultural theory, performance and queer culture. He has shown his work at Whitney Museum of Art, National Centre for the Arts Mumbai, India, Artspace, Sydney, Asia Pacific Triennale, Werkleitz Biennial, Gwangju Biennale, Malaysia National Art Gallery, Singapore Art Museum, National Gallery of Art Singapore, Kiasma Museum, Helsinki, Future of Imagination Festival (Singapore), Asiatopia (Bangkok), La Cite, Paris, *La Bas* Performance Art Festival, Cattle Depot Artists Village, Hong Kong, Hong Kong Art Centre, and Park 19 Artist Village, Guangzhou, China. His writings on SE Asian performance, propaganda and visual culture have appeared in *Performance Research*, *Oxford Dictionary of Performance*, *Mediating Malaysia: Media, Culture & Power in Malaysian Society* (Yeo, Routledge 2010), *Rigorous and Compassionate Listening*, *Dialogical Writing on Site-Specific Art* (Kantonen, KUVA, 2010), *Contesting Performance: Emerging Sites of Research* with Rae (Palgrave 2009/2012), *Histories, Practices, Interventions: A Reader in Singapore Contemporary Art* (ICA, LaSalle, 2016), *Narratives In Malaysian Art* Vols. 3 (2015) & 4 (2017). Langenbach is Professor of Performance Art and Theory, Live Art and Performance Studies, at the Theatre Academy of University of the Arts Helsinki.

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