

Symbiosis of the **Post-Human Identity** and the Biosphere



Portrait of Sara Huntley by Ariel Brown

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Sara Huntley created the beautiful botanically-inspired artwork that appears with this article.
—DJB

A sense of “other” is a pervading aspect of human cultures. It marks the border of the self—carving out our individuality from the collective—and it haunts us with a feeling of alienation from the world around us. Throughout history, the notion of “other” has caused much suffering in the world. Our separation from nature and other species—not to mention the human distinctions of class, race, and gender—have fragmented our sense of self and our ability to empathize with one another.

Our current attitude toward animal and plant life—as well as the Earth itself—is radically anthropocentric. Humanity acts as if it owns the Earth, justifying this because it is “other,” and the intelligence of other sentient beings has been subjugated, negated, and diminished. A whole dynamic construct of nature has been alienated from humanity as a result of this notion. However, for millennia, plant-induced psychedelic experiences—which break down cultural conditioning—have informed humanity about our relationship to the environment, allowed shamans to communicate with other species, and cleansed our lenses of perception.

One of the many ways that animals communicate with one another is through chemical signals, such as pheromones. I sometimes wonder, what if psychedelic plants are having some kind of dialogue with the human psyche through our brain chemistry? It appears as if our sense of identity becomes connected with the mind of the “plant teacher,” whose flesh we have consumed. What if our archetypal experience of the “other” is an artifact of our ancient merging with these different forms of consciousness? What if there is a deeper kind of biological intelligence that psychedelics have the capacity to bring us into communication with?

There have been some remarkable instances in which scientifically-trained minds have utilized the cognitive effects of psychedelic compounds to reach creative new insights within their fields of expertise. The case of Francis Crick, and his discovery (with the aid of LSD) of the DNA double-helix structure, comes to mind, as does the work of Kary Mullis. Mullis is the biochemist who won the 1993 Nobel Prize in chemistry for his development of the polymerase chain reaction (PCR), which revolutionized the study of genetics. Mullis has stated that LSD helped him to develop PCR. I find it fascinating that both of these



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LSD-inspired scientific developments were in the area of genetics, which is fueling our species' budding ability to manipulate biology--and we continue to make stunning new leaps in our understanding of the genetic language of the biosphere every day.

In some sense, we are incredible organic chemical computers, and it has become evident in the past few years that our aspirations on the technological level are on a collision course with our current biological identity. As medical science advances, it's becoming clear that we will soon be able to manipulate our own biology. It won't be long before we cross over a boundary that will redefine us as a species. Our emerging biotechnologies will help us to evolve beyond the purely biological entities that we were born as, into augmented beings, incorporating newly-grown organs and nanotechnological enhancements.

In modern culture it seems that whenever humanity enters a new biological or technological terrain it is feared, and portrayed as monstrous and evil. Mutants and cyborgs are seen as abominations of nature and something that erodes the human identity. The characters on *Star Trek* known as "the Borg" are one of the first and most prominent examples that come to mind. The Borg are a cybernetic alien race with a hive mind, who assimilate other species and cultures, and they are portrayed as being utterly void of individuality. The concept of losing one's self to their collective mind is portrayed as terrifying. Although this is an extreme example, it demonstrates the fear humanity has of the archetypal "other." However, in more recent popular culture we have seen the exploration of the "other" in technological terms become more neutral. Though fictionalized, our culture appears to be slowly warming up to the idea of relating to artificial beings.

The dynamic between ourselves, the biosphere, and our technology are inescapably intertwined, and we have to reevaluate, redefine, expand upon, and augment our perceptual constraints in order to relate to the "other." This means putting yourself in someone else's paws, seeing the world from the micro-perspective of an amoeba, or empathizing with an artificial intelligence (A.I.) software program. Sophisticated A.I. software and extremely realistic virtual realms will soon be in steep competition with external reality. There will soon come a time when you will no longer be able to tell if the voice on the other end of the phone is human or not, and your average customer service call might become a Turing test of sorts.

Because this super technologically-advanced future is going to happen whether we are ready for it or not, it would probably be wise for us to use our fear of the unknown as auxiliary energy to cope with our new evolutionary challenges. Although our fear is meant to protect us from the unknown, it would probably be a good idea to try and overcome our limitations, so that we can see outside the narrow confines of our anthropocentric per-

spective. When we integrate our sense of identity with the "other"-- whether it's other races, species or our environment--we foster empathy, and help to forge a conduit of understanding and mediation. Once we start broadening our understanding of the varieties of consciousness and intelligence, we will begin a dialogue with previously alien intelligences. Alien intelligences could be as close to us as our house pets. Making this first contact starts right here, naturally, not out in the stars.

Globalization has taught us much about human nature and culture in the past few decades; just imagine how much more there is to learn from other organisms and the greater biosphere. Shamans have been identifying with the spirits of various animals for millennia in their mythologies, medicine, and folklore. They call upon these spirits in times of need. This is a moment in our planet's history when we urgently need to listen and learn from our global family of organisms.

In this new age, information will be just as valuable as material resources, and the only way to understand an ecosystem, and distill information about it, is to preserve it in its natural state. Conservation is a multidisciplinary activity, a situation where passionate opinions will have to force compromise. There will be good and bad ideas, so let us not forget that evolution, by its nature, weeds out the bad ideas. In a quickly changing world, we need to remain flexible and adaptable. To do this we have to help foster diversity among ourselves and the ecosystems that we try to steward.

We are moving into a post-human era, and we will need a post human culture to support it. Psychedelics offer us a new perspective from which to view our own culture, outside of the limiting constraints imposed by the meta-program "other." I think that psychedelics have the potential to help us integrate our pre-existing qualities with our post-human identities. I also think that they can help us relate to other species, the intelligence residing within nature, and even artificial minds of our own creation. Unless humanity becomes more symbiotic with the rest of the biosphere, this new future won't be possible and our very existence is threatened. Our current paradigm has proven unsustainable, and this rift between humanity and the biosphere demands our attention and our respect. There is much healing that we are obligated to take a part in, as we cannot force ecological systems to abide by our will. We must adapt our technologies, and learn to work in harmony with nature to survive. •

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Prisma color on archival paper. 9x12"

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