

HUXLEY VIA SCHELLING: TOWARD AN AESTHETIC APPROACH TO PSYCHEDELIC EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT: A major problem that has prevented a deeper understanding of the effects of psychedelic substances is that of the ineffable. Their therapeutic potential is now well established, however many of the observed benefits appear contingent on the associated psychedelic experience – which is often deemed ineffable. This paper argues that the failure to approach the ineffable experience is a result of the scientific methods employed in psychedelic research, and thus might be reconciled upon broadening the approach. By returning to Aldous Huxley’s famous account of his mescaline experience presented in *The Doors of Perception* (1954) it will be argued that an aesthetic approach is a natural and potentially fruitful way of providing the deeper understanding of psychedelic experience currently lacking in the scientific literature. Drawing on the philosophy of Friedrich Schelling as presented in his two works *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800) and *The Philosophy of Art* (1802-1803) this aesthetic approach will be elaborated, highlighting the potential for future research.

KEYWORDS: Psychedelics; Schelling; Huxley; Art; Aesthetics; Ineffable; Experience

The recent resurgence of academic interest in the psychedelic experience has predominately been led by scientific approaches aiming to understand the phenomena in terms of chemical interactions, functional neuroimaging, and qualitative reporting. These approaches have done much to reveal the tremendous therapeutic potential of psychedelic compounds (as evident from the last two decades) but very little to reveal the nature of the experience itself – which in turn has often contributed to its dismissal as mere hallucination or

delusion.¹ However, scientific approaches have fallen short in their attempts to understand not just the psychedelic experience, but the nature of experience itself, begetting no clear account of consciousness.² As a result, attention is now turning toward philosophy to provide a further account of psychedelic substances and the experiences they can induce.³

One possible approach to the psychedelic experience is aesthetic. An aesthetic approach does not rely on the same empirical criteria as does a scientific approach, which aims to verify its object of study through evidence and analysis, building up toward its proof through a series of investigations.⁴ Rather, an aesthetic approach deals with what is at hand immediately, deducing its insights from the experience itself instead of seeking to explain its possibility contingently, as for instance neuroscience does. Instead, aesthetics lends itself to an understanding of the psychedelic experience precisely because of its epistemological flexibility which avoids from the outset the dismissive (anti)explanation that “all was just a delusion.” In other words, approaching the psychedelic experience from the perspective of aesthetics raises the question “*in what ways is the world being presented anew?*” and by asking such a question, permits and encourages the propagation of speculative interpretation which has been detrimentally lacking in the mainstream psychedelic literature thus far. Friedrich Schelling (1775-1854) thought much the same in regard to the problems of knowledge as such, which he understood as being underpinned by an arbitrary presupposition about which kind of knowledge is to be taken as primary – whether the objective or subjective. Experimentation, of the kind science tends to employ, ignores the presuppositions on which it fundamentally rests: “Every experiment is a question put to Nature, to which it is compelled to give a reply.

¹ Flanagan and Graham think of psychedelics as a kind of self-hypnosis that produce “metaphysical hallucinations.” See Owen Flanagan & George Graham, “Truth and Sanity: Positive Illusions, Spiritual Delusions, and Metaphysical Hallucinations” in *Extraordinary Science and Psychiatry* eds. J. Poland & S. Tekin. Cambridge: MA, MIT Press, 2017.

Further, anthropologist of science Nicholas Langlitz has detailed the tendency among the scientific community to continue to dismiss the psychedelic experience based on its alleged association with psychosis, of which there is no scientific evidence. See Nicholas Langlitz, *Neuropsychodelia: The Revival of Hallucinogen Research Since the Decade of the Brain*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.

² See David Chalmers, “Facing up to the problem of consciousness” *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, vol.2 no. 3. 1995, pp. 200-19.

³ The first Philosophy of Psychedelics conference was held by the University of Exeter in April 2021.

⁴ Andrew Bowie, “Revealing the truth of art”, *Radical Philosophy*, vol. 58 Summer, 1991, pp. 20-4.

But every question contains an implicit a priori judgment... it can never get beyond the forces of Nature, of which it makes use as means.”⁵ Schelling opted for a more nuanced approach, one which he passingly referred to as “ideal-realism.”⁶ At the end of his major work, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, Schelling concluded that art sheds light on the fundamental conditions of knowledge – a position shared by author and intellectual Aldous Huxley (1894-1963).

During the early mid-50s Huxley was by chance invited to partake in a scientific study on the effects of mescaline (the psychoactive compound found in the Peyote cactus). He detailed the experience in the 1954 book, *The Doors of Perception*, in which he reflects on metaphysics, perception and the mind and its place in nature from a psychedelic state of consciousness. It remains an invaluable account of the psychedelic experience expressed by one of the great writers of the 20th century. Today, there is no shortage of such “trip” reports, but what keeps Huxley’s account relevant is not only the expressive and evocative language of a distinguished author, but also its eagerness to understand the psychedelic experience philosophically. Huxley, in the *Doors*, had sown the seed for a philosophical consideration of psychedelics which, while lying dormant for some time, is now sprouting into an academic field of its own.⁷

One of the predominant themes of Huxley’s mescaline experience was a heightened aesthetic quality. He was led to believe that the drive for artistic expression was the drive to express reality truthfully, as it actually is. Contrary to Huxley’s position, truth and art aren’t often contemplated together, rather science holds a monopoly on epistemic validity – justifying itself through scrutinous methods of falsification and verification. While the distinction between science and art remains crude,⁸ for the purposes of this paper they will be held in tentative tension, if only in the hope of encouraging reflection on the current

⁵ F. W. J. Schelling, *First Outline of System of the Philosophy of Nature* (1799) trans, K. Peterson. Albany: SUNY Press, 2004, p. 197.

⁶ F. W. J. Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800) trans. P. Heath. Virginia: University Press Virginia, 2001, p. 41.

⁷ The philosophy of psychedelics so far contains a diverse array of advocated approaches, some of which are fundamentally scientific such as “neuropsychology” and others which are rooted in Eastern mystical traditions.

⁸ Schelling considered art and science as so directly opposed to one another that they were destined to merge into one. See Schelling, *System*, p. 227.

approaches taken in psychedelic research. By acknowledging Huxley's psychedelic experience through Schelling's philosophy of art, an aesthetic approach might become a viable way of understanding psychedelic experiences beyond the limits of the scientific method.

The first significant effects Huxley noticed after ingesting the mescaline were aesthetic in nature. He reports subtle changes to his perception which gradually developed into profound insights: an oddly arranged vase of flowers (which that morning he had noticed for its clashing colours) were now the embodiment of "the miracle, moment by moment, of naked existence" – seen as if by Adam on the day of his creation.⁹ Soon, the furniture in front of him appeared as if in a Braque or Juan Gris painting. Even the folds in the fabric of his trousers possessed a certain Botticellian allure. Moved by these initial effects, Huxley saw between art and reality a deep connection that he believed was the source of inspiration for all the great artists of history: to represent the world as it actually is. "What the rest of us see only under the influence of mescaline, the artist is congenitally equipped to see all the time."¹⁰ Huxley is not alone in associating art and psychedelics. The indigenous of the Americas have long tied the two together in ceremony, as preserved in their prehistoric rock art.¹¹

As Huxley's mescaline experience continued, he turned his attention from the external world of objects to the symbolic world of art, looking through a book until he came upon an image of Van Gough's *Chair*. Taken aback, he referred to it as an "astounding portrait of a *Ding an Sich*" claiming through reference to Kant's thing-in-itself that the painted chair was somehow *more real* than the chairs of the phenomenal world.¹² Huxley was influenced by Kant, as well as C.D. Broad and Bergson, especially in regard to the idea that that ultimate reality was somehow beyond the comprehension of ordinary experience. In following these thinkers Huxley proposed the "reducing valve" theory of the brain, which conceives of the cerebrum as a primarily inhibiting organ. Reminiscent of the inspired line from William Blake: "If the doors of perception were cleansed

⁹ Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception and Heaven and Hell*, London: Grafton 1977, p. 15.

¹⁰ Ibid. pp. 27-28.

¹¹ Peter T. Furst, "Hallucinogens in Precolumbian Art", in M.E. King, I.R. Traylor (Eds.), *Art and Environment in Native America*, Texas Technical University, 1974, pp. 55-107.

¹² Huxley, *Doors* p. 24.

everything would appear to man as it is: Infinite”¹³ Huxley thought particular substances such as mescaline could relax or widen, as it were, the valve of the brain to let through a greater stream of conscious experience.¹⁴ Reality and truth for Huxley become inseparably tied to the psychedelic experience. Ordinary consciousness – which is reduced or funnelled through the valve of the brain – is only of biological and practical necessity: it helps the organism survive. However, as far as Huxley is concerned, it does not produce a veridical rendering of the world and is therefore secondary to the psychedelic experience. The reducing valve theory of the brain, while seeming like ungrounded conjecture, has seen legitimate scientific interest after neuroimaging studies revealed decreased activity in the default mode network – a cluster of regions responsible for inhibiting global brain activity – during psychedelic experience. In other words, psychedelics may in fact increase overall brain activity, widening the valve to allow for a larger array of experience.¹⁵

Verisimilitude is a quality commonly attributed to psychedelic states. Barrett and Griffiths have noted in their studies that subjects tend to describe their psychedelic experiences as “more real than everyday reality”¹⁶ suggesting at the very least that an earnest consideration of such mental states is justified. Huxley associates this increased sensation of realness with what he describes as an intimation of the “suchness” of things – how things actually are. Art, in this way, is regarded by Huxley as an attempt at representing this haecceity symbolically, an “expressive symbol of the fact” and therefore a great source of knowledge. Van Gough’s *Chair* for instance, is a truthful rendering of an experiential phenomena. What might normally be considered an unimpressive everyday object for sitting is, for Van Gough, a wonderful masterpiece of inexplicable beauty worth every effort required to capture its exquisite individuality. However, as art is representative it necessarily fails to fully capture the suchness of its object – it

¹³ William Blake, “The Marriage of Heaven and Hell” in *William Blake: Introduced and Edited by J Bronowski*, United Kingdom: Penguin Publishing 1976, p. 101.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 19-21.

¹⁵ Robin Carhart-Harris et al., “Neural Correlates of the Psychedelic State as Determined by fMRI Studies with Psilocybin,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* vol.109, no. 6, 2012, p. 2142.

¹⁶ Frederick Barrett and Roland Griffiths, “Classic Hallucinogens and Mystical Experiences: Phenomenology and Neural Correlates,” *Current Topics in Behavioural Neuroscience*, no. 36, 2018, p. 4.

remains but a symbol which Huxley argues, is a “homemade substitute[s]” for the thing it stands for.¹⁷ He thus deems the psychedelic experience, which does not merely represent but reveals the haecceity of reality in the lived world, beyond the power of art to represent.

Contrary to Huxley’s conclusion, Schelling gave to art the highest praise, calling it “the holy of holies” capable of revealing the deepest truths.¹⁸ At the end of his *System*, he thought it to be the key to philosophy which could present *objectively* what the philosopher could only contemplate *subjectively*. Understanding Schelling’s initial enthusiasm toward art is a fruitful way of coming to terms with Huxley’s mescaline experience and will help establish the possibility of approaching the psychedelic experience aesthetically.

Schelling’s *System* takes the form of an odyssey charting the evolution of consciousness up from its undivided primordial roots and into the heights of its abstraction, seeking to conclude at the very point it begins. Thus the initial question is how knowledge as such is possible, especially given that knowledge is always conditioned by the means through which it is arrived at, i.e. through consciousness. One can either start with the external world and attempt to explain how self-consciousness possible within it, or one can start from internal self-consciousness and attempt to explain the existence of the objective world. In either case, the two opposites must bend around to meet one another, for without self-consciousness the world could not be cognised, and without world, a self-conscious organism could not emerge. Schelling was acutely aware that any account of knowledge presupposes the initial union between subject and object.

The union between the subjective and the objective – that which is the ground of all knowledge – is necessarily presupposed for without it knowledge would not be possible. One could not relate subjectively to the objective world if this were otherwise. However, philosophy, as a self-reflexive practice, is ultimately underpinned by the conditions of consciousness and finds itself limited in regard to being able to grasp this fact, or what Schelling would later refer to as *the absolute*. Philosophy then, it seems, is unable to grasp the conditions on which it depends and must subsequently presuppose the absolute without being able to prove it. At

¹⁷ Huxley, *Doors*, p. 37.

¹⁸ Schelling, *System*, p. 231

the end of the *System*, however, Schelling saw a possibility for philosophy, but more broadly, self-consciousness, to become liberated from its inherent limitations by turning toward art.

The work of art is a peculiar object in that while being a product of conscious human will, it is also a creation of unconscious Nature. According to Schelling, true art requires not only an artist who possesses technical mastery over their medium, but also the creative genius required to bring forth an artefact worthy of serious consideration.¹⁹ While an artist's technique can refine and develop through an exercise of the will, genius, on the other hand, falls beyond the control of the artist – one is either born with it or not. For Schelling, this dichotomy represents the combined influence of both conscious and unconscious forces in the creation of true art: conscious through skill, and unconscious through genius. Further, these conscious and unconscious aspects involved in artistic creation, for Schelling, represent the subjective and the objective elements of self-consciousness, harmonising to form the work of art.

With this in mind, Schelling sees in the artwork a symbol of the initial union between subject and object that is the ground of all subsequent knowledge, and from which self-consciousness is born. When one views a work of art and recognises within it the harmony between conscious and unconscious, subjective and objective, they are presented with an external rendering of the ground of knowledge as such, and thus the very roots of self-consciousness. Before this is possible the absolute ground of knowledge is but a presupposed necessary principle in Schelling's transcendental philosophy. Now however, through the work of art, the absolute is revealed and made accessible to consciousness, giving it the form, as it were, through which it can be grasped. Nonetheless the absolute *qua* absolute resists being reduced to any single physical artefact, and therefore art is left incapable of completely representing the ground of knowledge. What art can do however, is provide an intimation of the absolute through what Schelling refers to as *aesthetic intuition*, which simply put, is an objectification of the process self-consciousness itself. It is by virtue of the symbol of art that the process of conscious development is made objective, thereby allowing the comprehension

¹⁹ F. W. J. Schelling, *The Philosophy of Art (1802-1803)*, trans. D. W. Stott, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.

of the evolutionary history self-consciousness.

Both Schelling and Huxley consider art symbolic: it could be said they have more in common than they do in difference. However, Schelling gives to art a genuine philosophical role, whereas Huxley leaves it only the credit of those humble enough to enjoy it. In one of his cruder passages, he writes:

Art, I suppose, is only for beginners, or else for those resolute dead-enders, who have made up their minds to be content with the ersatz of Suchness, with symbols rather than with what they signify, with the elegantly composed recipe in lieu of actual dinner.²⁰

When it comes to articulating the content of the symbol, (what it actually represents), both thinkers stop short because what Schelling and Huxley are ultimately considering is beyond conceptual and discursive qualification – known in psychedelic literature as the problem of the ineffable. Millière et al. note the issue this causes in psychedelic research, stating: “It is notoriously difficult to gather reliable evidence about subjective experience, and this is all the more problematic with altered states of consciousness often being deemed *ineffable*.”²¹ Understanding experience itself is the broader problem underpinning the psychedelic experience. The question is whether psychedelic experience cannot illuminate something about the nature of experience per se. Huxley voices his concerns regarding this at the beginning of the *Doors*, claiming “every embodied spirit is doomed to suffer and enjoy in solitude... We can pool information about experiences, but never the experiences themselves.”²² To the dismay of many researchers the majority of profound therapeutic benefits associated with psychedelic substances appear contingent on the experience, which is often characterised as “mystical.”²³ In other words, without the experience the measurable benefits are not recorded.²⁴ Gordon Wasson phrases the problem well: “One who has known the ineffable is loath to embark on explanations:

²⁰ Huxley, *Doors*, p. 25.

²¹ Millière, R., Carhartt-Harris R., Roseman, L., et al., “Psychedelics, Meditation and Self-Consciousness”, *Frontiers in Psychology*, vol. 9, 2018, pp. 1-29, (emphasis added).

²² Huxley, *Doors*, pp. 11-12.

²³ Roland R. Griffiths et. al., Psilocybin can occasion “Psilocybin can occasion mystical-type experiences having substantial and sustained personal meaning and spiritual significance,” *Psychopharmacology*, vol. 187, no. 3. 2006, pp. 268-283.

²⁴ Walter N. Pahnke et al., “The Experimental Use of Psychedelic (LSD) Psychotherapy.” *JAMA*, vol. 212 no. 11 1970, p. 1856-1863.

words are useless.”²⁵

The problem of experience affects science more generally, as Nagel made famous with reference to bat phenomenology.²⁶ The scientific method, he argues, is limited to providing informational knowledge *about* experience, gathered through reliable data sources such as controlled experiments: it cannot disclose what an experience is *like*. All the data in the world about bat biology will never provide an exact account of what it is actually like to be a bat, and in fact, Nagel continues, will only take us further away from the experience. He writes:

If the subjective character of experience is fully comprehensible only from one point of view, then any shift to greater objectivity...does not take us nearer to the real nature of the phenomenon: it takes us further away from it.²⁷

David Chalmers characterises this as the “hard” problem of consciousness, noting that the methods of science are primarily designed to offer functional explanations, i.e. how something works. This, of course, does not account for conscious experience. “What makes the hard problem hard and almost unique is that it goes *beyond* problems about the performance of functions.”²⁸ If understanding ordinary experience is scientifically difficult at best, coming to an understanding of the psychedelic experience through the same methods is arguably futile.

If what has been expounded of Schelling so far is convincing, Nagel’s claim that an objective account of experience only takes one further away from its subjective character should seem absurd. Schelling made it clear that if knowledge at all is possible, both the subjective and objective must be inherently and initially entwined. This however does not completely resolve the hard problem of consciousness (which is undeniably a problem within the domain of science) it merely reframes the context by which knowledge is arrived at and therefore makes the hard problem of consciousness irrelevant. In other words, and this is Chalmers point too, experience must be taken as primary – it cannot

²⁵ R. Gordon Wasson, Albert Hoffman, Carl P. Ruck, *The Road to Eleusis: Unveiling the Secret of the Mysteries* (13th anniversary edition) California: North Atlantic Books, 2008 p. 67.

²⁶ Thomas Nagel, “What is it like to be a bat?”, *The Philosophical Review* vol. 83 no. 4 1974, p. 435-50.

²⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 444-5

²⁸ David Chalmers, “Facing up to the problem of consciousness”, *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, vol. 2 no. 3. 1995, pp. 200-19.

be explained.²⁹ Here the relevance of Schelling's philosophy to the problem of the ineffable becomes apparent: as consciousness is the determining factor of knowledge, knowledge itself can only be justified if its ground is made objective and presented externally. This is achieved for Schelling in the work of art and thus *aesthetics* becomes the appropriate approach to the problem of consciousness.³⁰ An obvious question that arises here is whether art can somehow "explain" the psychedelic experience. Permitting such optimism, what comes to mind is the psychedelic art movement.

Psychedelic art emerged alongside the counterculture movement of the 1960s and 70s, known for its intense and vivid representations of geometric patterns and spiritual symbolism (often taken from eastern mystic traditions). Such symbols intended to depict the visual and felt experience of psychedelic states. The rise of the information age, which counterculture figurehead Timothy Leary embraced,³¹ amplified the psychedelic aesthetic as computer technologies provided a new medium for the art. Subsequently, almost all contemporary art considered "psychedelic" is computer generated and gains its appeal through the spectacle of its visual composition.

One interpretation of psychedelic art might be that the computer-medium has forsaken content in favour of form: emphasising pure spectacle over the conceptual. Referring to Schelling, it could also be argued that technical skill has been given precedence over genius – failing to meet the necessary requirements of true art. Criticisms aside however, Schelling's understanding of the role of art changes in a significant way following the year 1800 after the publication of his *System*. Rather than art providing insight into philosophy, philosophy would instead be that which gives insight into art: rendering art by itself incapable of revealing the absolute.

The prominent turn taken by Schelling after the *System* is presented in his *Philosophy of Art* lectures (1802-1803) where he addresses the very possibility and purpose of a philosophy of art. He maintains that the transcendental truth – that the subjective and the objective must necessarily converge – is a truth which is limited to philosophy within the realm of self-consciousness, or more generally

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Bowie, *Radical Philosophy*.

³¹ Timothy Leary, *Chaos and Cyber Culture*, California: Ronin Publishing, Berkeley, 1994.

the ideal.³² The artwork still offers the philosopher an objective or *real* rendering of this truth, as it did in the *System*, however Schelling now argues that it takes philosophy for it to be realised:

This indicates not only in a larger sense that art can become the object of knowledge in philosophy, but more specifically that outside of philosophy and other than through philosophy, *nothing can be known about art in an absolute fashion.*³³

It is only through philosophy, in other words, that art can be seen as containing within it the absolute which lies at the ground of knowledge and it is for this reason that Schelling suggests “the philosopher necessarily possesses better vision within the essence of art than does the artist himself.”³⁴ Nassar notes that it is not art which provides the key to philosophy (as was the case in the *System*) but now philosophy that provides insight into art.³⁵ While the possibility for a philosophy of art is first established in Schelling’s conception of the artwork as epistemologically valuable to the philosopher, in the *PA* he refines its purpose and goal which becomes nothing short of “the presentation of the absolute world in the form of art.”³⁶

One might ask what it is that grants philosophy the ability to see into that absolute and “unfathomable quality of art.” For Schelling it is philosophy’s inherent disposition to the ideal world – that its presentations take the form of ideas. Philosophy, no matter what it takes as its object, works to present what it studies in ideal form (or as an idea) because it is necessarily a self-reflective discipline. It is in this way, through a transfiguration of aesthetics into ideas, that a philosophy of art fulfils its task. More than a decade before Keats, Schelling would see this process exemplified in the relationship between beauty and truth, which for him, represents a parallel between the subjective and the objective: “Beauty and truth are essentially or ideally one, for truth, just as beauty, is ideally the identity of the subjective and the objective.”³⁷ If something is purported to be beautiful, says Schelling, if it is to be *absolutely* beautiful it must also be true and

³² Schelling, *PA*, p.3.

³³ *Ibid.* p. 6. My italics.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Dalia Nassar, *The Romantic Absolute: Being and Knowing in Early German Romanticism*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 253.

³⁶ Schelling, *PA*, p. 7.

³⁷ *Ibid.* p. 31 (emphasis omitted).

vice versa. The difference between the two, is that this absolute identity is intuited subjectively through truth, that is to say within self-consciousness by philosophy, and through beauty it is done objectively or within a work of art. However, both beauty and truth work to reveal their absolute identity from different perspectives. It is in this regard that a philosophy of art is tasked with presenting the beauty of the sensual in the form of philosophical truth.³⁸

The transfiguration of aesthetics into ideas is Schelling's newly assigned goal for a philosophy of art. In the context of the psychedelic experience (if treated in aesthetic terms) this would imply speculation and reflection on psychedelic states rather than a dismissal of them on empirical grounds. During a point in his mescaline experience, Huxley refers to what he calls an "obscure knowledge" of the infinite within the finite, or as he puts it: "that All is in all – that All is actually each."³⁹ For Huxley this was an "unconceptualized event," a product of direct experience rather than conceptual deliberation which qualitative reporting would be quick to file away as "ineffable." Granted that an aesthetic approach could be a viable way of dealing with psychedelic experience, Huxley's unconceptualized event might be interpreted in Schellingian terms as an *intuition of the absolute*. However, to be successful and insightful, an aesthetic account of the psychedelic experience cannot settle for mere descriptions of the ineffable in philosophical terms because description, lacking a fundamental conceptual element, simply leads toward further explanatory adequation of the kind science relies on – which has already been shown to be fruitless in this regard. While capable of providing a conceptual framework, Schelling's philosophy of art offers more than just a lexicon. It encourages an entirely different framing of the experience which avoids the barriers constantly faced by the scientific method.

For philosophy to justly take something as its object (i.e. for there to be a philosophy of *X*) its object must be capable of "taking up the entire, undivided essence of the absolute into itself" says Schelling.⁴⁰ If the psychedelic experience is capable of being seen in such terms – if a philosophy of psychedelics is possible – it must partake in the idealisation of the experience, which put simply, involves *articulating the aesthetic experience in the form of ideas*. The criterion of truth with

³⁸ Ibid. p. 5.

³⁹ Huxley, *Doors*, p. 22.

⁴⁰ Schelling, *PA*, pp. 15-16.

respect to these ideas produced on aesthetic grounds is not propositional: it does not rely on representation or adequation but rather depends on its association with beauty.⁴¹ Contra Hegel, Schelling makes it clear that philosophy can never hope to subsume the whole of art, resulting in some kind of ultimate dissipation of creativity into reason. Rather, as philosophy and art disclose the various facets of the absolute as they are presented in beauty and truth, the process is a reciprocal one which reveals that the grounds on which both stand is the one absolute ground of the ideal and real, the subjective and the objective – the ground of both philosophy and art. As Bowie acknowledges, art too can affect philosophy by making ideas sensuous in the form of images.⁴² This aligns with Schelling's conception of the absolute as necessarily outside or beyond time as that which "subsumes the momentum of cause and effect".⁴³ The result is that the task of a philosophy of art is an endless one.

The distinction between the standard scientific approach and the aesthetic approach has forced some revisions when it comes to producing an "understanding" of the psychedelic experience. It can be argued that many of the metaphysical implications of a philosophy of art are speculative rather than final and are necessary for the transfiguration of aesthetics into ideas. Because of this, such metaphysical speculation should be encouraged within the new field of the philosophy of psychedelics. The evolution in Schelling's approach from the time of his *System* to the *PA* lectures shows that an aesthetic approach requires philosophical intervention for its completion. By posing the initial aesthetic question "in what ways is the world being presented anew?" the psychedelic experience can begin to be understood as a form of truth, rather than delusion. Just as the *experience* of art is not about the individual brush strokes on the canvas nor the specific words within the poem,⁴⁴ so the psychedelic experience cannot be understood merely in regard to its particular neural correlates. Similarly, a science of art would only be capable of disclosing the compositional elements of a work and not its revelatory capacity. A scientific approach to the psychedelic

⁴¹ Bowie, *Radical Philosophy*.

⁴² Andrew Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: From Kant to Nietzsche*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990, p. 124.

⁴³ David Simpson, Foreword in Schelling's *The Philosophy of Art*, p. xii.

⁴⁴ Bowie, *Radical Philosophy*, p. 24.

experience produces only a functional explanation of its effects. These scientific explanations are useful for deepening an understanding of the way psychedelic substances *interact* with the brain, but in turn offer no account of the nature of the *experience* itself. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of the psychedelic experience requires a philosophical, and in this case, aesthetic interpretation in conjunction with the science.

Spanning well over half a century Schelling's philosophical career saw him undergo many dramatic theoretical evolutions, to such a point that Hegel would condemn him for conducting his education "in public".⁴⁵ However, Nassar interprets this turbulence in terms of his relentless desire to articulate the absolute, which given the nature of the task demanded various philosophical approaches.⁴⁶ His focus on art was one such attempt and shows the multifarious requirements of articulating something deemed beyond conceptual and discursive comprehension. Similarly, an understanding of the psychedelic experience can be expected to be as complex and precarious. The difficult task of understanding something deemed beyond conceptual and discursive comprehension however, should not disqualify all attempts to understand it. Rather eclecticism can be encouraged, and a varied approach taken. Schelling's career is testament to this, and within his work the philosophy of psychedelics finds justification.

The aesthetic nature of psychedelic experience, which Huxley alluded to so eloquently in *The Doors of Perception*, requires a philosophical exposition of the kind Schelling required for art. In following these two thinkers, the therapeutically powerful, and perhaps epistemically valuable ineffable experience produced by psychedelic substances can be approached in a fruitful way.

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⁴⁵ Nassar, *Romantic*, p. 158.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

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