

**Can the Theories of McGilchrist and Žižek Help in Understanding and  
Responding to Ideological Influences on the State Delivery of  
Psycho-Social Care?**

MALCOLM HANSON

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## Abstract

In *The Master and His Emissary*, Iain McGilchrist proposes that an intrinsic aspect of human neurology has an undue influence on shaping culture and that this particular trait manifests itself in opposition to spirituality, art and the body. I examine these domains to find evidence for the cultural processes he warns of. I also draw on Lacanian theory, via the work of Slavoj Žižek, as a general template to map out the ideological landscape in which the features McGilchrist identifies are played out. I have limited the use of Lacanian theory so that there can be a space for the development of McGilchrist's ideas.

The thesis looks at aspects of culture that manifest this ideological process and focuses on the delivery of psycho-social healthcare as an exemplar of it, on how overt statements of beneficence are ideologically grounded. State delivery of psycho-social care ignores the assumptions on which its methods are founded. This thesis addresses that lack. Any attempt to promote a definitive solution to this situation could become yet another ideological structure that merely compounds the problem. I look for a solution in areas beyond the symbolic network utilised by an ideology, areas that correspond to the Lacanian Real. In the daily lived experience of a subject, this can also be translated as the esoteric.

I explore concepts found in mystic traditions, whether religiously grounded or of a more secular nature. I conclude that their practical application becomes ideologically corrupted if they are overly prescriptive, but they do show the potential for individual subjects to prepare for the singular events that sometimes rupture the standing order. With suitable preparation, individuals stand a better chance of using such events to change their circumstances for the better.

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You find yourself walking through a factory which at the time was the biggest factory I'd ever seen in my life. And it was machining plant for making engines. So the air is full of that peculiar mixture of machining fluid and fine metal grit. Walking down through this haze, and there's enough haze that you can't see the far end of the building that you're inside, and you're beginning to think 'what am I going to do in a place like this?'. But at the same time there was excitement because production processes and that many people working and machines going have a rhythm and a pace their own that sort of enters the blood (Sir Ian Gibson, Ford General Manager 1979 to 1980 BBC Four 2009, 25:05-25:40).

But for a lot of people it is just obvious that we are machines. Because we only understand something by comparing it with a model and what you compare it with determines what it is you find. If you compare something with a machine, all its machine-like properties will start to stand forth but everything else will recede. That makes you think this is a very good model and so you carry on using it and soon you can't break out of this and you can't see anything that that model doesn't yield. And we have been sold this model that we are machines by clever people in the media and it's become almost embarrassing to mention things like the soul. It might mean that you were half-educated, not very intelligent, easily impressed with superstition and not sharp or serious. And I want to suggest to you that the precise opposite is the case (Iain McGilchrist 2016, 12:40–13:40).

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**Can the Theories of McGilchrist and Žižek Help in Understanding and  
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**Chapters:**

**Introduction**

**Chapter 1: Introducing the Theoretical Approaches - McGilchrist's**

**Hemispheres and Žižek's Lacan**

**Chapter 2: The Problem - Current Antagonisms in Wellbeing**

**Chapter 3: Subjectivity in Wellbeing**

**Chapter 4: Forming a Response**

**4.1: McGilchrist in Žižek's World**

**4.2: Theory and Practice**

**4.3: Urizen**

**Chapter 5: Finding evidence for McGilchrist's Ideas**

**5.1: Accounts which support McGilchrist**

**5.2: Art**

**5.3: Body**

**5.4: Soul**

**Chapter 6: Urizen Goes Global**

**6.1: Incubation**

**6.2: Cross-Infection from Culture to Politics**

**6.3: Pandemic**

**6.4: Urizen Manifesting Beyond Western Culture**

**6.5: Common Themes: Abstraction, Context, Juxtaposition  
and Meaning**

**Chapter 7: Potential Responses to Urizen**

**7.1: The Real**

**7.2: The Real and Spiritual Traditions**

**7.3: Žižek on Religion and the Esoteric**

**7.4: Urizen and the Esoteric**

**7.5: Other Perspectives: Blake and Kant**

**7.6: Caveats on Spirituality from Žižek and McGilchrist**

**Chapter 8: The Influence of the Real and Mystery Traditions on the Subject**

**8.1: Sirr**

**8.2: A Subject Shaped by a Different Experience**

**8.3: Karbala, Rupture and Decline**

**8.4: Islam as a Contested Signifier**

**8.5: The Esoteric in Urizenic Times**

**Chapter 9: What Is To Be Done?**

**9.1: Re-thinking the Patient/System Relationship**

**9.2: A Wellbeing Policy that Challenges the Social Order**

**9.3: Accommodating the System's Limits**

**9.4: Embracing the Marginal**

**9.5: Firebreak**

**Conclusion**

**References**

**Appendices:**

**Appendix One: List of brain hemisphere traits based on McGilchrist (2009).**

**Appendix Two: Terrorist Suspect Hasna Ait Boulahcen.**

**Appendix Three: The Abraj al Bait Hotel and the Kaaba.**

## **Introduction**

This thesis developed from my work as a psychotherapist and manager within the National Health Service (NHS) from 2008 to 2017. It is a response to the ideologies influencing those areas of health policy which are related to emotional wellbeing through the United Kingdom's (UK) statutory health services. The first of the two projects I conducted as part of this (Hanson 2014a) showed the presence of the ideological processes themselves. The second project (Hanson 2015) looked at the way that a subjectivity built on different ideals interacted with a system that endorsed the ideology identified in the earlier project.

My work has been based on the theory put forward by McGilchrist in *The Master and His Emissary* (2009) that traits associated with the natural functioning of the human brain's left hemisphere, which have evolved to enable us to analyse and manipulate the world around us, also have a propensity to distort the ways in which people mutually interact with their cultures over time. McGilchrist's book covers two main themes: the neurology of the brain hemispheres and the cultural influence that arises from this interaction. He proposes that when they are unchecked by the moderating effect of the right hemisphere, the left hemisphere traits have an undue influence which is reflected in deleterious effects upon people and their culture. A summary of his theory is at Appendix One. McGilchrist explores many cultural aspects but he does not include an overall sociological viewpoint from which to study the wider societal impact of his theory, and it is here that I turn to the work of Žižek, who writes extensively about ideology as well as many of the problems confronting societies today, such as subjectivity, capitalism, human migration and social exclusion. Like



McGilchrist, Žižek also uses numerous cultural references, especially film (1992), to illustrate his points.

If McGilchrist's theory is correct, there are implications not only for the interests of our society but also the way that a society's problems are addressed through the delivery of healthcare services, particularly those related to psycho-social care: the same institutions designed to support those individuals who are negatively affected by societal difficulties. My thesis aims to discern the effects that McGilchrist warns us of and to suggest potential responses.

Statutory wellbeing services are the officially sanctioned point at which the social body attempts to heal its difficulties. Under a liberal capitalist framework, providers have commercial relationships with the state to deliver wellbeing services through institutions such as the NHS. These services are the points at which the culture in distress might find some way of averting further problems and at which the government intervenes in the interior emotional life of a person. If this effort is based on incorrect assumptions about the problem being tackled, there are wide-scale policy implications in that the millions of pounds invested in trying to improve the emotional situation of many communities could be spent differently and better.

McGilchrist (2009) warns us that the left hemisphere activities try to perpetuate their limited worldview once they begin to misperceive it as the only one that matters. If McGilchrist is correct, then the current system will try to persist in working inefficiently and possibly harmfully.

In this thesis I will address the following points:

- What is the current problem with wellbeing services from a perspective based on McGilchrist's theory?
- Is there a way of articulating the left hemisphere functions so that they can be studied more easily? (Unless this is done, we are at risk of trying to analyse a problem through the analytical medium that is the problem itself.)
- Can I find evidence for McGilchrist's theory in modern cultural settings beyond healthcare? Is healthcare only one part of a wider problem? Does the ideological influence on domestic wellbeing services have implications beyond that particular setting?
- How should we respond to the above matters?

## **Chapter 1: Introducing the Theoretical Approaches - McGilchrist's**

### **Hemispheres and Žižek's Lacan**

According to McGilchrist (2009), there is an optimum way for the human brain to manipulate the world around it. In general terms, the right hemisphere, which is more closely engaged with the surrounding environment, communicates its findings to the left hemisphere, which specialises in analysing fragmentary information. The important final step is for the left hemisphere to then pass its new knowledge back to the right hemisphere, which retains the more holistic view, to assist it in making judgements about how to interact with the world. But the left hemisphere tends to value its own narrow conclusions, based on limited information, above those of the right. This arrangement can go awry if the left hemisphere becomes less inclined to co-ordinate its work with that of the right. Given that the relationship between the two hemispheres is there to enable us to work with the world around us, McGilchrist contends that over time, human cultures can be negatively shaped by this imbalance. The metaphor behind *The Master and His Emissary* is that of a wise ruler who relies on an emissary because he cannot oversee his entire kingdom alone. The emissary, unaware that his duties encompass only a small part of larger system, begins to believe that he can rule in the master's stead and usurps him with disastrous consequences. McGilchrist proposes that there have been epochs when this secondary process, that of the emissary, has had undue influence on the surrounding culture and that we appear to be in such an era now. This argument does not favour one brain hemisphere over another, it is instead about certain important mental functions running to excess. McGilchrist (2009) clarifies that it is not that one hemisphere thinks and the other feels, but it is that we must synthesise two

ways of thinking and two ways of feeling, with the caveat that all parts of the brain are utilised in some way with every activity.

McGilchrist's link between the neurological and the cultural is generalised through the idea of a feedback loop and the philosophical term *Aufhebung* (2009, p. 352), which he interprets to mean *integration*. McGilchrist describes cultural changes over time but does not provide a framework for understanding these beyond the interrelationship of neurology and cultural movements. This is the point where I employ Žižek to try to frame the ideological space in which this feedback loop occurs. My approach is to set McGilchrist's theory in the wider context of Žižek's world. Neither Žižek nor McGilchrist discuss each other - they operate in separate domains: the social and the neurological. But McGilchrist does briefly mention the influence of psychoanalytical thinking on culture (2009) and Žižek's use of Lacanian theory, in relation to art and culture as well as to societal problems, can correspond with McGilchrist in those areas.

## **Chapter 2: The Problem - Current Antagonisms in Wellbeing**

According to Žižek (2006a), drawing on the work of Laclau and Mouffe (1985), ideologies arise as part of an attempt by a social system to conceal its inherent antagonisms. Based on this model, an ideology of wellbeing encourages the distressed individual to believe that the social structure around them is not a factor to consider in the formulation of their problems and urges them to change their thinking rather than to critique their surroundings. Wellbeing is an important area to examine because it is the point where the wider societal antagonisms attempt to heal problems that they are responsible for creating. The state delivery of psychological and social services is a useful juncture for observing ideological processes as well as being a potential point for intervention, for trying to ameliorate the effects that the ideology has upon the individual. I will be examining how a highly rational, utilitarian approach to healthcare – an approach that perceives itself to be capable of solving problems rather than causing them – actually contains inherent difficulties and is unaware of the part that it plays in creating the antagonisms around it.

Under the statutory health services in the United Kingdom (UK), wellbeing, as an abstract idea that has been packaged under the mindset that McGilchrist warns us of, has been shaped by the introduction of IAPT (Improving Access to Psychological Therapy) mental health services which assume a certain form of subject. Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), as delivered under IAPT, is predicated on a predictable subject who receives standardised treatment in a neutral social setting; the evidence base for this is structured on the assumption that RCTs (Randomised Controlled Trials) are the gold-standard by which to judge a treatment's efficacy even though this method artificially excludes the countless variables which influence therapy,

such as the therapeutic relationship between therapist and patient (Rosenzweig 1936), or the agency of each client in making therapy successful (Bohart and Tallman 1999). It is a pharmacological assessment tool overapplied to the field of psycho-social wellbeing where variables are far more complex (Bower and Gilbody 2010).

Scientific objectivity is not value neutral: "It is just one particular way of looking at things, a way which privileges detachment" (McGilchrist 2009, p. 28). Within the therapeutic relationship there may be factors that are not typically accounted for in mainstream research, qualitative information that can vary so much between research cohorts that it would be hard to capture. Some researchers have been able to provide outlines. Asay and Lambert (2004) isolated four factors common to all psychotherapy which play a role in whether the treatment will reach a successful outcome. Frank and Frank (1991) found the commonality of myth and ritual within both psychotherapy and traditional healing systems. Frankl's (2004) personal account of the Holocaust gives us examples of people deriving meaning from their attitude towards their imminent death in the harshest of conditions. These are just some examples of the numerous possibilities of what might be the active ingredients of a successful psychotherapeutic intervention.

State delivered psycho-social healthcare in the UK follows the guidance put forward by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE). The NICE guidelines on mental health treatment (2009), following the medical model originally designed around physical health, focus on the declared treatment method rather than the therapist, as outlined in the examples above, the nature of which will have a

profound influence on the actual delivery of that model. In the style of the *Académie Française*, NICE is seeking to control a discourse but may be damaging what it aims to preserve by limiting adaptation. Aschoff (2015) claims that there is a storytelling elite who transmit a cultural message through media products such as the Oprah franchise, which encourages people to change themselves to adapt to the world rather than change the conditions under which they live.

Sacks' (2013) recollection that the change of case notes occurred in parallel with the promotion of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) is in keeping with McGilchrist's expectations: that there would be a change from artful, descriptive single studies of *how* an individual was to briefer, formulaic summaries of *what* their problem was. These developments are similar to the changes tracked by Foucault (1994), where the relationship between the patient and their healer changes to one where the patient is seen as a site of illness and brought under the scrutiny of a medical gaze. The focus on the category of disease rather than the person can be linked to the encroachment of litigation into the field of mental health which has resulted in patients seeking a specific diagnosis so that damages owed to them can be more accurately assessed. In an effort to regain this spirit, to move away from seeing the human as a collection of pathologies, Seligman (2000) has tried to generate a different model of treatment via Positive Psychology, which emphasises positive traits rather than symptoms. But this still requires belief in the idea of a client's problem being one of unhappiness.

Computerised CBT (cCBT) is the apogee of the ideological arrangement I have been describing: the human sits alone being given instructions by a computer program about their cognitions and behavior. This therapeutic intervention also exhibits the problematic left hemisphere characteristics in another way, in that the implications of its failure have been ignored: the research endorsing such methods, such as by Proudfoot *et al.* (2003) is conducted in such a rarified atmosphere that it gives too limited a picture of the processes involved in psychological treatment. In its application with real patients outside laboratory conditions, cCBT was found to be no more effective in the treatment of depression than usual GP care alone (Gilbody *et al.* 2015). The critics of cCBT conclude that the disparity between the research supporting this treatment and its failure in application is because research has been conducted in specialist centres by researchers who were in some way invested in the project's success (Gilbody *et al.* 2015). But the presence of artificial conditions and an interest group also applies in the case of other clinical trials of psychological treatments. CBT is regarded as being particularly suited to obsessive-compulsive disorder, yet stress-reduction techniques produce effects that are nearly as beneficial for the client. Whittal *et al.* (2010), in comparing CBT with stress-management training, found that the latter was almost as effective but were unable to establish why. McGilchrist's response to the lack of an answer would be that a left hemisphere mindset fails to look for answers outside itself. Research involving 270 collaborators found that much psychological research failed reproducibility tests (AAAS 2015) from which it can be assumed that the standards used to claim therapeutic effectiveness have been corrupted. The learning to be taken from Žižek's oeuvre is that in the symbolic economy, the undercurrent says the opposite of the surface message. Overtly, psychological treatment touts its objectivity, but beneath



this veneer is an understanding that a lot of partiality is required to achieve this apparent neutrality. The unwritten rule appears to be that one must pretend, that one acts as if one believes in order to maintain the façade. In Žižek's (1989) Lacanian interpretation of ideology, this pretence is to protect the gaze of the big Other, that which upholds the symbolic order, from the failure of the system supporting it.

The Socratic questioning of the fifth century BC, aimed at generating profound insights, was the sort of subversive activity which led to Socrates' death sentence: he had caused the Athenian society of his day to confront uncomfortable truths. Yet under IAPT, Socratic questioning has become relegated to a therapeutic tool, far detached from its socially disruptive potential. One of the more up-to-date books by a leading exponent of CBT (Drummond 2014) closes off the possibilities of Socratic enquiry from an examination into the nature of the surrounding social order which could be influencing a troubled individual. This leaves us with a template for sophistry, a runt of the original that is now used to deflect an individual away from critical enquiry. The CBT form of Socratic questioning coerces the client into accepting consensus because it limits the questioning to the basics of how a patient's beliefs about anxiety and depression might be preventing the CBT from reducing symptoms. The exercise is no longer an attempt to pursue truth or to generate an unfolding experience. In the hands of today's psychological hierarchy, Socratic questioning is a means to close off alternatives, in that issues beyond the psychological, subjects that Socrates would have pursued, are left unaddressed. Closing off extraneous information is something the left hemisphere excels at (McGilchrist 2009). An alternative dialogue about the sources of distress in modern society and the role of psychology in treating it is excluded.

IAPT services do help some people but the visibility of what is occurring within each session is limited to narrowly defined outcome measures by which the perceived effectiveness of the IAPT services themselves is monitored. Despite the intention behind RCTs to isolate the active ingredient in a model of therapy, there is no guarantee that the effects of the theory are actually having the predicted influence within the context of each session with all of the variables that might affect it (Wampold 2001). Reisner (2005) suggests that some therapies can be more effective for some disorders but acknowledges the strong effect of external factors. If, as I contend, society is developing along the lines that McGilchrist (2009) suspects it may, then the subtleties of the factors unique to each session, such as the therapeutic relationship, or the sheer weight of pressing external factors, such as a serious illness, will become increasingly ignored and therapy delivered by the state will be far less effective than it could be. It is also demeaning for the successful CBT therapists whose efforts are assumed to be effective through their adherence to doctrine rather than their own unique personal qualities such as their ability to build rapport with a patient.

In summary, wellbeing services are delivered under a utilitarian programme based on data analysis and it ignores its potential deficiencies. The healthcare system is acting like an institution which is heavily influenced by the thinking process McGilchrist (2009) describes in an unchecked left hemisphere. Ideological processes will attempt to conceal these antagonisms (Žižek 2006a) and those within the system itself will try to thrive within it by exploiting any transgressions which the system allows.

Having explained the nature of the problem in terms of statutory delivery of services for psycho-social care, I will now look at the individual subjected to these influences.

### **Chapter 3: Subjectivity in Wellbeing**

Prior to Žižek becoming an established guide to Lacan's work as a medium for the study of power, Lacan's form of psychoanalytic theory had been applied to politics by figures such as Althusser (1971) as well as Laclau and Mouffe (1985). One of Žižek's (2006a) applications of Lacanian theory is to interrogate ideologies at the point where they attempt to smooth over the antagonisms that are part of their essence; an idea that can also be applied to a clinical setting where ideologies influence health and social care delivered under the closed mindset that McGilchrist (2009) identifies. In its most obvious form, this concealment of antagonisms manifests as the causes of emotional distress and their treatment being oversimplified so that they can be represented in a way that does not call into question the inequalities and disadvantages inherent in the way a society is structured.

IAPT, as a form of Althusser's (1971) Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), educates the subject into seeing the problems as a matter of their subjective thought and behavior rather than as a result of the failures of the system itself. The antagonisms driving their upset remain concealed and once declared fit, they take their place back in the structure.

I will be using Žižek's Lacanian ideas to look at the subject of these systems. The relationship between the subject and the forces intersecting them is complex. Sturrock describes the difficulty of attempting to use terminology, such as *structuralism*, that would easily categorise some of the key thinkers in this field:

To the query 'Where does Foucault stand?' there is no easy answer.

Lacan is a man of famously arrogant independence who prefers others to follow and be influenced by him, rather than to appear himself to be following or even associating with others (Sturrock 1979, p. 4).

Althusser's (1971) theory of ISAs relies on a coherent subject who is hailed by the system and responds. According to Eagleton, Althusser misreads Lacan; "Althusser's imaginary subject really corresponds to the Lacanian *ego*" (Eagleton 2007, p. 144; italics in the original) resulting in a subject who is "a good deal more stable and coherent" (*ibid.*) than Lacan's, for whom "the imaginary dimension of our being is punctured and traversed by insatiable desire, which suggests a subject rather more volatile and turbulent" (*ibid.*). The ambiguous and rebellious aspects of the subject's relationship with their social order are unacknowledged by Althusser, who has produced instead an ideology of the ego, as far as Eagleton (2007) is concerned. Eagleton argues that if Althusser's subject were as unstable as Lacan's, interpellation would be less clear-cut.

Unlike the structuralism of Althusser, post-structuralism looks at factors such as power, language, social institutions and personal consciousness, areas beyond the relationship between capital and labour, meaning that the post-structuralist subject mentally adopts a subject position within a discourse (Weedon 1997). Butler (1997) sees Althusser as setting the stage for Foucault's (1995, 1998) ideas of a discursively produced subject. McGilchrist does not use the same terminology of subjectivity but in providing reasons for the success of the left hemisphere's thinking style in the West, he states that this intellectual characteristic bestows power,

provides simple explanations by omitting what contradicts its view, constructs arguments in its favour and that it has fashioned the world to suit itself (McGilchrist 2012a). These are arguments that fit Foucault's (1995, 1998) ideas of a discourse with the power to shape an individual and how they think.

McGilchrist (2009) states that despite its shortcomings, the left hemisphere is vital for our capacity to make sense of the world around us. Lacan (2006) informs us that we would fall into psychosis without our inscription into the symbolic order. But submission to these structures does not have to be total.

That we have to be interpellated as *some* kind of subject is clear: the alternative, for Lacan, would be to fall outside the symbolic order altogether into psychosis. But there is no reason why we should always accept society's identification of us as this *particular* sort of subject (Eagleton 2007, p. 145; italics in the original).

Even for those who reject Lacan's version of an incomplete subject, it is possible to imagine a subject who may not be fully interpellated. In McGilchrist's terms (2009), the left hemisphere is only dealing with part of the information to which the right hemisphere has access. The response of the subject hailed by the ISA may be misinterpreted (Dews 1987) or the validity of the interpellation may remain in question because the Lacanian subject is not fully present in their response (Eagleton 2007). The Lacanian perspective is that "no *particular* other can ever furnish me with the confirmation of my identity I seek, since my desire for such

confirmation will always 'go beyond' this figure" (Eagleton 2007, p. 145; italics in the original).

For Althusser's subject, the situation is pessimistic as there is no obvious means of escape (Eagleton 2007). But the different approaches to subject formation which I have described marry up at the level of the unconscious, where "the ground of all our insight, then, is some primordial opaqueness to ourselves" (Eagleton 2007, p. 177). The idea of the unconscious and unknown being a contested site and a possible space from which to respond to ideology will be explored later. Žižek (1989) sees the weak point in Althusser's argument as the lack of explanation linking the external ISA to the internalised obedience of the individual. Žižek's answer to this gap is that the ISA can exert its influence "only in so far as it is experienced, in the unconscious economy of the subject, as a traumatic, senseless injunction" (1989 p. 43). I will be working with these ideas of self-opaqueness and of the divided subject.

The practical effect of these ideologies in state provisioned healthcare is that the individual is guided into overlooking the possibility that the causes of their distress might be rooted in the same system that is claiming ownership of that person's wellbeing. The state's IAPT project is a psychologically oriented programme whose narrow cognitive behaviourist interpretation of a patient's symptoms belies the fact that many of the stressors for an individual can be seen as social phenomena which fall outside the remit of a psychologically driven intervention (Asay and Lambert 2004). This can include factors such as housing, debt, relationships, employment and support.

The morality of IAPT is questionable, for its aim is to send people back into the conditions that generate the kind of problems that produced the distress in the individual in the first place. The successfully treated individual is expected to conform and there is a tacit acceptance that a new generation will in turn take up the baton of distress. This strategy is similar to an economic model for generating profit in a new product: the demand for services is maintained amid an illusion of activity. People are coached to see their problems in a certain way and their treatment is successful once they have changed their attitude in the prescribed manner. In Lacanian terms, this is perversity in that the collective members of society are failing to traverse the fantasy, failing to change their relationship to the big Other. They continue to obey what is not in their best interests. The system is either failing to see, or else ignoring, the wider context. It is fixated on delivering the treatment and recording the act as a metric to prove efficacy.



## **Chapter 4: Forming a Response**

### **4.1: McGilchrist in Žižek's World**

I have described the effects of the processes in McGilchrist's (2009) theory as well as some ideas on how Žižek's Lacanianism (1989) can also be seen at work through the ideas of the divided subject, ideology and the big Other. McGilchrist provides the neurological basis for the thinking style that lies behind a fixed belief in ideological structures while Žižek can give us some understanding of how the consequences unfold in modern society. My proposed response cannot be overly prescriptive, lest it become the substance of what it is intended to be reacting against. McGilchrist (2009) emphasises how Heidegger's (1996) *aletheia* (unconcealing) presupposes a truth awaiting revelation, rather than something constructed. It is an acknowledgement that there is something within Being that is hidden and that the process of revelation involves something else becoming elusive. My response to the ideologies within healthcare is to acknowledge what is concealed - the esoteric - on the understanding that by its nature it will not be explicit and will point the way to further concealment. The esoteric stands for what the left hemisphere thinking style cannot comprehend and for what the health services miss among the metrics which they use to gauge humanity. It is the aspect of the subject which escapes being fully known by the system or the subjects themselves.

### **4.2: Theory and Practice**

Within the limits of responding to ideology from within it, I can generate debate about what I think is being observed but without being able to fully grasp it, let alone show something complete or fully reproducible. The mercurial nature of ideology and its

interaction with the psyche means that we can look at certain areas that we think we should watch on the understanding that what we believe that we are looking for may not appear, or may even elude us by surfacing elsewhere.

McGilchrist (2009) describes the conditions created by the over-zealous left hemisphere mindset as being like trapped in a hall of mirrors because perception becomes so distorted that people are blind to what is occurring and unable to see a way out. For Žižek (1989), ideology shapes our reality so that we cannot see it because it is the everyday fabric of our lives. This presents the question of how the problems described by McGilchrist and Žižek can be investigated through theory and challenged in practice. In basing my work on their theories, I am presented with the same impasses as faced by McGilchrist and Žižek. McGilchrist (2009) suggests that there are pockets within cultures that retain their creative potential for when conditions become favourable again and that different approaches will eventually emerge in future as they have done so before. McGilchrist offers hope but does not advocate a specific strategy based on some form of direct action. Žižek (2011a) is cautious about actions inspired by a popular cause because the activity itself can take precedence over questions of its efficacy or consequences. Using the example of humanitarian aid, Žižek summarises the problematic attitude as follows: “Don’t think, don’t politicize, forget about the true causes of their poverty, just act, contribute money, so that you will not have to think!” (2011a, p. 4). Žižek emphasises the importance of theory over action in correcting this problem: “Maybe today we should say, ‘In the twentieth century, we maybe tried to change the world too quickly. The time is [here] to interpret it again, to start thinking’” (Žižek 2012a, 4:29–4:39).

I am using a theory-led approach to avoid adding to difficulties at a time when the problem I am looking at needs to be reformulated. My approach is to step back from what is already occurring in order to see if there is a completely different way to view the problem. The work of the two authors that I am drawing on is suited to a theoretical approach. For Žižek, there is a psychoanalytic orientation to his observations – he tries to see the hidden influences behind situations. For McGilchrist, the starting point is neurological, although he too comments on society and culture from a perspective that does not lend itself easily to standard empirical methods. For both authors, the motivations they describe are subtle and the effects can be hard to determine. They are both concerned with acquiring indirect knowledge about the relationship between the inner self and intangibles of society such as power or culture.

I am taking McGilchrist's (2009) ideas and attempting to understand their application in other areas. In doing so, I may be extending the search for evidence too far or inappropriately. I cannot offer definitive proof so there is the danger of me seeing something that is not there. McGilchrist (2009) states that the left hemisphere utilises a mode of coded language that implies the presence of factors which are not actually there, playing on the vanity of investigators by making them believe that they have uncovered something. My response to this is that what I am describing is never going to declare itself overtly - it can only be alluded to - but potential sites must still be examined. McGilchrist (2009) speaks of the problems encountered when making explicit that which was hidden: it is uncomfortable and hard to discern, easy for a dogmatist to sweep it away as unprovable by empirical means.

My argument against the problems inherent to the psycho-social care system is developed in terms that exceed the limits of that system. The idea is to permit uncertainty and open-endedness so that the research does not ossify around a fixed idea (Parker and Pavon-Cuellar 2014). I believe that the system which is at the heart of the problems I am describing remains too powerful to move against directly. None of my proposals would be countenanced by the current healthcare regimes.

Improving practice may be a goal of research but this can be influenced by aspects such as whose practice it is aimed at (the management of practitioners or the management of information), the audience for the research (academic or industrial), and the preferences and skills of the researcher, as well as practicalities like time and money (Jones 2009). I am not rejecting a practical response to the current situation, but I am advocating that the problem be viewed differently before the next round of activity ensues. I have already criticised IAPT and I do not want to recreate it anew. As Žižek states: "I think the task of people like me is not to provide answers but to ask the right questions" (Aitkenhead 2012, unpaginated).

The reasoning above is also behind my decision not to base my study on quantitative data about wellbeing from within the NHS. The data collected is already a part of the same problem in that it is designed to monitor the factors which the system already deems important. For example, it is used to make sure that the NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) are meeting targets for the number of patients seen (National IAPT Programme Team 2012) and by emphasising the scale of the activity over the precise nature of what is actually being delivered, data is used to conceal the problems within the organisation. This is the point where the idea of research as open theoretical enquiry can become co-opted, as knowledge

production designed around a government agenda or linked to commerce, as Gibbons *et al.* (1994) foresaw. The thinking behind the data collection is itself illustrative of the processes that are of concern to McGilchrist and Žižek and needs to be questioned from outside.

Although there is a limit to how much practical influence can be wielded against the current healthcare system, this does not negate the pursuit of new ways of developing theory about the situation. In cases of power imbalance, research in the tradition of critical theorists can be a precursor to political change, achieving emancipatory activity by exposing injustices (Kincheloe and McLaren 2005). Even without a definitive response, research that questions accepted arrangements can be “styled ‘practical’ because of the crucial importance to human beings of securing and developing mutual understanding in the everyday conduct of life” (Crotty 2015, p.143).

In terms of doctoral studies contributing to knowledge, theory is necessary to make meaning of the research and establish the significance of the new knowledge, which may derive from its breadth, how it helps to make sense of the world or its disruption of accepted ways of thinking (Thomson and Walker 2010). But the end result of the research may not achieve these ambitions and so “more humble definitions of contribution are required - a new voice in the conversation, a different angle and slant on something” (Thomson and Walker 2010, p. 393). For researchers trying to gauge the balance between theory and practice, national policy can direct research and control funding to projects that will deliver an impact on the social, economic or knowledge production fields. The consequence is that knowledge can be seen as

something produced in a particular place and then transferred into another setting. The concepts of *impact* and *transfer* then dominate academic research (Thomson and Walker 2010) and this is the type of pattern that has driven the problems that I am aiming to address in this thesis. I believe that research which revisits the theoretical bases behind the current problems carries the potential to deliver something new.

A preference for theory-led research can exist in certain areas but there may be difficulties with how theory is understood and accounted for. In architecture, one study found that theory-based dissertations constituted a majority in Finland but also that the academic field needed to “consolidate the position of doctoral dissertations arising from the theoretical bases” (Aura, Katainen and Suoranta 2002, p. 78).

According to another study on the place of theory in doctoral dissertations:

the place of theory in research can intimidate some candidates initially because it points to a way of thinking that is difficult to grasp without fuller immersion in a field. The role of theory has also proved difficult to articulate in general texts outside of reference to literature and to some extent this is echoed in examination (Holbrook, Bourke and Fairbairn 2015, p. 83).

Jones' (2009) experience of a doctoral dissertation based entirely on grounded theory was of having to educate and influence others about the approach after finding that it was the only acceptable methodology. Despite challenges with weighting the research towards theory, doctoral theses based on theory can aspire

to wide-scale influence. Bettcher's thesis is a psychoanalytic study of politics, which he describes as "an attempt to produce a political theory which relates to 'real' world affairs" (1997, p. 272).

In their review of different definitions about theory when used in doctoral research, Gulson and Parkes (2010) believe that the role of explanation is a common theme but with the caveats that theory for doctoral research can be presented as something to be tested or as a conclusion to be reached. Gulson and Parkes (2010) draw a distinction between explanation and understanding: the former, preferred by the natural sciences, aims to clarify through empirical evidence and data while the latter, preferred by the human sciences, seeks to articulate meaning and is more subjective. When used interpretatively, theory acts as "a disruptive force, deconstructive tactic, a denaturalising strategy, or a diffractive lens through which to view afresh a particular set of problems, or to problematise a phenomena [sic], text, or event that is usually taken-for-granted" (Gulson and Parkes 2010, p. 78). This is the sort of reformulation of the problem advocated by Žižek (2012a).

Ogunnaike (2015) bases his dissertation on a comparison of intellectual traditions, including Sufism, traditional African systems and Western models, to find out ways of being and knowing. Beyond ideas of balancing theory and practice, Ogunnaike feels it is important to make a distinction between standard academic use of theory and *theoria*; the inner dimension as experienced by those who live according to the approaches he looked at.

In following on from Žižek's call to think more before acting (Aitkenhead 2012), the works on which I am basing this thesis, those of McGilchrist and Žižek, are ones that discuss the importance of what is occurring within a person and how that person makes meaning of their world. A theory-based approach is the frame for how I perceive the problem and my place in understanding it. I see the effects that McGilchrist (2009) describes and I see them emerge in a world for which Žižek (1989) has explanations. In the next chapter, I will look at how Tweedy's (2012) application of William Blake's creativity gives me some way of articulating this situation. For these authors, who emphasise the importance of what is happening within a person, a theory-led approach privileges the interior life at a time when healthcare focuses on external data. Gulson and Parkes conclude that

theory works on the doctoral student so they become recognisable as a particular sort of scholar, with a particular set of commitments. Theory isn't simply adopted and applied. In the act of mobilising theory we are also adopted by the theory, as another of its conduits into discourse (2010, p. 82).

### **4.3: Urizen**

Later, I will be looking for evidence of McGilchrist's theory but before doing so, I will use this chapter to introduce the concept of Urizen, a figure from the work of William Blake which I am employing as a device to better encapsulate the interface between McGilchrist's neurological theory and the culture it shapes. Urizen, one of the Four Zoas in Blake's worldview, is an aspect of the human mind:



Blake's exploration of the Four Zoas and their Emanations, for example, present us with a complex and vital dynamic within the human psyche, and indeed both Blake's visual art and his written work revolve around these inner psychodynamics (Tweedy 2013, p 1).

Tweedy (2012) links the mental faculty of Urizen portrayed by Blake and the left hemisphere traits described by McGilchrist (2009). Tweedy (2012) also sees a connection between the left hemisphere's tendency to falsify (McGilchrist 2009) and Lacan's view of an ego compelled towards misunderstanding and misrecognition, something to which spiritual beliefs are not immune: "We are one with God only when God is no longer one with Himself, but abandons Himself, 'internalizes' the radical distance which separates us from Him" (Žižek 2003a, p. 91)

At some point, as we extend McGilchrist's ideas into their practical effects on our world, it is helpful to find a *modus operandi* beyond neurological terms. Tweedy (2012), not only emphasised McGilchrist's references to the artist and mystic William Blake, especially through Blake's (1797) creation of the figure of Urizen, but also found correspondence between Blake's critique of the culture of his time and McGilchrist's theories. Blake's Urizen is a figure that self-differentiated from the Eternity within which it developed: "Self-closed, all-repelling. What demon hath formed this abominable void, this soul-shuddering vacuum?" (Blake 2007, p. 255). Urizen is a useful way to conceptualise, beyond mere brain matter, the effects that McGilchrist (2009) describes. Urizen "symbolizes Reason. But he is much more than what we commonly understand by 'reason': he is the limiter of Energy, the law-maker, and the avenging conscience" (Damon 1988, p. 419). Authors such as

Bracher (1985) and Freeman (1997) have used the figure of Urizen in a similar way to me. The physicist Frank Wilczek (2015), in his blending of the rational with the mystical, describes Blake's figure of Urizen as dualistic: a figure who brings and constrains life. Wilczek sees Urizen as carrying echoes of Blake's portrayal of Newton, a figure who achieved much but who in doing so became absorbed by abstractions and ignored a wider perspective.

I do not wish to generate a debate over whether something is Urizenic or not: to divide the world in that way is the very tendency under discussion. My use of the image is designed to convey a theme and to use the idea of a figure inspired by Blake as a way of describing the world through metaphor and by permitting some ambiguity - terms that defy the precise language favoured by the brain's left hemisphere (McGilchrist 2009). Figurative language provides some form of opening; a reader can paint Urizen in various shades depending on the setting. McGilchrist's observations on language (2009) show that at different eras and in different cultures there have been some forms of written language which permitted ambiguity, which allowed for a play of meaning and in doing so they invited the reader to meet the author halfway without being explicitly instructed on what to think.

In the following chapter, as I look for evidence for McGilchrist's theory, I will use the figure of Urizen to describe the left hemisphere faculties when manifested in areas where they are more apparent. Urizen does not just refer to the neurological in McGilchrist's theory, but it also helps to bridge the gap between the left hemisphere and the culture it influences. Urizen also helps to provide a metaphor for the points of commonality between the situations that McGilchrist and Žižek depict.

## **Chapter 5: Finding Evidence for McGilchrist's ideas**

Urizen is not going to reveal itself through normal empirical studies. Both McGilchrist and Žižek are tackling issues that are deeply entrenched within our social fabric and from which it is hard to achieve some critical distance.

### **5.1: Accounts Which Support McGilchrist**

Using Urizen's preferred tools against it, there is some empirical evidence from other researchers for McGilchrist's (2009) ideas. Tweedy (2012) makes much use of the personal account of Jill Bolte Taylor, a neuroscientist who suffered a left hemisphere stroke and found that it dramatically altered not only her cognitive functions but her attitudes, in line with McGilchrist's predictions (Bolte Taylor 2009). Silani *et al.* (2013) found that the brain is dependent on a part of its right hemisphere to monitor and curb its own egocentric behavior. The human tendency to assess other people's mental states by using the self as a reference point when applied in inappropriate situations can result in egocentrically biased judgements, and overcoming biased empathic judgements is associated with increased activation in the right hemisphere's supramarginal gyrus, an area Silani *et al.* (2013) concluded was crucial in countering egocentricity. These examples are listed to illustrate the problem. To reiterate, the ultimate aim is collaboration between hemispheres, not a favouring of the right over the left hemisphere. The difficulty is that the left hemisphere processes that McGilchrist describes do not tolerate ambiguity and, at the most extreme level, as demonstrated in split-brain studies, do not recognise the existence of factors which do not conform to their limited view (Berlucchi, Mangun and Gazzaniga 1997).

Looking for traces of Urizen requires a holistic approach, to view the whole without solely engaging the left hemisphere functions of parsing and analysing. McGilchrist (2009) states that the left hemisphere acts *gauchely* when it tries to operate with authority in the domain of the right hemisphere (i.e. that of holism, empathy and ambiguity) and its associated cultural activity, such as the arts. McGilchrist indicates three areas which are a problem for the left hemisphere: “these points of weakness in the self-enclosed system are three rather important, indissolubly interlinked, aspects of human existence: the body, the soul and art (which relies on body and soul coming together)” (2009, p. 438). McGilchrist also describes the importance of context and abstraction. The left hemisphere takes information away from its original context to analyse it and interprets what it finds by abstraction, by transforming it in some way to make it more manageable. The left hemisphere should then pass that analysed material back to the right hemisphere so that it can be placed within the wider context, the broader worldview that is the bailiwick of the right. If left hemisphere tropes are detached from this final stage of the process, if they are regarding the analysed material as a complete picture rather than as a part, then the overall meaning behind that information can be radically altered through excessive abstraction and misplaced context (McGilchrist 2009). I will examine the left hemisphere’s three problematic areas in the order of art, body and soul. These areas not only inform us about McGilchrist’s ideas, but they also have a role in the formation of ideology and responses to it. Sigurdson’s (2012) study of theology and ideology through the work of Žižek and Eagleton acknowledges the idea that humans flourish and have a sense of morality through mutual recognition of embodiment and that the embodiment itself is mediated by culture. Sigurdson adds

that embodiment “implies sociality, in that it suggests that the human subject is constituted by dependency rather than self-sufficiency” (2012, p. 38). In the following examples there will be indications of how Urizen promotes self-sufficiency over inter-dependence through culture and embodiment.

## **5.2: Art**

Huizinga described how a ludic attitude, including art, helped to shape culture but became separated from institutions once a “sacred seriousness” (1971, p. 31) arose. Pfaller’s (2014) interpretation of Huizinga - that this sphere of play and its loss is more of a psychic state rather than rules-based - brings the issue of cultural change through psychic influence close to the work of McGilchrist (2009) and Tweedy (2012).

Artistic works rendered mechanically and prescriptively can become markers for the mode of thought that McGilchrist is concerned about. McGilchrist dedicates the second half of *The Master and His Emissary* to “many examples of the left hemisphere’s intemperate attacks on nature, art, religion and the body, the main routes to something beyond its power” (2009, p. 230).

In his study of Proust’s *Search for Lost Time*, Deleuze states that

it is by the work of art, by painting and music and especially by the problem of literature, that the hero of the Search arrives at this revelation of essences. The worldly signs, the signs of love, even the sensuous signs are incapable of giving us the essence; they bring us closer to it, but

we always fall back into the trap of the object, into the snare of subjectivity. It is only on the level of art that the essences are revealed. But *once* they are manifested in the work of art, they react upon all the other realms; we learn that they *already* incarnated, that they were already there in all these kinds of signs, in all the types of apprenticeship (2008, p. 25, italics in original).

Writing on the subject of so-called *Entartete Kunst* (Degenerate Art) Mitchell (2010) describes how Barlach's unfinished forms were disliked by the Nazis because they wanted completeness. In the present day it appears that funding for innovative programmes within the domains of art or wellbeing requires a similar conformity from applicants. Current trends demand explanation over observation; a product has to exist at the end of the funded process, what McGilchrist (2009) describes as an emphasis on the *what* rather than the *how*. Zeki describes how the ambiguities that are an inherent component of art forms are derived from the way that our brains are structured to gather knowledge:

Hence the capacity to give multiple interpretations is not a separate faculty invented or used by the artist. It is instead tied to a general capacity of the brain to give several interpretations, to instill meaning by applying several concepts, a capacity that is important for it in its role of acquiring knowledge. It is on this physiological basis that the prized quality of ambiguity in art is built (2009, p. 91).

In the field of art, an area where we can observe Urizen more easily, there appears to be a decline in in-depth knowledge among experts. Brian Allen, a trustee of the National Portrait Gallery, laments what he sees as a decline in connoisseurship in the education of art historians compared to "the rigours of older art, where you have to know languages, classical mythology, Greek and Roman history" (Alberge 2015, unpaginated). He is describing the importance of multiple forms of learning and the way that certain elements which might otherwise have been regarded as useful as one aspect of a multi-disciplinary approach, have been given elevated importance. McLuhan (2001) likened art to a radar system that could help people prepare for changes to their culture. This lack of understanding and variety matches McGilchrist's theory: the left hemisphere prefers novelty and narrowness.

There is also a confluence of regimes within healthcare and art if we briefly compare Lord Richard Layard's takeover of healthcare with Sir Nicholas Serota's directing of contemporary art. I regard economist-turned-health-advisor Layard and professional art bureaucrat Serota as similar entities. Serota has privileged the practice of artistic abstraction, just as Layard has abstracted the art of psychotherapy. As an informer of social meaning, art has been transformed. The misplaced certainty of art co-opted by Urizen as a devourer is summed up in the widely publicised image showing Charles Saatchi grasping Nigella Lawson's throat (Toomey 2014). Saatchi provided the advertising for Thatcher's 1979 election victory and invested heavily in Serota's *protégés* although he and Serota later fell out.

Larry Gagosian, the New York superdealer, whose global empire now has two London branches, considers Serota a master strategist. "Nick really

caught the wave,” Gagosian told me. “He saw the possibilities, the wealth coming in, and he kind of harnessed that” (Tomkins 2012, unpaginated).

This strategy is similar to Layard’s coup in promoting one form of therapy and directing funds for its continuance. Serota and Layard extended their influence into the political realm, an arena where the left hemisphere can exercise its “desire for power and control” (McGilchrist 2009, p. 433). Serota’s management style resembles the Lacanian superego. Tomkins provides the following observation from one of Serota’s team:

Nick was very focussed and very ambitious,” she said. “He was also very clever at getting the best out of his team, by being consciously counterintuitive. He’d throw out a provocative statement, and then reverse one hundred eighty degrees and throw out another one. He nurtured and encouraged critical thinking, and of course he was totally in control (Tomkins 2012, unpaginated).

It is counterintuitive that he apparently encouraged critical thinking yet remained in control.

There are other indications of the left hemisphere style in the world that Serota created. When some of the key players behind Tate Modern were interviewed in 2016, they referred to wanting art to be exciting, to the sheer size of the gallery space and to the subsequent enormity of the installations when compared to normal human parameters (BBC Radio Four 2016). This attitude was neatly summarised by



the editor of the *Independent on Sunday* at that time, Janet Street-Porter: “the hugeness of it is going to excite people beyond the art” (BBC Radio Four 2016, 25:20–25:26). In an earlier project (Hanson 2014a), I described the way in which Urizenic trends utilise the gigantic.

The works by Robert Montgomery, a conceptual artist specialising in the use of text, include statements presented in large letters in different settings, sometimes describing a scene or an emotion with words. When asked why he uses words as a medium, Montgomery replies:

I think there’s a certain slowness to words. I think we probably live in an age of accelerated image and we’re bombarded with, like, hundreds of images a day. Ironically in that context, words can be a sort of moment of quiet or a moment of pause (BBC Four 2016 27:10-27:26).

In his reply, he has described the left hemisphere’s concern at having to deal with a flow of images and its response by deadening the flow so that analysis can occur. Body marking, an area that I shall examine shortly, is present here too. One of his most iconic works, titled *People You Love* (which consists of the text: *The people you love become ghosts inside of you and like this you keep them alive* displayed in large illuminated letters on public display) was written as an expression of grief for a deceased friend and has now become a popular tattoo. To take the abstraction even further, it has also been tattooed as a soundwave of the spoken words (BBC Four 2016, 29:20–29:30).

Montgomery also says something that implies a need to maintain distance:

The point of art is to touch the heart of strangers without the trouble of ever having to meet them. But if you can, sort of, touch their hearts from a distance and help a little bit, you know, from your quiet, sort of, studio then it's quite nice (BBC Four 2016, 29:37-29:51).

The point of this example is that it shows left hemisphere tropes emerging into contemporary culture in a subtle way. Montgomery wishes to share his emotional experiences in a compassionate way with other people and hopes to help them. Yet even here, the left hemisphere can insinuate itself.

Urizen exposes itself through outlets such as art because its involvement in something that the left hemisphere regards as subversive (McGilchrist 2009) becomes tainted with its worldview: it abstracts something beyond recognition and treats it as an object to be manipulated. In his critique of the cult that Serota created, Massow also describes the left hemisphere process of abstraction to the point where understanding and coherence become lost:

The boundaries have been pushed further and further ever since, but, I wonder, isn't it all now rather piss-poor compared to the brilliant and explosive interventions of our modernist forebears? Have we now gone so far in the other direction that, rather than just developing and broadening the contemporary arts scene, concept art has grown, like a virus, into little more than the dotcom of the art world? ... Concept art is so firmly

'established', it is no longer promoted through reference to any criteria of aesthetics, originality or intellectual challenge, but through spin and the clever exploitation of the fear of 'missing out' (Massow 2002, unpaginated).

### **5.3: Body**

The second of the three areas McGilchrist identifies is the body. I will be describing the influence of Urizen at the meeting point between art and the body through the medium of tattooing, recalling that McGilchrist (2009) sees art as the confluence of the body and soul. I am not referring to all tattoos or to tattooing as a practice; the tattoos of concern to me are those that are a close approximation to the conceptual art I have discussed above. Urizen's influence in the art gallery extends onto human skin. There comes a point in body art where the disparateness of the themes begins to resemble McGilchrist's examples of the left hemisphere's perception of the world, in that fragments of information are isolated from their source and heavily abstracted from their original meaning. Benson describes this interaction between body art, culture and the psyche:

The haphazard and incoherent nature of early twentieth-century tattoo reflects lives that were themselves often incoherent and fragmented, 'one thing after another': we should not be surprised by the absence of a master narrative of the self expressed upon the skin (2000, p. 245).

There has been an increase in tattooing although little is known about its prevalence and characteristics amongst the general adult population and what research there is

tends to focus on adolescents and prisoners (Heywood *et al.* 2012). Grumet (1983) saw the tattoo as a part of a person's self-construction of their identity. He adds that "further evidence for a sociopathic diagnosis is found in a hodgepodge of unrelated and asymmetrical designs which have been termed 'kitsch' tattoos" (1983 p. 490).

There are a variety of reasons why people get tattooed (Wohlrab, Stahl and Kappeler 2007) and their motivations are further complicated by the influence of mainstream and social media on their decision (Walzer and Sanjurjo 2016).

Historically, tattoos would have played a valuable role in social cohesion as part of an overall pattern of cultural practices shared by a large body of people. The history of tattooing practices in Europe and America is complex and is in its very early stages of research (Benson 2000). But, as with the example of conceptual art, there are influences on art displayed on the body which reflect negative aspects of modern living:

Our current society craves individuality and self expression. And now many people wear their artistic expression. We are having more trouble communicating with each other than ever before, as electronic communication will never replace face-to-face human contact. So, it's not surprising that there's a growing trend toward communication via body ink. We don't have to talk, we just have to look. Our bodies have become the refrigerator magnets of quotes, sayings and reminders (Karim 2013).

I see this form of body art as a way in which people can signify to one another in the same way that Deleuze (2008) described in his study of the work of Marcel Proust,

who portrayed individuals signifying to one another to illustrate that it is possible that someone “communicates’ nothing to us, but unceasingly produces signs that must be deciphered” (Deleuze 2008, p. 25).

I am indicating the popularity of these designs as the footprints of Urizen, for the left hemisphere constructs its own self-image in spite of the facts (McGilchrist 2009).

Dawkins’ (1976) concept of the meme as a unit of culture is Urizenic and has relevance here. McGilchrist describes this operation as “a perfect example, incidentally, of the left hemisphere’s way of construing its own history, not least in its way of breaking a culture into atomistic fragments devoid of context” (2009, p. 247).

The fragmentation of images is a theme of left hemisphere influence (McGilchrist 2009).

The individual relies on signifiers to provide some semblance of meaning to their world. Without these signifiers, the individuals would fall into a state of psychosis, unable to fix meaning to their surroundings (Lacan 2006). The signifiers shore up meaning through reference to other signifiers although some carry greater influence than others: “all signs are equal, but some are more equal than others” (Chandler 2001, p. 111). These nodes that set the tone for others are what Lacan (2006) termed *points de capiton* (quilting points). They are more stable, less likely to change suddenly and exert greater influence over other signifiers. Even the quilting points are contested sites and their meanings can change. Chandler (2001) advises that studies of semiotics should note what is not represented in the signs, that which is hidden but which may leak through. I believe that this leakage can be seen in body art, two sites where Urizen is more likely to expose itself because of its desire to

control these areas but also its limited capacity to do so without altering what it finds there. McGilchrist (2009) contends that art in the West has been increasingly influenced by the left hemisphere and Urizen's visibility on the body is consistent with this view.

Sometimes signification through tattooing in the modern era has practical value. For example, within the vast and disorientating network that was the penal system of the former Soviet Union it was necessary for a person to signify their status and other information about their role in the criminal (*vor*) culture by the use of specific symbolic tattoos, a code that one would not violate lightly (Lambert 2001).

Harvey (2000) predicted a postmodern society lacking a sweeping narrative. Pfaller states that postmodernism overstates its scepticism, creating "the same ego-fixated enjoyment of those who believe in everything that they believe in, regardless of what it is, only in order to believe in themselves" (2014, Loc. 223). There are occasions when single, symbolic tattoos generated from current ideas can be highly meaningful; one example is the use of the semicolon design as a preventative against suicidal thoughts (BBC News 2015a). But it too, within a few months, has become a design that is becoming detached from its original purpose, as this extract from an interview with tattoo artists makes clear:

Why do people keep getting the same tattoos?

It's literally Instagram and Pinterest. Everyone's getting Instagram tattoos.

You go on Pinterest and everyone has the same tattoo; infinity symbols and those bloody semi-colons. It's almost like a joke now in the trade

(Kale 2015, unpaginated).

To reiterate, I am not arguing against tattooing itself – it is a practice with a long cultural history. But I am arguing that the same Urizenic features found in conceptual art have also influenced modern tattooing trends and that this is occurring at the convergence of two areas, the art and the body, which McGilchrist has indicated as significant with regard to the left hemisphere. Tattoos might be regarded as making a statement, but using art to do so “is itself another aspect of left hemisphere domination” (McGilchrist 2009, p. 414). Even statements made in this way can articulate an unintended message, as Farrell observes in differentiating modern tattoos from those used in ancient cultures:

What’s striking about threatening tattoos is how equivocal they are. They’re frightening signs of real conflicts, yet also just playful abstractions. They wink and snarl at the same time. They make a passive aggressive protest rather than openly defy injustice and abuse. This may be a logical reaction in an era when people feel haunted by a sense of oppression whose sources are masked and too big to confront (Farrell 2013, unpaginated).

Urizen is finding another medium through which to signify but revealing more about the situation it creates than it intends. Benson (2000) acknowledges the therapeutic or emancipatory claims of tattoo enthusiasts but observes that the decorations themselves represent little more than changes in aesthetic taste. Benson also sees this “self-fashioning” as confirming “much of what is currently written by cultural

critics about the plasticity, contingency and motility of identities in the world of ‘late capitalism’” (2000, p. 236) – views that echo Žižek’s (2003a, 2006a) misgivings about New Age thinking which I will discuss further in Chapter 7.6. But Benson’s study also corresponds with McGilchrist in that she sees body marking as an attempt to fix and control the sense of self, seeing the body as manifesting the subject’s will. In contemporary body marking, control is exercised through “the body as a thing to be bent to the will of the self” (Benson 2000, p. 250) and tattooing gives “assertions of permanence to ideas of the body as property and possession,” (Benson 2000, p. 251). The left hemisphere balks at its inability to control the impermanence of the body (McGilchrist 2009). Blake, in developing the figure of Urizen, perceived that for the faculty of Reason, “to accept the reality of the natural world is automatically to be plunged into despair and paranoia about the status of the self” (Quinney 2009, p. 51).

#### **5.4: Soul**

For my purposes, the evidence for Urizen’s effect on our souls can be found in the overuse of measurement and analysis of the individual; the point where the idea of a soul as an inner perspective is lost and “this results in the body becoming ‘mere’ matter. As a result, other human beings, too, appear no more than things” (McGilchrist 2009, p. 439). Instead of body and spirit being separate, for McGilchrist, what matters is our embodied relationship with the world around us and he provides useful guidance on how we might assess the impact of the left hemisphere thinking style on the soul in his observations of the work of William Shakespeare and John Donne: “They lament the loss of the relation of part to whole, of individual to community, of the context, the cosmos, to which each single soul belongs – each



now standing alone” (McGilchrist 2009, p. 327). To find Urizen in the domain of the soul, I will look for examples of people being treated as objects unworthy of empathy, deemed to be lacking interior richness and whose potential relationship to something greater themselves or their institutions is discounted. In Blake’s time, the transformation of the world through measurement and analysis was represented in the work of Sir Isaac Newton. For Blake, the problem with Newton’s work “was that it left out God, man, life, and all the values which make life worth living” (Damon 1988, p. 298).

The abstraction of people into data in psycho-social healthcare leads to alienation but it is handled by forcing NHS CCGs to demonstrate effectiveness by analytics, not by the individual patient's sense of what they need to solve their problem, which may not involve psychological treatment. The CCGs are forced to collude in the deception because if they fail, they are punished by the withholding of funds from NHS England. The drive for data is also self-undermining; the CCGs have to not only increase the numbers that enter treatment, but also increase the numbers being shown to have recovered (National IAPT Programme Team 2012). This is contradictory, as the wider the net is cast, the more likely it is that it will bring in a broader range of people with even more complex problems. Yet these more complex cases will either be rejected outright for not fitting the model or else rushed through the system far more quickly than their complexity warrants. The Department of Health stated that it would “look to identify PCTs where: ... numbers entering treatment fail to improve in line with planned trajectories” (National IAPT Programme Team 2012, p. 5). Under this pressure, the PCTs (the Primary Care Trusts which were later

changed into CCGs under statute) would not accept patients who were unlikely to recover or whose illness could not fit easily into a measurable category.

The problems identified by Dorling (2016) as key factors in happiness are not recognised by IAPT because they are social rather than psychological, and the areas important to his work relate to problems inherent to the dominant liberal ideology such as inequality, social mobility and income. The signifiers upholding this structure fail to maintain their pretence when scrutinised closely.

The sickness of the soul can be manifested in the emotional health of those who live within a society built along Urizenic lines. Urizenic values (a list of the left hemisphere functions, taken from McGilchrist (2009), is in Appendix One) run counter to what is expected to promote and sustain human wellbeing when applied without any critical reflection and in isolation. Sundquist, Frank and Sundquist (2004) identify a link between urban living and psychosis and I believe that the stresses faced by such populations are one of the mechanisms by which Urizen thrives: people treated as isolated units to be densely packed and managed *en masse* by a remote management structure. In the absence of integral mechanisms to balance these problems, the population feels that they need counselling for everyday matters and then comes to expect it as the normal supplement to their lives (Furedi 2004). Eckersley describes a state of “cultural fraud” (2006, p. 256) by which the individualism being promoted as beneficial to the economy is having a deleterious psycho-social effect, such as with increased suicide rates.

Metrics are used to measure efficacy in the field of social wellbeing. Their collection and the adherence to detailed guidelines give the system the illusion that it has a full understanding of a situation and is addressing it in the best possible way. The workers within such a system have to make the metrics succeed and this can come at the expense of the people they are supposed to care for. The social workers assigned to the family responsible for the death in 2007 of seventeen-month-old Peter Connelly (known afterwards as Baby P) were strongly criticised by the media even though they had followed protocols designed to protect individual liberties promoted by the same systems (the media as well as social services) that damned them. The safety arrangements can still be subverted by those who have become adept at foiling surveillance by social care agencies (Jones 2014; Warner 2014) but the overburdened social workers are blamed for a system that can be subverted.

McGilchrist's (2009) portrait of a culture in thrall to left hemisphere tropes is one where social injunctions become arbitrary and inconsistent. Žižek (2009a) describes how, for a system to function, there must be tacit rules for its subversion because the underpinning markers for the system of symbolic exchange are empty in the first place. In the aftermath of the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991, people suffered because the codes of the shadow system which had previously helped citizens traverse the impasses of the communist structure were no longer valid (Žižek 2009a). With the loss of usual norms, people do not know the new implicit rules. Informal rules that are understood to be empty make up the domain of habits that facilitate interaction (Žižek 2009a). Under an Urizenic system which would not understand an informal process, navigation through a social space, by which one would expect to acquire increased understanding, becomes a journey deeper into

the unknown. As with my study of ideological practices in the NHS, previously innocuous phrases are now assumed to provoke offence (Hanson 2014a) so that anyone can have the “right to remain at a safe distance from others” (Žižek 2009a, p. 41) and use the inherent uncertainty in social encounters to further their own ends rather than society’s.

Under Urizen, a person is objectified as a unit of measure, an item valued for its function. A person’s intrinsic quality as a human being, someone with a soul, is lost.

It is with the right hemisphere that we distinguish individuals of all kinds, places as well as faces. In fact it is precisely its capacity for holistic processing that enables the right hemisphere to recognise individuals. Individuals are, after all, *Gestalt* wholes: that face, that voice, that gait, that sheer ‘quiddity’ of the person or thing, defying analysis into parts (McGilchrist 2009, p. 51).

As an example of objectification, children in the United States are being named after brands (BBC News 2003), a trend which is likely to have been followed in the UK, but for which it is hard to find available research. Professor Cleveland Evans of Bellevue University, who monitors naming trends in the United States but does not appear to publish on this specific phenomenon other than through media interviews, states that this can be seen as simply an extension of the same aspirations expressed by earlier generations who, for example, named children after precious stones (BBC News 2003). But I believe that there are points of difference. Firstly, in earlier times, objects could represent something with a depth of meaning, in a similar

vein to work by Levi-Strauss (1966) and Douglas (2001) on tribal groups having a relationship to natural phenomena in their environment which had shared meaning beyond the mundane. Secondly, those things had an identity in themselves, as physical entities that were present to the observer and which could produce a tangible effect by their presence, such as flora and fauna. They were not brands with a superficial message intended to sell products. McGilchrist (2009) states that unlike the right hemisphere's capacity to appreciate the unique quality of a gift, the left hemisphere of the brain is suited to understand money as an abstracted form of this idea which has been generalised. In a press interview, Evans expressed his concern that "parents are giving the message that children are possessions" (Deam 2003, unpaginated) and that parents want their children to be marked as different. These children are named after material things, often ones representing luxury, exclusivity or individuality (Deam 2003).

Žižek's work also provides evidence for Urizen's assault on the soul through its effect on the people who comprise the social body but who feel that their inner life is not being accounted for by those with authority and influence over them. Žižek (2011b) described the 2011 riots in the UK following the shooting of Mark Duggan as a spasmodic acting out – *passage a l'acte* - which was being imbued with an excess of meaning by some commentators. One year earlier, Sharpe and Boucher presaged the riots as well as Žižek's position: "for Žižek, the post-political consensus in the West is an effort to suppress 'social antagonism' – the sorts of volatile disagreements about basic values and social institutions that lead to real political opposition" (2010, p. 36). McGilchrist (2009) states that the left hemisphere does not acknowledge its failings even when the facts are presented to it. Žižek's

observations on internal antagonisms erupting and a population resorting to *passages a l'acte* because they are unable to influence the authorities fits this picture of a structure that refuses to recognise problems which are common knowledge for those excluded from power and who feel that their treatment is based on data that purports to represent them rather than on an understanding of their situation.

We can also see similar eruptions if we look at spirituality or religion, the traditional setting for ideas about the soul. Recruits to Islamic State (IS) leaving their privileged Western upbringing for the uncertainty of the civil war in Syria are performing the same spasmodic lurch towards self-satisfaction as other similar acts of *jouissance* (Lacan's (2010) term for the libidinal excess which is unstated but the true driving force behind exchanges) to replace the absence of meaning at home. A United Nations study found that the typical foreign IS recruit was:

most likely to be male, young and disadvantaged economically, educationally, and in terms of the labour market. He is also more likely than not to come from a marginalized background, both socially and politically. Most were unemployed, or underemployed, and/or said that their life lacked meaning (El-Said and Barrett 2017, p. 40).

The acts of *jouissance* cross cultural boundaries between secular and religious expression, as expressed by the Tunisian Islamist politician Rached Ghannouchi, in his comments on recruitment to IS quoted by Zakaria (2015, unpaginated): "Some people search for an ideology of violent protest against the established order. That's not strange," he said. "It has taken a religious garb today."

The examples in the preceding paragraphs show how Urizen exposes itself in the domains of art, the body and the soul; three areas that are of importance to McGilchrist (2009) because the left hemisphere has difficulty understanding how it can manipulate them as instruments. The functions specific to the left hemisphere - of isolating, fragmenting and abstracting - can be seen in these examples as well as some points of correspondence with Žižek's ideas once they emerge into the social body. To reiterate: the processes themselves are not a problem, for the human mind to be able isolate, fragment and abstract information is essential for survival. The difficulty occurs once these become the prime motive, taken to an extreme and misapplied. In the next chapter I will track the movement of these influences on a wider scale. Tweedy (2012) observes how the negative influence of British imperial expansion in the eighteenth century was depicted in Blake's work and I will look at how Urizen projects itself onto the world stage. As with previous examples, this will be explored via wellbeing because it is a point of friction where a system attempts to resolve psycho-social difficulties created by its own social planning.

## **Chapter 6: Urizen Goes Global**

### **6.1: Incubation**

To trace Urizen's outward growth requires a look at the conditions in which it is incubating. The first area to consider is how Western liberalism copes with its failings. Žižek (1989) describes ideologies concealing their internal antagonisms and McGilchrist (2009) warns that the left hemisphere does not recognise its errors as its own. When scaled upwards as national policy, these mindsets produce a system that applies rules but which refuses to be open about their negative consequences. This extends from areas such as wellbeing into foreign policy, a process I will now show. Using the analogy of an infection, in this chapter I will describe how Urizenic tendencies are incubated in a domestic setting and how Urizen's cultural impact influences domestic politics before it spreads internationally. For Blake, the analytic mindset represented by figures such as Sir Isaac Newton, Roger Bacon and John Locke promoted unrest in many settings. According to Damon, Blake felt that "the cruel philosophy of materialism has spread from England over the world" (Damon 1988, p. 299).

In the field of wellbeing there exists the mythology within the liberal system that it possesses cures for its own antagonisms. Problems which stem from lack of social mobility are seen as psychological responses within the individual, not deficiencies within the system. The New Economics Foundation (NEF) promotes the Five Ways to Wellbeing:



The concept of wellbeing comprises two main elements: feeling good and functioning well. NEF has developed a set of five evidence-based actions to improve personal wellbeing. The 5 ways to wellbeing are: connect, be active, take notice, keep learning, and give (NEF Publications 2016, unpaginated).

Public Health England admits that this strategy is supposed to be a foundation for wellbeing, that it is “an upstream intervention, not a treatment for those already ill” (Public Health England 2014, p. 49) and yet it discusses neither lack of social mobility nor poverty, nor does it analyse the effects upon the human spirit of the urban landscape in which the strategy will be deployed. It actually appears to be more of a strategy for concealing antagonisms. The statement in the forward that “the evidence shows that effective marketing is one key lever for catalysing change, and PHE will invest in it” (Public Health England 2014, p. 5) indicates that the strategy is based more on convincing a population rather than meaningfully changing their material conditions in the long term.

The Five Ways to Wellbeing appears to be a pastiche of the guidance given by philosophers over the last two and a half millennia on how to live a meaningful existence, as summarised by Nehemas (2000). It is Urizenic in that it has abstracted various ideas away from their original context in the belief that their simple re-application in a modern setting, without accounting for the effects of twenty-first century approaches to technology and economics, will paper over the problems of high-density living in post-industrial inner cities where those without access to key opportunities early on are unlikely to improve on their prospects for employment or

upward social movement. As with IAPT, further speculation about alternative causes for emotional distress, such as the system itself, is omitted.

Urizen, as manifested via the NHS, does not regard itself as something that may create or amplify the difficulties within an ideological structure. In 2015 NHS England's chief executive Simon Stevens announced that staff would be offered Zumba classes to reduce sickness rates (BBC News 2015b). This occurred two months before junior doctors threatened strike action related to pay and working conditions. Stevens' proposal is reminiscent of the way that patients with right hemisphere damage will adopt the left hemisphere's strategy of misrepresenting facts which are demonstrably wrong, such as claiming to be able to lift an incapacitated arm but suddenly announcing that it is not really their arm after all when challenged on why they have not done so (McGilchrist 2009) – a phenomenon known as hemispatial neglect. By framing the problems of staff absenteeism as one that needed only a facile solution, the NHS does not have to openly discuss other potential causes of sickness absence such as poor management and debilitating work stress. This attitude of presenting the problem in a certain way and failing to understand how it does not help is typical of Urizen and is a useful way of understanding NHS failures in the field of emotional wellbeing. The IAPT programme is the equivalent of these Zumba classes: it may help some people and it is organised in such a way that success can be claimed by the number of sessions delivered and attendance rates, but it is a denial of other more pressing factors. The therapist and the client both represent different parts of the same ideological process to each other, while above them, NICE (2009) guidelines impose a meaning: the perceived problem and its resolution are framed in a way that presents social

difficulties as matters of psychology, unconnected to societal factors such as status, wealth inequality or the inability to materially change one's lived circumstances.

The examples above have included PHE's policy on social intervention, the IAPT programme and the attempts by the NHS to address sickness within its own ranks. I have described an ideology of healthcare informed by the ideals of Urizen and, following McGilchrist's (2009) argument, one which seeks to reproduce itself through imposing replication of its worldview rather than encouraging true innovation. In keeping with McGilchrist's predictions, the closed mindset has abstracted any meaningful discussion of the human experience into terms such as *wellbeing* which then becomes generalised to mean whatever Urizen declares it to be. Urizen's success in *delivering wellbeing* – whatever that actually is – can be *proved* by the metrics that Urizen creates to define the term. This system is unaware even of the existence of its blind spots, let alone of what they may comprise. The most recent example is the vanguardism of the cognitive behaviourist lobby in claiming to be the bow wave of improving wellbeing while limiting it by only approving a fraction of what is available and restricting who can access it by stringent criteria that are designed around their model of illness rather than a collaborative formulation with the patient of their wider needs beyond that specific psychological viewpoint. They have taken for themselves the role of pioneering the change until the public have been educated enough to look after the project for themselves.

I am describing the incubation process by which Urizen self-replicates before exporting itself. So far, I have looked at policy but the self-replication also includes the establishment of power structures and elites. One is left to question what IAPT's

true purpose was because it has been a successful model for channeling millions of pounds into the psychology departments of select establishments, strengthening the careers of those who publish and develop courses which reinforce the approved paradigm, and invigorating the career structure for the field of psychology at the expense of sociology, social work and children's services. Yet if we judge IAPT by its declared original purpose – improving wellbeing to reduce unemployment in a manner that will pay for itself (Layard *et al.* 2006) – it has failed. An investigation by Pulse in 2013 (Price 2013) found that targets were not being met and recovery rates were slipping. Two years later a report by the Health Foundation found that the figures for 2015 had elements of both success and failure, based on information which showed that IAPT had changed its data sets in the second quarter of the 2013/2014 period (Dormon 2015). In other words, because the project was failing, it simply changed the criteria by which it judged itself and even that did not work. Layard has allowed an elite to benefit but a decade later we have a failed system propped up by massaged figures. This response to problems is like the earlier example of hemispatial neglect.

The elusive wellbeing aimed for by the social planners behind IAPT remains out of reach because the metrics allege the psychological progress of some individuals despite absence of meaningful change in the surrounding social environment. Based on Laclau's (2007) work on empty signifiers, I have predicted (Hanson 2014b) that Urizenic healthcare ideologies would be indicated by the presence of place-holders for what is absent, that the system would signify a certain value but it would be an empty gesture.

If we consider again the idea of Five Ways to Wellbeing mentioned earlier (NEF Publications 2016), even if there were not more pressing issues such as gang violence, overcrowded housing estates and lack of green space, the target audience is deprived of the means to attain the five ways easily because their playing fields have been sold and their libraries closed.

The communities targeted by PHE are themselves in thrall to Urizen; they are isolated pockets lacking coherent master signifiers which could provide substantial meaning. An Urizenic system is broadcasting a series of guidelines at an Urizenic population and the possibility of alternative perspectives about the issues is never featured in the documents.

Urizen shapes a society by promoting ways of being that foster its worldview.

McGilchrist contends that

the innate structures of the left hemisphere are, through technology, being incarnated in the world it has come to dominate. But the left hemisphere would appear to be unsatisfied with this, because it still leaves possible exits from the maze, from the hall of mirrors, unbarred (2009, p. 388).

## **6.2: Cross-Infection from Culture to Politics**

I have described the ways that Urizen exposes itself at the point where society attempts to heal its difficulties via a healthcare system. The next stage in understanding how Urizen exports itself globally is via the transition from culture into politics.

The conceptual artists known as Gilbert and George (Gilbert Proesch and George Passmore) claim that their work is social commentary. It tends to be based on collages of disparate images, often including themselves. Gilbert and George admire former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, a politician who, like the conceptual artists, seemed to abstract information without accounting for the whole. An inability to nuance how a shifted context in relation to one piece of information can change the meaning of the whole is an indicator of a left hemisphere process at work (McGilchrist 2009). Thatcher's former Scottish Secretary, Malcolm Rifkind, describes how she could understand an issue but not empathise with it (BBC Scotland 2009, 04:25–05:00). He once advised her to stop using the alienating phrase *you in Scotland* and to replace it with the more collegial *we*. But, unable to intuit the shifted context, she then addressed a conference there several times with the phrase: “we in Scotland,” (BBC Scotland 2009, 06:10–07:30), leaving Rifkind confused over how a well-educated person could make such an error. Her biographer notes that “the novelist and travel writer Jonathan Raban saw her as a total philistine – ‘she doesn’t appreciate doubleness, contradictions, paradox, irony, ambiguity’ and, to her, paintings, books and ideas were ‘just so much Black Forest gateau’,” (Moore 2015, p. 636). What Raban described is a list of the mental processes that are anathema to the left hemisphere (McGilchrist 2009). The same problems of disjunction, juxtaposition, ambiguity and meaning that were described earlier in the description of Urizenic influence on art (Chapter 5.2) are also apparent in politics.

My use of these examples is not intended to make a point about the Conservative Party; rather, they are used in order to demonstrate examples of Urizen, its pervasiveness and the subtlety of clues sometimes indicating it. Hence the ease with

which Thatcher was able to state that Tony Blair and New Labour were her greatest achievements (Burns 2008): Urizenic processes transcend political divisions.

IAPT was Blair's domestic equivalent of the 2003 Iraq invasion: neoliberalism's *passage a l'acte* based on a closed view of the problem and its solution. Our crisis arises from Urizen and the same mindset is used by political authorities and social planners in an attempt to solve it.

### **6.3: Pandemic**

Urizen's domestic influence can be scaled upwards to become international policy.

As Curtis observes in his criticism of foreign policy in Afghanistan:

All kinds of groups came to Kabul to help the project. It was like a snapshot of what those in power in America and Britain believed made democracy work. As well as the obvious lessons in how to organise elections and conferences on how to stop the narcotics trade, young Afghan students were also given lessons in how to make conceptual art (Curtis 2015, 1:47:44-1:48:14).

In McGilchrist's portrayal of a world dominated by left hemisphere values, "art would become conceptual" (2009, p. 433).

Žižek's position is that tension is pre-programmed into the Western mindset. Internal threats appear external: "the appearance of the fundamentalist Other ... is the way that the effects of contradictions *within* Western social reality appear as an external threat arising from *without*" (Sharpe and Boucher 2010, p. 35; italics in the original).

My addition to this is that the weapons used to attack the perceived threat without are also then turned inwards. Policies implemented on the back of military intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan are echoed in the strategies applied to the home population. The counter-insurgency doctrine makes use of *Shaping*: a strategy designed to influence the domestic population as well as the Afghans (Ministry of Defence 2009). This has morphed into a strategy of applying the positivist metrics of local community construction projects used to portray perceived success in Afghanistan to be used as various indices of wellbeing among the home population. The dynamics of Afghan culture were so subtle that the Western planners were unable to see the unintended consequences of their actions and how well-intentioned projects to build schools and playgrounds were ineffectual in altering the overall tensions between the incomers and the host population (Ledwidge 2011). Similarly, the architects of IAPT can disregard the lived experience of those who exist under difficult social conditions because they judge the success of the programme by its own measures, which can be manipulated to create a certain impression (Griffiths and Steen 2013a), rather than by what is important to the local population. The expansionist mindset projected outwards into the world in 2001 returned in the form of IAPT in 2006 (IAPT 2016) and the Five Ways to Wellbeing programme in 2016 (New Economics Foundation 2016).

Rumsfeld's (2002) infamous pre-Iraq War speech about *known unknowns*, as studied by Žižek, is an example of an Urizenic declaration. In the speech, Rumsfeld lists three of the four possible ways of relating knowns to unknowns but omits the fourth, *unknown knowns*: the one that is covertly influencing decisions. Žižek (2004) cites this as an example of how our unconscious desires and prejudices influence us



without our acknowledgment of them, and McGilchrist uses the speech as an example of how the left hemisphere does not understand the need for the right hemisphere: “in a Rumsfeldean way, it’s not aware of what it’s not aware of” (2012b, 1:05:24-1:05:28).

The trope of professed neutrality which is oppressive in its efforts to be seen as truly liberal, was exemplified by the then Prime Minister Blair’s statement: “I think most people who have dealt with me, think I’m a pretty straight sort of guy and I am” (BBC One 1997, unpaginated). Planning for the invasion of Iraq began only five years after this statement and it then took over a decade for Blair to come the closest yet to admitting that his foreign policy had contributed to the 2015 refugee crisis and growth of radical non-state actors in the Middle East (CNN 2015). A leader who was earlier touting his liberal democratic credentials later embarked on a military campaign which, by his own belated admission, caused immense upheaval.

The imperial enterprises criticised by Blake (1809) are repeated today on a greater scale and justified with subtler artifice than basic imperial expansion. Contemporary Western campaigns in the Middle East and Asia have been conducted under shifting guises: defeating terrorism, bringing democracy, promotion of women's rights, curbing heroin production, stability of a volatile region and so on (Johnson and Leslie 2004). Institutions such as the British East India Company of the seventeenth century cannot be seen simply as a forerunner of the modern military industrial complex because the limited technology of that era demanded longevity, an investment of time and long-term physical presence in the foreign locale. This led to intermarriages and the cultural bleed of the colonised into the host: it was this kind of

threat to Western identity that prompted the Christian missionary zeal within India that culminated in the 1857 uprisings (Dalrymple 2006). Before travel by rail and air telescoped distance, Urizenic tendencies could be absorbed more readily by time and topography. The campaign to transplant our own mythical social stability on a reluctant host abroad has turned inwards to enforce upon our domestic population a certain view of what wellbeing should be. The mentality applied abroad to Afghanistan is utilised against the perceived threat to our economic values at home.

Baudrillard, in his analysis of the idea of a simulacrum being put into practice during the 1990–1991 Gulf War, describes how the idea of precision becomes a *leitmotif* which adds to the deception to the point where the war “is no longer measured against an adversary but against its abstract operation alone” (1991, p. 45). The public, indifferent to this state of affairs, nevertheless give their consent to be frightened. To take these ideas about the Gulf War into the present, we can say that the public continue to give consent to have their emotions guided by the abstraction of data.

Urizen is unable to empathise and it is suspicious of its own population as well as of the Other. This suspicion is obvious when exhibited as part of foreign policy but it is also present domestically in healthcare delivery. McGilchrist (2012a) describes a lack of trust which is associated with the need to control and to reinforce an established view. He uses the example of research that is not funded unless it is identical to what is already known.

Urizen wages war against whatever it sees as alien, even if it is of the same nationality. The home population needing emotional support from the NHS because their social underpinnings have decayed are the collateral damage resulting from what Foucault (2010) foresaw as the liberal ideals turned into neoliberal competitiveness and its consequent inequalities. Klein (2008) describes one consequence of the use of shock strategies derived from the neoliberal economics of what became known as the Chicago School being that the emotional response of a population is regarded as secondary to the competitive advantages that might be gained by an elite. The methods by which neoliberalism functions have now become so arcane and far reaching that it is hard to unpick exactly what the process is. As economics increases its influence on politics, a certain form of self-reflexivity in the system is lost so that it can no longer really understand its own activity and motivations (Davies 2014).

#### **6.4: Urizen Manifesting Beyond Western Culture**

Earlier, I mentioned Eckersley's (2006) view that the attitude of individualism promoted in Western liberal economies was having a harmful effect on people. Dressler criticizes Eckersley for over-simplifying arguments about culture into a binary of the "west versus the rest" (Dressler 2006, p. 258) but I see Eckersley's comments as helpful indicators of Urizen's pan-cultural influence in the wake of Western cultural expansion into other parts of the globe. Also, Dressler is writing at a time before the 2015 exodus of refugees from the Middle East into Europe, an effect of Urizenic foreign policy by the West which its own architects accept as causal (CNN 2015). Just as in Blake's era, there is a particular manifestation of Urizen prevalent today that fits the West's expeditionary strategy: the use of technology to

extend military and political influence because it regards its worldview as a worthy export.

When looking at examples of problems created by attitudes prevalent in the West there is a risk of over privileging the Other, of seeing the non-Western as a source of something better. Žižek (2016) warns of a liberal tendency to push tolerance to the degree where it impinges on the freedoms of some members of the same community that the West is attempting to accept by, for example, permitting cultural practices where children are kept away from school, forced into underage marriages and women are controlled by social codes related to clothing and behaviour.

I wish to show that the same process of excessive abstraction which is a hallmark of Urizen and which was present in my earlier descriptions of the management of healthcare can arise in an area that is the apparent opposite of Western healthcare: Islamic extremism poised against the West. McGilchrist is concerned with the left hemisphere's capacity to misuse its abstracting principle. Žižek also sees a difficulty caused by over-abstraction, suggesting that we ask "to what extent our own abstract multiculturalism has contributed to this sad state of affairs" (Žižek 2016, p. 99).

Writing about Western anti-immigrant populists, Žižek observes that "one should be more attentive to the hidden proximity between them and fundamentalist Islamists" (2017, p. 171). Urizen is visible with extremists from IS, whose members can imagine being older but also being dead: a process that requires them to be comfortable with ignoring the whole. This is in keeping with the earlier references to hemispatial neglect found through the isolated left hemisphere such as with stroke patients disavowing one of their own limbs, claiming that it is simply not theirs

despite its remaining naturally connected to their own body (McGilchrist 2009). A journalist who obtained access to young IS recruits reported:

Our team was granted relatively free access to the fighters, who had clearly been given orders to cooperate from above. This included being permitted to interview two would-be teenage suicide bombers who, on the one hand, appeared frustrated at having not yet fulfilled their mission and, on the other, talked excitedly about their hopes for when they grow up (Doran 2015, unpaginated).

Islamic fundamentalists misuse the Quran and Hadith by partially quoting out of context or ignoring alternative explanations. For example, the verse “Kill them wherever you encounter them” (Quran 2:191) was originally used to clarify the rules of engagement if attacked on pilgrimage in Mecca (Haleem 2010) but is often used by extremists to justify massacres. The terror group IS has made use of a prophecy by Mohammed about a battle centred on Dabiq/Dabeeq (Al Areefi 2010) to give credence to their claim to be the rightful heirs of his legacy, but in doing so they ignore another prophecy which describes a group very much like IS and which is highly critical of it (Chaudhry 2015).

Research suggests that of those Muslims from an academic background who were drawn to extremism, those with an engineering mindset were over-represented while there was an almost complete absence of those with an academic background in the social sciences – phenomena attributed to the different thinking styles required in those disciplines: the former rigid and definite, the latter embracing the ambiguous

and critical (Rose 2015). The highest qualification in CBT under IAPT is an MSc rather than an MA: a parallel of the thinking style identified by Rose (2015) as operationalising Islamic extremism, a preference for the definiteness promised by science over the ambiguities accepted within art. The ideological system behind wellbeing wants the healing process between two potentially creative humans to be artless, non-creative and predictable.

### **6.5: Common Themes: Abstraction, Context, Juxtaposition and Meaning**

The thread running through the preceding chapters has been about the left hemisphere's specialism for isolating information, abstracting it and presenting it anew (McGilchrist 2009). An important aspect of the mind's construction of its world is that information is taken out of its original setting and analysed separately, something that should be done with a view to re-integrating the new findings back into the whole (McGilchrist 2009). When this methodology becomes an end in itself, it produces material that can be overly abstracted, overly de-contextualised, juxtaposed too closely with other items and which can have its original meaning distorted. Instead of a harmonious re-integration of the knowledge that the left hemisphere has analysed, there is instead a disjunct, a problem which the Urizenic system conceals as normalcy (McGilchrist 2009). This is similar to the ideological practices that Žižek (1989) describes. I have described Urizen's influence in the field of wellbeing and Western foreign policy. The excessive use of fragmented, abstracted and de-contextualised information can also indicate Urizen's influence in other settings.

Just as with the evidence taken from split-brain studies and developed by McGilchrist, the mentality of the suicide bomber and certain forms of tattoo referred to earlier are examples of how information is isolated, removed from its context and, to use McGilchrist's descriptor, *re-presented* in a way that manipulates its meaning and influences those involved in its transmission and processing. Borowski describes how, amongst the social media of IS militants, “decapitated heads are casually juxtaposed with pictures of kittens, and of selfies with freshly baked cakes. Beyond shock value, this makes for an unsettling confusion of genres” (2015, p. 25). It is the close proximity of unrelated items which indicates the workings of the left hemisphere because it is unable to see the whole. The left hemisphere is blind to the fact that presenting isolated fragments together in the same space changes the quality of the overall arrangement because it is unable to comprehend the larger view of which the fragments are a part (McGilchrist 2009).

After the IS-inspired attacks on Paris in November 2015, a photograph circulated across press agencies showing the female terrorist suspect Hasna Ait Boulahcen wearing a head-covering taken in a private moment as she was making an offensive gesture to the camera with both hands (BBC News 2015c – see also Appendix Two). The left hemisphere style of thinking is indicated here by the disjunct created by placing two mismatched symbols (the offensive gesture and the headscarf) in the same setting. These two symbols combined look out of place when viewed together as a whole, but not to a mindset that focuses only on the individual elements.

My earlier projects (Hanson 2014a, 2015) showed examples of the left hemisphere's effect on wellbeing for the individual as well as institutions. From that Urizenic

mindset emerge systems as seemingly diverse as the terrorist group IS and the false dawn of IAPT: one a distorted form of a spiritual tradition, the other a distorted form of a psychological one. Both focus on what is valuable to the entity itself rather than the population whom they claim to serve, and both possess that crucial ideological element; an object-cause of desire (Žižek 1989). For IAPT there is a mythical social environment which will come into being once a certain segment of the population have been cured of psychological ills that prevent them working – it was claimed that the treatment would pay for itself through the treated workforce returning to productivity (Layard 2005). The original claims for IAPT's cost-effectiveness are flawed (Griffiths and Steen 2013b). For IS there is an idealised *ummah* – a Muslim community - waiting for the opportunity to be actualised.

Disjunct and juxtaposition can be used creatively; Koestler (1964) proposed that two distinct conceptual planes could be held simultaneously to be viewed from a new frame of reference. Foucault (1967/1984) developed the idea of the term *counter-site* to describe a space where deliberate inversion can inform. Under an Urizenic system, these processes are mimicked but without true depth.



## **Chapter 7: Potential Responses to Urizen**

I have given examples of how the neurological feature described by McGilchrist (2009) can be tracked and understood when manifesting within culture through the figure of Urizen, as exemplified by Tweedy (2012). I have also used Žižek's ideas about society as the surrounding framework for better understanding the effects of Urizen. I have shown how Urizen influences the way in which the culture attempts to heal itself of societal problems in the field of wellbeing and how this attitude then extends outwards at an international level. Having described the nature of what is occurring and the methods involved in producing it, I will now look at possible responses.

### **7.1: The Real**

The real is that which falls outside the symbolic order and it has been viewed by theorists such as Laclau (2007) as a space from which to resist ideological influences. The real is beyond our grasp, but the meaning that we give to our relationship to it is open to interpretation. Its meaning may be contested but can also be a space for the strange and marginal, those boundary elements which Douglas (2001) attests are healing as well as dangerous. It is the space from which the outrageous intrudes in the form of *das Ding* (Freud 1919) - the Freudian Thing - and, consequently, we need to look to that unknown aspect for inspiration beyond the responses which are limited to the known symbolic space. My work aims to find a dialogue with the real, whereas Urizen, opposed to ambiguity and what it cannot categorise, will attempt to colonise at source what emerges from it.

My earlier study (Hanson 2014a) showed how the aspect of the Urizenic system displayed in the NHS, which claims state responsibility for dispensing psychological treatments to enhance wellbeing, exposes itself at certain points, such as when that part of it which purports to be inclusive and to promote wellbeing for all, becomes compromised by the Lacanian real, by things that it cannot accommodate within its structure. Such examples are microcosms of a wider difficulty, that the manifestations of Urizen at the level of politics and social policy are so excessively rational that they cannot grasp the implications of the real, the point at which the symbolic order on which the rational is structured breaks down. The health system has irrational practices (Hanson 2014a) and those within it who advocate rationalism still accept their awards derived from an irrational undercurrent. This is to be expected: the law conceals its Law-is-Law tautology, its foundational violence (Žižek 2003b, 2006b). My response to this form of ideology in healthcare is to embrace the irrational, to look within it for traces of the real.

## **7.2: The Real and Spiritual Traditions**

The Lacanian view of ideology sees a need for the individual to traverse the fantasy of the symbolic order upheld by the big Other (Žižek 1989). The subjects pre-supposed by wellbeing services remain in thrall to an ideological system, the function of which “is not to offer us a point of escape from our reality but to offer us the social reality itself as an escape from some traumatic, real kernel” (Žižek 1989, p. 45).

What is needed is an approach that traverses the fantasy maintained by these subjects of the ideologically grounded wellbeing services while also addressing the deeper concern of the traumatic kernel of the real. McGilchrist raises the difficulty of trying to escape from the left hemisphere’s increasingly self-reflexive “hall of mirrors”

(2009, p. 388) and suggests that the exit from such a closed system can be to reach beyond what the left hemisphere understands, to go to places that it cannot comprehend.

The analytic left hemisphere, personified as Urizen, cannot tolerate what it is unable to accommodate within its worldview (McGilchrist 2009), whereas an approach that accommodates the concept of the esoteric not only accepts the unknown but understands that it plays a role in the subject's way of being and even relies on that element of mystery. It acknowledges an empty centre that cannot be accessed but around which the more consciously recognisable features of the human psyche are noticed.

In response to an ideology built on Urizenic principles, McGilchrist infers possible solutions which point towards the esoteric, those areas of spirituality and art which defy analysis and integration. In the following passage I interpret him as not only endorsing the esoteric, but also recognising that an Urizenic system is inherently vulnerable to what may erupt from the real:

My theme may seem pessimistic. I do think that there are, nonetheless, reasons for hope. As will be obvious, I think we need, for one thing, urgently to move on from our current, limiting preconceptions about the nature of physical existence, spiritual life and art, and there are some small indications that this may be happening. Art and religion should not become part of the betrayal. Another reason for hope lies in the fact that, however much the left hemisphere sees progress as a straight line, it is

rarely so in the real world. The very circularity of things as they really are, rather than as the left hemisphere conceives them, might be a reason for hope (McGilchrist 2009, p. 445).

In this section I will look at spirituality, which pushes against the extremities of what one accepts as provably true while remaining in some way definable and socially accepted. I do not advocate a theocracy - that could be an Urizenic form of spirituality - but I do suggest that there can be a meeting point where the theological and the secular both accept ambiguities within their systems. McGilchrist states:

The problem is that logic doesn't allow us what used to be called the *coincidentia oppositorum*, the fact that opposites often come together.

This is ancient knowledge. It's in Lao Tze ... it's in the philosopher Heraclitus ... the idea is in Tantric Hinduism, it's in Buddhism, it's in German mysticism and it's in Sufism; something can change and remain the same (McGilchrist 2014, 27:10–27:58).

In trying to find some area of human life which encourages an openness to the real, the first area that I will look at is an esoteric tradition. Urizen is the aspect of the human psyche compelled to measure but esoteric traditions represent another aspect of ourselves which escapes this measurement because we never fully understand or control that part of ourselves. I will be using ideas found within Sufism; its esotericism is a fit for the real but it is connected to the routine practice of everyday living through the religious tradition in which it has been housed. Islam does not advocate monastic withdrawal from the world and, prior to his revelation as

well as to some extent afterwards, Mohammed was engaged in the same normal daily activities involving trade, family and social conventions as his peers. In his analysis of theology and politics from the perspectives of Žižek and Eagleton, Sigurdson reminds us that religion “was not, as in Western modernity, a sphere distinct from ‘politics’ or ‘economy’” (Sigurdson 2012, p. 29). A tradition that embraced the mystic might normally not be included in a study of healthcare or ideology, but at the time that it emerged these divisions were not so distinct. Sigurdson (2012) concludes that theology can be a site of resistance culturally, socially and as a theoretical resource provided that “God is not objectified as an alien power” (2012, p. 202) but is used as the ground for freedom and hope.

My perspective is that Islam today has emerged being labelled as a religion for understandable reasons but its core appears to be far harder to fathom. To categorise Islam exclusively via its outward religious forms is to miss the part of it which escapes such symbolism, the esoteric aspect. This is applicable to many spiritual traditions which could be a vestige of something that is harder to define but Islam's temporal proximity to the present day, its identifiable formative characters and its subsequent impact make this process easier to observe. Campbell (1949) overcame the problem of trying to establish the concealed meaning behind external characteristics by describing the outer forms as metaphors for the inner. According to Sigurdson, Eagleton has “come to regard religious institutions as a possible site of resistance” (2012, p. 43). I am bound by the term *religion* for want of a suitable alternative. There were elements which existed before the schisms in Islam, before disagreements over leadership, before Islamic imperialism created a built-in friction against its attempts at spirituality. Linking some aspects of Islam to the Lacanian real

is an attempt to look again at something that is subtle and easily missed. In revisiting Islam through McGilchrist's ideas on hemisphere differences and Lacan's conception of the real we may get closer to that original essence which is not represented.

Islam can provide a framework for the model of an esoteric subject but on the understanding that the form of Islam I refer to cannot be merely a preserved version of the seventh-century Arabian tribal culture. Mohammed himself predicted that the world would fundamentally change after his death and that this change would also include how people lived and how they put into practice what he had transmitted to them (Kabbani 2003).

Islam contains the idea that the human is forgetful, hence the Sufi exercise of *zhikr* (also Anglicised as *dhikr*): remembrance. This is something inherent to Sufism: we are forgetful of something that transcends us but we possess a hidden memory of it. Eagleton describes the subject's relationship to their ideological surroundings as one of ignorance: "oblivion is thus our 'natural' mode" (2007, p. 177). From the perspective of an esoteric subjectivity, the Lacanian traversal of the fantasy can be seen as a form of remembrance: the Lacanian divided subject aiming to traverse the fantasy is like the torn – *baz* - Sufi longing for the divine (Sufis use the Persian term *baz* – open – to describe feeling torn). Žižek specifies

the meaning of Lacan's assertion of the subject's constitutive 'decenterment': its point is not that my subjective experience is regulated by objective unconscious mechanisms which are 'decentered' with regard to my self-experience and, as such, beyond my control (a point asserted

by every materialist), but, rather, something much more unsettling – I am deprived of even my most intimate ‘subjective’ experience, the way things ‘really seem to me,’ that of the fundamental fantasy that constitutes and guarantees the core of my being, since I can never consciously experience it and assume it (2006a, p. 171).

Sufism is fixed via Islam around a specific person and the eventual revelation that ruptured the symbolic order of its time. According to Sufis, the record of its transmission, the Quran, contains within its text layers of hidden meaning, deliberate ambiguities, in keeping with the equivocation McGilchrist feels it is important to maintain (2009). The Quran recognises the existence of many prophets before Mohammed under a rubric that can incorporate figures from pre-Islamic doctrines; “every community is sent a messenger” (10:47) and “every community has been sent a warner” (35:24). Sufism comes from a lineage of methods that have facilitated the intrusion of the Real/real into the culture of the time.

In the same way, Leszek Kolakowski has described mysticism as the revolt of the individual conscience against the system, the 'apparatus'. Mysticism is certainly a private experience which has an absolute value for the person involved, and so where the ‘system’, that is the established framework of ideas and institutions, is opposed to its revelations it can indeed be such a revolt of experience. So, given the same conditions, can pure science or philosophy. But there are systems - the Catholic Church is one - which are sufficiently flexible and intelligent to have been able to channel this spontaneous mystical activity so as to give it a place, a role,

even to make use of the vital impulse as something which feeds it and to which it in turn gives rise. This is how Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross have remained great Catholic mystics, and ornaments of a Church they might have shaken. No similar institution existed in Arabia to channel Muhammad” (Rodinson 1985, p. 82).

Sufism too is vulnerable to Urizen, when the term is used as a signifier whose meaning can be altered. There is an extant example of esoteric traditions such as Sufism being used in alternative ways. In the early twentieth century George Gurdjieff took elements of Sufism (Toussulis 2010) as well as a mixture of Greek philosophy, alchemy and Armenian traditions (Pittman 2008) and then re-presented it as a system of human mastery over nature through a set of exercises. These can then be turned into institutional practices once the founding figure dies.

Mura (2014), using a Lacanian approach, develops what she describes as a limited range of work on the meeting point of psychoanalysis and Islam. For her study of Islamism through the discourse of Islam as a master signifier, the importance of the real lies not only in the failure of the symbolic (the experience of social lack in an Islamic setting) but also in how the real can account for this lack through the illusion of an idealised Islam that is unable to manifest itself. This may be a historic version or one that hopes for a new Islamic age (Mura 2014). Couched within Islam, Sufism, as a mundane term used to describe an encounter with the real, can be over-identified with whatever master signifier Islam has come to be recognised by.



Shortly, I will revisit these above themes from the perspective of the massacre of the proto-Shia forces at Karbala in 680 AD as an example of signifiers connected with the esoteric having their meaning changed through violence.

### **7.3: Žižek on Religion and the Esoteric**

Žižek (1997) sees Christianity as unique among religions as revealing, through the sense of forsakenness expressed by the crucified Christ, that there is no big Other. He places spirituality and religion in the same category and sees them as complicit in covering up the non-existence of the big Other, with the exception of the Christian crucifixion. According to Žižek (2012b), the position of the revolutionary and the analyst is to be aware of the big Other but not subject to it.

Žižek (2001) uses Christianity rather than Sufism as a template but he has views on Gnosticism, which under his interpretation has similarities to Sufism: that of a divine spark lying unknown or forgotten within each person because they are taken up with worldly matters. Žižek (2001) concludes that instead of a return to a true form of self, Christianity calls for our reinvention. But I believe that the idea of abandonment and reinvention is not exclusive to Christianity. I will argue in later chapters that the potential which Žižek sees in Christianity can also be found within aspects of Islam, in the ideas found in Sufism and the psychological and cultural legacy of Karbala. Dabashi sees the similarities between the crucified Christ and the martyred Imam Hossein as “striking” (2011, p. 80) in that both were perceived as spiritually capable of receiving divine intervention against their aggressors but both opted to fulfill their destiny. Blake’s mysticism also subverts Gnosticism because any hidden gods separated from the human become an “inaccessible object of desire” (Quinney 2009,

p. 37). He believed instead that deities resided within the person themselves (Quinney 2009).

Žižek's version of Christ is not God and man, but the "divine dimension in man" (2001, p. 90) becoming visible. However, he also sees this divine aspect as an obstacle preventing humanity's self-identification. According to Žižek's Christianity, the death of Christ means there is no longer a place for "any God of Beyond" (2001, p. 91) and the only remainder is the *Holy Spirit*, Žižek's term for the community of believing followers.

Žižek's (2003a) Christianity is an atheist one that requires redemption through abandoning its institutional structures, and he regards Islam as a fusion of the worst aspects of the Abrahamic faiths in having the superego that Christians claim of Judaism as well as the regression from monotheism into mythology that Jews can see in Christianity (Žižek 2001). Islam, for Žižek, has both superego and narrative. But Žižek's criticism of Islam does not include aspects that are built on rupture, which I will explore later through the theme of Karbala and the sayings from Mohammed (the Hadith) which predicted the degeneration of his message.

For Žižek, "the 'Holy Spirit' is the community deprived of its support in the big Other" (2003a, p. 172). This absence of God means that there is no afterlife in Žižek's interpretation of Christianity, just as there was none in the Judaic tradition from which Christ emerged (Žižek 2001). For Žižek, there is no God and the divine spark is a disruption, but the theme of rupture remains. As with my brief reference to Karbala

above, this idea of rupture can be further explored through other ideas found in Islam.

Islam can be seen as a reaction to the way that the religion of the time had been oriented towards the big Other through idol-worship and acquired a form by which to respond to it. Like any revolutionary movement, Islam was then free to install its own symbolic network, to maintain the big Other in a new form. For Žižek (2001), the prohibition on images is not because the spiritual may become humanised, but because it would “render it all too faithfully, as the ultimate Neighbor-Thing” (2001, p. 130). Žižek (2001) states that only Christianity takes this to its conclusion in the likeness of God and man, as well as their mutual identity, in Christ. The result of the crucifixion, according to Žižek’s account, is that the responsibility for the divine programme lies with us. Later, I will develop further ideas about the impact of a spiritual legacy after a foundational traumatic event when I discuss the consequences of Karbala.

#### **7.4: Urizen and the Esoteric**

McGilchrist, as part of his argument about left hemisphere influence on culture, points out the ways that religions can be highly organised and abstracted from their spiritual origins but does not go much further beyond documenting the popularity and decline of religious movements alongside other cultural indicators. Tweedy’s development of McGilchrist’s themes through the works of Blake includes Blake’s conception of God. Tweedy (2012) helps to differentiate the ideas of the divine from those of a deity. According to Tweedy, Blake’s God is closely linked to the human experience and is not a remote entity requiring intercession: “for an abstract and

impersonal God, Blake maintained, is the invention of the rationalising Spectre, and is the sort of God invoked and adored by all Urizenic religions and philosophies” (Tweedy 2012, p. 201). Urizenic religions “are founded on the belief that God is more than man” (Tweedy 2012, p. 202). Blake, an opponent of religious orthodoxy also saw the human as divine. “Priesthood, according to Blake, did not originate in the belief that God was human, but in the belief that God was not human” (Tweedy 2012, p. 204).

Urizen has an etymological connection with the idea of horizon (Tweedy 2012). The horizon marked a limit, beyond which the remote gods of ancient cultures dwelt (Rundle Clark 1991). Blake felt that religions erred when they formulated their idea of God through abstract symbols, something in common with left hemisphere functions (McGilchrist 2009; Tweedy 2012). In Blake’s mythology, Urizen is made to see sense through the efforts of another of Blake’s creations: Albion. Tweedy explains Albion’s realisation that “Urizen and all the other orthodox ‘Gods’ are programs and powers within his own brain and being” (2012 p. 288). Frye (1969) describes Blake’s philosophy as one where man was cut off from his divine inheritance by religion, which he saw as belief in a nonhuman God. In comparing his theory about brain hemispheres to that of Jaynes (1976), McGilchrist describes how “the voices of intuition now appear ‘other’; familiar but alien, wise but uncanny – in a word, divine” (2009, p. 262). Parallels between Blake and Žižek can be seen in the refutation of a God outside of man and the idea of an internal authority figure (the big Other). Blake’s rejection of a priestly caste also aligns him with Žižek who regards the community as the *Holy Spirit* (2001, 2003a).

### **7.5: Other Perspectives: Blake and Kant**

Blake, as a mystic, an artist and a Briton living at a time of imperial expansion, also covers themes which are pertinent here with regard to the West's relationship with other cultures. As a non-religious mystic (Berger 1914/2009), Blake is an example of esoteric ideas made active within a secular system. Blake was raised in a Christian setting, but he was a dissenter at a time when to be a non-believer carried risk (Ackroyd 1999). Frye's view of Blake's mysticism delineates him alongside non-Western esoteric traditions:

Unity with this God could be attained only by an effort of vision which not only rejects the duality of subject and object but attacks the far more difficult antithesis of being and non-being as well. This effort of vision, so called, is to be conceived neither as a human attempt to reach God nor a divine attempt to reach man, but as the realization in total experience of the identity of God and Man in which both the human creature and the superhuman Creator disappear. Blake's conception of art as creation designed to destroy *the* Creation is the most readily comprehensible expression of this effort of vision I know; but the effort itself is the basis of, for instance, Zen Buddhism, which with its paradoxical humor and its intimate relationship to the arts is startlingly close to Blake (Frye 1969, p. 431).

McGilchrist, who does not utilise Lacanian concepts, sees value in aesthetics that transcend their surroundings. According to McGilchrist, the Romantics, for whom the sublime was a core concept, sought the sense of belonging to something greater

than themselves by being able to see through material phenomena. An encounter with the sublime “expands and extends, not dwarfs, the being of the beholder” (McGilchrist 2009, p. 363). The sublime has had different meanings over time; eloquent poetry, divinity, the inadequacy of human perception confronted by nature, the power of reason and as a symbol of what escapes reason (Shaw 2006). For McGilchrist, the sublime was best understood by the Romantics, while Kant, along with figures such as Bentham and Descartes, was a figure whose worldview was shaped by an objectifying, analytical left hemisphere thinking style. Žižek (1989) cautions against *Kantianising* the Lacanian real into a distinction between the noumenal and the phenomenal. Instead of something transcendent, Žižek’s sublime is “an indicator of the traumatic emptiness” (Shaw 2006, p. 138) beneath symbolisation. There is a “hideous sublimity” (Shaw 2006, p. 139) in the object that is preventing full ideological closure.

Scruton (2001) describes Kant’s sentiment of the sublime as one where we are overcome by the greatness of the world and we abandon our efforts to understand or control it. For Žižek (1989), Kant’s sublime is paradoxical; it cannot be represented but the failure to do so indicates the greatness of what lies beyond and fanaticism occurs in the belief that one can grasp it. Both Žižek and McGilchrist respect its unattainable nature: “the sublime is more truly present when only partially visible” (McGilchrist 2009, p. 369).

The theme of something that lies beyond human experience but remains unobtainable can be applied to ideas of the sublime, the real, the divided subject and the mystic. Blake is an example of a secular mystic at the dawning of a culture which

was being shaped by technology and imperialism - domains in which the left hemisphere excels. But Blake's mysticism was firmly rooted in the workings of the human mind. Frye's view of Blake, is that

If mysticism means primarily a contemplative quietism, mysticism is something abhorrent to Blake ... But if mysticism means primarily the vision of the prodigious and unthinkable metamorphosis of the human mind just described, then Blake is one of the mystics (Frye 1969, p. 432).

### **7.6: Caveats on Spirituality from Žižek and McGilchrist**

McGilchrist lays out his views on spirituality from a different starting point to Žižek, not only as a neuroscientist but as someone who, unlike Žižek, neither declares himself an atheist nor privileges Christianity above other faiths, even from an atheist perspective. But there are points of correspondence between them in their distrust of some ideas that claim to be spiritual.

Žižek (2003a, 2006a) is critical of the transcendental techniques which have increased in popularity in the West, designed around certain types of spirituality. He uses examples from Victoria (1997), based on the teachings of Suzuki (1959), to illustrate how meditative detachment can enable a combatant to psychologically distance themselves from the act of killing. Žižek writes that "spiritual meditation, in its abstraction from institutionalized religion, appears today as the zero level undistorted core of religion" (Žižek, Milbank and Davis 2011, p. 27) and argues that such an intimate experience through meditation is the ideological format most suited to global capitalism. This version of spirituality encourages its followers to avoid

trying to cope with the demands of technology and instead “renounce the very endeavor to retain control over what goes on ... while retaining an inner distance and indifference” (2003a, p. 13).

Žižek regards this type of solution as:

the “Oriental” one: that, precisely, of *Gelassenheit* – we should remain active, engaged in the world; we should merely do it with an inner distance, without full attachment, maintaining intact throughout this engagement the core of our being – all the mystical rubbish about how, through the very incessant agility of its parts, the Whole is at peace with itself” (2006a, Loc 780).

In the earlier description of meditation, the phrase “in its abstraction” (Žižek, Milbank and Davis 2011, p. 27) echoes McGilchrist’s concern with how abstraction is misused to distort information. When viewed under McGilchrist’s rubric, Žižek is saying that a certain element (in this case, meditation) has been taken away from its original context, abstracted into a new entity and then utilised to make money, another form of abstraction. McGilchrist’s views on the co-opting of spiritual traditions complements Žižek’s: “Thus 15 minutes Zen meditation a day may make you a more effective money broker, or improve your blood pressure, or lower your cholesterol” (McGilchrist 2009, p. 441). McGilchrist’s theory also links the detachment identified by Žižek with left hemisphere processes:

The relative detachment from the body displayed by the left hemisphere, and its tendency to abstraction, normally serve its purposeful striving



towards individual gain. The left frontal lobe, however, brings distance, and allows the experience of the peaceful detachment from the material realm and 'emptying out' described by experts in meditation as a mystical experience (McGilchrist 2009, p. 91).

Another point that Žižek raises about the misuse of spiritual ideals is summed up in the phrase: "no ethnic cleansing without poetry" (Irwin and Motoh 2014, p. 143). The leaders of a movement may be responsible for misleading the public but this manipulation occurs because the poets have already created a dream for people to follow (Žižek 2014a).

McGilchrist (2009) not only criticises the overselling of Zen meditation, but he also believes that practices aimed at self-annihilation should instead be utilised as ways for people to understand their relation to a whole that is greater than the person. For McGilchrist, the brain hemispheres have two distinct forms of understanding individualism: where the left hemisphere sees the individual as an isolated unit, the right understands the interrelationship between the individual and the whole of which they are a part.

## **Chapter 8: The Influence of the Real and Mystery Traditions on the Subject**

Over the previous chapters, I have described how McGilchrist's theory can manifest in society, especially in the field of psycho-social care, the means by which the social body tries to heal itself of the sort of problems that McGilchrist and Žižek explain. I have described this as an ideological process, and I have looked at how both McGilchrist and Žižek warn of the difficulties in trying to escape from the situations they each describe. I have proposed that there can be sites from which to resist Urizen and in this chapter I will look more closely at potential candidates for these sites of resistance.

### **8.1: Sirr**

If there is some aspect of the real in the mystic tradition, what might it be? Even if Žižek rejects the Gnostic view and sees the divine spark as something problematic, how might one get an idea of what it is that is being rejected? If McGilchrist is correct about the possibility of sustaining an ambiguous but stable relationship between humanity's mundane as well as their spiritual aspect, are there precedents for how might that be experienced? Mystic traditions carry the idea of a secret "unknown to both self and other" (Podmore 2017, p. 197). As a site of resistance, "mystical theology carves a 'space', inaccessible to exteriority" (Podmore 2017, p. 199).

According to the Sufis, the human psyche has the capacity to contain divine mystery, *sirr* – secret - which mirrors the idea of the Sufic Real and the Lacanian real in that it cannot be grasped.

One of the great Sufis, Ibn Arabi (d. 1240), claims that there are three layers to the study of the spiritual sciences: the first is reason, the second is experience of the spiritual states beyond reason and the third, the science of the mysteries (*asrar*), goes even beyond the first two (Chittick 1989). Ibn Arabi also describes *sirr* as the point between the human and the divine at which God addresses the person (Chittick 1989) (this term is not to be confused with *sihr*, which means sorcery). *Sirr* is sometimes described as one aspect of the *laitaf* (stations) a series of internal way points, associated with sites on the body and corresponding concepts and symbolic colours that lead the Sufi towards the divine. There are different ways of classifying the gradations of the *laitaf* at this level (Nurbakhsh 1992), so I will refer to *sirr* as a blanket term for these concealed aspects on the understanding that some Sufic sources may sub-categorise this principle. Frager (1999) focuses on the concept of refining the *nafs*, but still acknowledges the importance of an inner domain of the heart that lies beyond their influence. The key point is that there is an element of the divine within the human which is unknown to them and the locus of attention for these stations is the heart. Ibn Arabi wrote: "The Real has chosen out for Himself from you only your heart, since He illumined it with faith, and it encompasses the majesty of the Real" (Chittick 1989, p. 245). While there are various stations, it is those that are hidden from the individual which are of interest here. This concealment is different from standard notions of the unconscious, as Benslama states: "Ibn Arabi's unconscious is not the Freudian unconscious, even if it often comes close to it. It is the condition of the spiritual veiling and unveiling of the multiple forms of man" (2009, p. 31). Chittick clarifies Ibn Arabi's doctrine on this matter: "God does not really place anything behind a curtain, but our ignorance prevents us from seeing the realities as they are in themselves" (1989, p. 105).

The subject of this esoteric position is similar to the Lacanian subject who is barred through incompleteness, an inability to fully be oneself. But for the esoteric subject, there is a locus to this absence. If there is a part of our mind-body relationship that is associated with esoteric subjectivity, then it is the heart – a symbol that can be interpreted in different ways. The heart is a useful symbol for the esoteric because it is not linked to cognition – it circumvents a dialogue centred on the brain. The heart is often referred to as a site of direct experience of something that cannot be articulated and this occurs in different traditions and across different cultures at different times.

Sufis emphasise the abstract symbolism of the heart, a feature shared with other spiritual traditions: the ancient Greeks saw the heart as a source of intellect, the Egyptian mythology of the afterlife has the heart weighed to assess the actions of the deceased. Jaynes (1976), in his theory of the way that the relationship between the brain hemispheres has shaped culture, acknowledges the importance of the *thumos*, located in the chest as a source of knowledge for the ancient Greeks, even though his premise about the relationship between brain hemispheres differs from McGilchrist (2009). The heart is one of several focal points for meditation in Hinduism while Roman Catholicism has the devotion of the Sacred Heart. The sixteenth century mystic Teresa of Avila (1995) had the sensation of her heart being speared during a mystical vision. Julian of Norwich (d. 1416) uses similar descriptors to the Sufis when she states that a spiritual eye was opened which enabled her to see the soul within the heart (1920). The Sufi Al Ghazali (d. 1111) describes God placing light in his chest (2006) and Surah 94 of the Quran refers to comfort or

expansion of the heart or breast, depending on how the Arabic term is translated. As a symbol, the heart is truly mystical: we cannot divulge anything further beyond the hints given from the literature. It symbolises something which is deeply subjective, yet remains a common point of great significance to mystical traditions. It is also important in Blake's cosmology. In *Jerusalem* Blake includes lines such as: "I look into thy bosom, I discover thy secret places" (Blake and Stevenson 2007 p. 702). In the *Four Zoas*, one of the works that features Urizen, one of the characters is instructed to look within at the gates of their broken Heart to find the Lamb of God (Quinney p. 120).

As described in Chapter 7.3, Žižek privileges Christianity over Gnosticism because the former calls for reinvention while the latter asks for reunification with the divine. But some esoteric traditions based around the heart see it as a site that remains open. Although *sirr* is associated with the heart, in Islam the heart itself is also a contested site. One of the Hadith describes the heart being blown about like a feather in a desert breeze (Ibn Majah 2012). In another, Mohammed is reported to have said that the hearts of everyone are "between the two fingers of the Merciful as one heart. He directs them wherever he wills" (Muslim 2011). The Arabic word for heart – *qalb* – is derived from the same root as the word for revolution (Nurbakhsh 1992). There are differences between Islamic mysticism and New Age thinking. Unlike the New Age meditator seeking an emptiness inside themselves, the esoteric subject in this case is left torn open and unable to fully cohere, but is also open to reinvention.

*Sirr* is not something that a human controls, another aspect which makes it anathema to Urizen. This sense of desertion, of the person not being in control of what they are accessing from the divine, is regarded by Sufis as a teaching point anyway. Mohammed experienced a two-year hiatus in revelations and Sufi poetry frequently references separation and longing. On a practical level, Al Ghazali (2006) described his own crisis when God took away his ability to speak, the skill which had made his worldly reputation as a leading academic and advisor. The message in Sufism is that everything by which a human measures themselves can be taken in an instant. It is difficult to attempt to package these concepts as an overarching method other than a form of self-cultivation that allows room for something new to enter. The position of an esoteric subject under these conditions is something far more tenuous than the type of Gnostic position of which Žižek is critical. The situation I am describing is one of an individual unable to rest in the certainty of eventual closure, something that corresponds with Žižek's position as an atheist. For Žižek, "everything that *is*, is material, but materiality itself is non-all, inherently incomplete, failed" (Rose 2017, p. 252; italics in the original). I will also discuss the idea of non-closure further in the context of Karbala, the battle which left the Shia in a ruptured world in which they are fated "never to succeed" (Dabashi 2011, p. 81).

## **8.2: A Subject Shaped by a Different Experience**

The concept of an esoteric subject does not rely on a belief in a certain faith. It can accommodate secularism and atheism. Rose describes how "a crucial mutation took place somewhere between Descartes and Kant" (2017, p. 250) through which philosophical enquiry switched from concern about the relation between God and creation to questions about whether the subject could ever know the world. This "re-

centring around the individual subject, made possible the re-emergence of mystical theology” (Rose 2017, p. 250). For Lacan, “the true formula of atheism is not *God is dead* – even by basing the origin of the function of the father upon his murder, Freud protects the father – the true formula of atheism is *God is unconscious*” (Lacan 1998, p. 59; italics in the original). Žižek (2013) reminds us that there is a “difference between ‘God is unconscious’ and ‘God is THE unconscious’, that the idea of God informs our practices without our awareness, that ‘we act AS IF we believe’” (Žižek 2013, unpaginated). Regarding Lacan’s secularism, Beattie observes: “Whether Lacan’s desire ever did find release from the absent God of his Catholic faith is open to debate, but his flight led him along a winding atheological path which is more critical of modern scientific atheism than it is of religion” (Beattie 2016, p. 60).

The nature of the subject, their self-perception mirrored by society and by their own reflective processes, is a key to what can be called *wellbeing* but the implications of that subjectivity run deeper than just wellbeing itself. The idea of an esoteric subjectivity derives from my earlier projects (Hanson 2014a, 2015) which looked at the problems with the current healthcare ideology and ideas with the potential to offer an alternative perspective. As a tradition that has elements of esoteric doctrine, there are many concepts that can be included within the descriptor of Islam, such that it acts as a quilting point (Sayyid 1997). Islam has a shifting identity as a term, especially at the point where it meets Western liberalism (Massad 2009). Rodinson describes how, in its formative years after the revelation,

the group had not yet acquired a name. Its members could only call themselves the faithful (*mu'min* in the singular) and, probably not until a

good deal later, those who had surrendered (*muslim*, or *moslem*) to Allah. But these qualities did not necessarily apply to them alone. In particular, the same words were used to describe those who had followed the call of the prophets of the past. There are no signs of a truly organized community (Rodinson 1985, p. 129).

This is a community emerging from an encounter with the real, before Urizenic tropes can set in.

In the Islamic tradition, Mohammed, like other human beings, has much in common with the Lacanian divided subject. The initial shock of revelation was traumatic, for its initial onset in the cave of Hijra was enough to make him contemplate suicide (Ishaq and Guillaume 1955/2004). Mohammed's situation steps even closer to Lacan's ideas of division when we consider that he had to articulate through language what he experienced. He had to put into words a set of phenomena which, each time, left him feeling as if his soul would be torn from his body (Rogerson 2007). This resembles, albeit more viscerally, the Lacanian subject for whom words are inadequate and for whom there is knowledge that there is more to them than they can fully grasp.

Whereas Lacan's ideas are applicable to many as a psychological aspect of one's encounter with society, the experience of revelation was unique to one individual and the death of the prophet left a rupture. Islam-as-master-signifier (Sayyid 1997) is also wrenched open by that trauma. If, as Rifkind and Picco (2014) suggest, a social body, a nation state or culture can be influenced by traumatic events just as an



individual is, to the degree that its leaders tend to emphasise the presence of an enemy and guide their followers to respond to events on the assumption that they are under threat, is it also possible for a *religion* to be traumatised? Dabashi posits a *Karbala complex*: the concepts of innocence and martyrdom formulated through “the post-traumatic stress syndrome of the Battle of Karbala” (2011, p. 80). Feldman (2012), growing up in a strict Hasidic sect, describes a community with rules derived from the trauma of the Holocaust, which absorbed anti-Semitic concepts, such as believing that the group was deserving of persecution, in order to rationalise those events and to imbue the group with a special status in their relationship to God. As a comparison, the geographic sites of Blackbird Field (the site of the defeat of Serbian forces by the Ottomans in 1389) and Karbala are of psychological significance for the Serbians and for the Shia respectively; each of these people (the Jews of Israel, the Orthodox Christians of Serbia and the Shia of the Middle East) have a focal point of a religion and geography associated with those emotionally charged events. The legacy of these events binds the community in the manner of Reddy’s (2001) ideas of *emotives*: the words themselves are emotionally charged and directly linked to sets of cultural practices including ritual, narratives and symbolic art. The overwhelming sensations felt by Mohammed when first confronted by a vision in the cave at Hijra and the soul-tearing subsequent revelations were experienced by a mortal who, we are informed, was chosen as a messenger because he was similar to the rest of his community. It was his ordinariness which led some to reject him because they saw no special reason why he should be a messenger. As with the archetypal Lacanian subject, an ordinary person has to cope with the extraordinary process of their identity and the real, even without exposure to a truth event.

There are first-hand accounts of esoteric knowledge being embraced by people with backgrounds which are not only secular but also scientific, criteria which might otherwise be expected to conflict with their unusual personal experiences. John Wren-Lewis, an atheist who recovered from a life-threatening poisoning in 1983 describes his mystic experience as accessing the *Dazzling Dark*.

My impression is that my personal consciousness was actually snuffed out (the root meaning, according to some scholars, of the word *nirvana*) and then recreated by a kind of focusing-down from the infinite eternity of that radiant dark pure consciousness ... Moreover that wonderful eternal life of everywhere was still there, right behind my eyes or more accurately, at the back of my head continually recreating my whole personal body-mind consciousness afresh, instant by instant, now! and now! and now! That's no mere metaphor for a vague sensation; it was so palpably real that I put my hand up to probe the back of my skull, half wondering if the doctors had sawn part of it away to open my head to infinity. Yet it wasn't in the least a feeling of being damaged; it was more like having had a cataract taken off my brain, letting me experience the world and myself properly for the first time for that lovely dark radiance seemed to reveal the essence of everything as holy (Wren-Lewis n.d., unpaginated).

These experiences bear some similarity to those of the neuroscientist Jill Bolte Taylor (2009) whose left hemisphere stroke changed the way that she applied her awareness to the world around her.

According to Quinney, Blake and Kant share the belief that people can “possess themselves of an unassailable transcendental agency” (Quinney 2009, p. 99) which can rescue them from helplessness. What Blake promotes is “not the *recovery* of an empirical agency (which was never possessed) but the *discovery* of agency of another kind” (Quinney 2009, p. 98; italics in the original). The esoteric can be chosen over the empiricism that Urizen represents. This is the same type of reinvention that Žižek (2001) sees in Christianity, as described in Chapter 7.3. The esoteric subject is one who cultivates an attitude of being open to the real for the rare occasions when its unplanned intrusion into the symbolic radically alters the individual’s world. They are able to respond to a call to become something inspired by the real in a manner similar to the ways described by Ruti (2012), whose approach is based on Lacanian theory. Ruti draws on Badiou’s (2005) concept of the *event* and Žižek’s (2009b) ideas about the *act* of subjective destitution to describe the importance of critical moments that define the subject in their relationship to the prevailing order. I have already used the experiences of the mathematician John Wren-Lewis and the neuroscientist Jill Bolte Taylor as examples from fields normally associated with mainstream thinking. Wren-Lewis describes the type of condition that must be overcome and in doing so, he shows that what is required is more than a psychological method.

The hypothesis I’ve come up with is that the block which cuts off so-called normal human consciousness from its roots in that other, impersonal consciousness, is some kind of inflation or hyperactivity of the psychological survival-system. Exactly how or when this originated in the history of our species I have no idea, and at present don’t propose to

speculate. But the effect of this hyper-defensiveness is to focus individual consciousness so rigidly on the business of securing its own future that the underlying universal consciousness, with its every-present-moment happiness, peace and wonder, gets shut out (Wren-Lewis 1994, unpaginated).

Wren-Lewis also expresses his unusual mental state another way. He describes how on emerging from the poisoning which nearly killed him: “My feeling was much more like that of having been suddenly and instantaneously cured of something akin to a brain cataract that had obscured my perceptions for as long as I could remember” (2004, p. 2). These accounts appear to bear out the lived experience of McGilchrist’s description that “left hemisphere superiority is based, not on a leap forward of the left hemisphere, but on a ‘deliberate’ handicapping of the right” (2009, p. 132) but they hint at something deeper because while Bolte Taylor’s left hemisphere stroke impeded her ability to function in the world (Bolte Taylor 2009), Wren-Lewis does not report any such impediment – he was able to manipulate the world around him while still experiencing a newly discovered state of mind which appears to have lasted for the rest of his life.

I am not suggesting that the epiphanic experiences above are specifically right hemisphere ones, nor am I suggesting that hemispheric differences are the way to approach the idea of an esoteric subjectivity. McGilchrist (2009) advocates a co-operation between the approaches exemplified by the right and left sides of the brain and stresses that all parts of the brain are involved in some way with every activity.

### **8.3: Karbala, Rupture and Decline**

In 680 AD, an internal divide over the succession to Mohammed culminated in a massacre at Karbala, an event of spiritual and emotional significance to Shia Muslims in the modern era.

Encounters with the real can bring disruption and failure in the material realm. The symbolic order re-closes the gap while the subjects created by the event are altered and change the co-ordinates of their immediate social surroundings (Ruti 2012).

Karbala represents a prophylactic to Žižek's (2012c) warning that what appears to be revolutionary fails as it becomes structured. The esotericism of Islam was elided from the dominant Islamic narrative, a process which Hussain (1988) sees as eternal and something that becomes replicated on the internal plane in the form of an individual's struggle against their *nafs*.

If the revolution already comes with a state of disturbance, there is a continuous invitation to change. The emotional significance of Karbala has kept the rupture open. Extremism is the Urizenic attempt to artificially seal this process and introduce stasis.

The Urizenic subject compensates for an absence of holistic meaning by filling their world with piecemeal signifiers. McGilchrist provides us with the themes, such as novelty and abstraction, that this mindset adopts. The esoteric subject recognises the void within their view of the whole and accepts the separation they feel from an ideal, whether that means the Sufi's separation from God, the Lacanian self-division, or the acknowledgement by both of their sense of the real. As mentioned in Chapter 7.3, Žižek (2001) sees a distinction between Gnosticism's search for reunion with the

divine and Christianity's call for a person's reinvention. But the legacy of Karbala introduces a rupture rather than a Gnostic return.

Karbala can represent open possibility, a rupture that is kept open through ritual and iconography by the communities that live with its legacy, without hope of arriving at a conclusion (Flaskerud 2012). It is an acceptance of failure (Dabashi 2011). The acceptance of an open rupture becomes even more striking if one considers the way it is alluded to as an act of destiny. Karbala has been captured in the Shia cultural memory as

a predestined divine plan, with the mythologized notion of the protagonists' willingness to die. They become part of God's plan by, on the one hand, being predestined to do so and, on the other hand, by willingly choosing to participate in the plan (Flaskerud 2012, p. 118).

Dabashi (2011) sees parallels between the shared sense of sacrifice experienced by both Shias and Christians.

Karbala is an example of a response that can thwart an Urizenic programme.

Rodinson's description of these events points to the same idea – that of a revolutionary ideal failing on one level but also realising its potential in unexpected ways. Speaking of the victors at the Battle of Karbala (680 AD) he writes:

At the head of this empire was the family of Quraysh, which had been the most determined in its opposition to the Prophet - the family of Abu Sufyan, the Umayyads. Its finest administrator was Mu'awiya, the son of Abu Sufyan and also of Hind, the woman whose hysterical hatred of Islam

was such that on the night after Uhud she had torn out and eaten the liver of the Prophet's uncle Hamza, the lion of Allah. It was as if Muhammad had worked and preached all for the greater glory and profit of his enemies. He had conquered an empire for those who had rejected him, the Quraysh. A not uncommon outcome of revolutions. But ideas have a life of their own and that life, too, is revolutionary (Rodinson 1985, p. 295).

At the point of failure, the revolution can take on a life of its own and instigate forms of renewal that cannot be foreseen – a situation similar to the process of renewal that Žižek (1997) sees as the important legacy of Christianity. Urizen can materially crush what it sees as the external representation of the esoteric but its blind spot is that of the left hemisphere which discounts the possibility that it may have missing information (McGilchrist 2009). In its blunt response to what it did not understand, it produced an emotionally charged event that propelled the esoteric element forward.

In rational terms, the stand against superior forces at Karbala had no logic to it. But as an emotive event, it side-stepped the difficulty of a spiritual practice degenerating once it becomes the master signifier. Žižek (2012c) regards the figurative *day after* the revolution as a crucial moment where an emancipatory project teeters on the brink of failure through loss of momentum or misappropriation. Karbala inserted an indelible mark by deliberate self-destruction in a way that carried immense symbolic weight, something of the order of an act of subjective destitution where the individual is compelled by a motivation that possesses its own internal logic (Žižek 2014b). Lewis Mumford believed that Jesus, Buddha, Mohammed and the traditions they “fostered eventually broke the magico-religious spell of the megamachine” (Miller 1989, p. 524) – the latter being his term for centralised power based on technology.

As an act of subjective destitution, Karbala allowed a Lacanian metaphysical approach to unfold because it prevented the complete closure of the Islamic project around a single master signifier.

The followers of a spiritual tradition attempt to re-connect to something that went before but is now lost. A lost ideal can sustain an ideology (Žižek 1989). But there are two features of Islam's past which are of interest here: the idea of Karbala as an open rupture, and Mohammed's own indications of how Islam would change radically in the generations after his death as laid out in the hadith: "Islam began as something strange and will go back to being strange, so glad tidings to the strangers" (Ibn Majah 2013). Žižek has rightly criticised New Age detachment as well as the manipulation of a lost or promised ideal to maintain an ideology. There are various examples of hadith in which Mohammed predicted the decay of the tradition after his death (Kabbani 2003; Al Areefi 2010). The predictions of degeneration and the open wound of Karbala are aspects built into the system that appear to resist the normal frameworks supporting ideological closure.

As an alternative to using the lost ideal as a prop for ideology, the esoteric path can recognise limitations or even failure in the external world, as with courtly love or the Lacanian drive. The individual will be left incomplete, open, as with the Sufic idea of *baz* - to be torn open. Unlike Žižek's view of the gnostic, this is a system founded not on anticipated reunification but on rupture in the present.

Externally with Karbala, internally with *baz*, we have the wrenching of the symbolic to produce a permanently open context, a wound that will not heal and is not intended



to. The liberal tradition as formulated in the West discourages this esoteric escape route because it cannot be examined under a positivist rubric: Urizen attempts to suture all openings.

#### **8.4: Islam as a Contested Signifier**

A challenge for a spiritual tradition in the present is that the material world attempts to co-opt the external markers designed to guide internal change. Since 2012, Pilgrims to Mecca have been able to pay for a stay in the Abraj al Bait hotel which towers nearly two thousand feet over the Kaaba, negating the sense of equality that is shown when a community in prayer prostrate themselves equally and not by social rank. Irfan Al-Alawi, director of the Islamic Heritage Research Foundation, reports that people sometimes pray in the wrong direction because the scale of luxury accommodation and exclusive shops (built at the cost of destruction of local heritage) means that they are confused about where the mosque is (Wainwright 2015). (Appendix Two shows an example of the hotel towering above the sites of spiritual significance.)

But the markers of dogma, such as the rote transmission of ritual, cannot be dispensed with because, used in a certain way, they have a role to play. The prayer uttered into the Muslim child's ear at birth is an inscribing into the symbolic order before they are capable of a response to it. Even if, cognitively, there is no way for the child's brain to meaningfully interpret the sounds, the fact that the event has occurred remains. This has commonality with other rituals in other spiritual traditions. Those who witness it will generate meaning in their own way. Žižek (1989) describes the ideological process occurring through practice, that by repeating the words and

gestures people come to believe that they believe, and such practices correspond with what Reddy (2001) sees as elements of his *emotives*. The prayer that is never understood by the newborn who hears it can carry a seed that possesses the potential to trump Urizen as a form of delayed interpellation. The subject is hailed by a whisper in the ear but does not respond immediately; it eventually learns the significance of the event that occurred and can respond. A set of conditions similar to Heidegger's (1996) concept of *Lichtung* (the clearing) has been established for the person to discover. Looked at another way, the child catching up with a realisation of being marked is similar to Lacan's (2006) subject of the mirror stage: it realises that there is a version of itself that has been awaiting recognition. In thus being inscribed into one symbolic order, the subject is conditioned to a degree against subsequent attempts at interpellation because the ideological apparatuses have to work against a structure that precedes them. Sacred spaces in contested sites linked to Judaism and Islam are policed because the religious authorities fear the subversive power of silent prayer: "One who walks this sacred space evoking any suspicion of silent secret prayer is interrogated by security, both official and self-appointed" (Podmore 2017, p. 206).

Althusser (1971) warns that ideology runs deeper than the material presence of the ISAs, that when hailed our response is a recognition that we have *already* been interpellated. From the perspective of McGilchrist and Tweedy, the Urizenic function I have been describing has been present as part of our development from birth. The seed of the pre-interpellation fails to grow if the Muslim-by-birth takes these elements at face value, to incorporate them into the Urizenic view of the self and distort them, to become an *unMuslim*, one who, in the manner of the fictional undead,

masquerades the principles as a superficial construct of dogma. Žižek (2003b) describes this category of *the undead* as manifesting the true meaning of the death drive: a mindless continuation of life without the creative. It is a Thing that looks and acts like those around it but is not one of them.

### **8.5: The Esoteric in Urizenic Times**

The interface between the human and what they perceive as beyond themselves is the problematic marginal space that Douglas (2001) identified as separate from the mainstream of a community but also necessary at certain times, performing rites that are both reassuring and threatening. In his study of the mystic, Podmore, is “mindful of the scandal and threat (even offense) the *secret* of such interiority poses to exteriority” (Podmore 2017, p. 198; italics in the original). As Derrida (1981) proposed with the idea of *pharmakon*, the medium of transmission can be potentially healing or lethal – as was the case with the climate of tribal conflict in which a religion promoting peace as an ideal found itself in seventh century Arabia. Paradoxes would be an inevitable consequence of the symbolic order's inability to articulate the real. The right hemisphere thinking style can tolerate difference but if we are in an epoch marked by the values of Urizen, then the religious ideals will be valued for their capacity to be misused rather than for their original esoteric worth. Almond (2004) sees a relationship between Derrida and the Sufi Ibn Arabi in their suspicion towards rational attempts to understand the true meaning behind a process, whether it is a text for the former or the divine for the latter.

The compromise between an esoteric approach and the spiritual form of leadership traditionally used to manifest it carries a risk of being misread, such as with

Foucault's (1978) misplaced optimism about the ultimate outcome of the Khomeini revolution in Iran. Something that evokes an esoteric ideal can fall foul of Urizen once it has power.

## **Chapter 9: What Is To Be Done?**

In this chapter I will examine how the issues that I have covered in preceding chapters can be applied to healthcare policy. The innovations I am proposing are unlikely to be welcomed by Urizen. McGilchrist (2009) is careful to repeatedly state that both thinking styles are required, the holism of the right and the parsing of the left, even though the left hemisphere does not realise this and sees attenuation of its influence as a threat.

It is possible to resist Urizenic tendencies. McGilchrist (2009) describes points in time where certain cultural movements, such as Romanticism, were able to emerge and how even outside of those periods, a minority of artists were still able to generate new ways of thinking from within a culture dominated by the sort of problems I have explored above. A response based on this viewpoint of the relationship between neurology and culture would resist Urizen by maintaining practices that preserve an alternative perspective until the cycle of cultural change once again permits the expansion of such ideas. In Blake's (1797) cosmology, there is a reconciliation when Urizen realises the damage he has caused and begins to work in harmony with the other figures included in his myth, not forgetting that these figures, including that of Urizen, represent emanations of the psyche. A response to Urizen based on the ideas of McGilchrist and Blake would be relatively passive.

I have been using Žižek's ideas to explore the social setting for McGilchrist's theory and it is at this point of resistance that we can observe a difference in their responses. Žižek (2011a, 2016) addresses pressing, global issues such as financial collapse and mass migration, matters which I see as closely linked to Urizenic

mindset that originates from McGilchrist's initial idea and Žižek's approach to solutions is more radical. Žižek (2016) speaks of breaking out of social deadlocks via a common struggle.

Currently, the response to healthcare ideologies which I will describe cannot be adopted within mainstream healthcare programmes because it is of the margins, an ambiguous space that can be both hostile and vulnerable (Douglas (2001): threatening to the staid view of emotional wellbeing within the NHS but also threatened by it through denial of funding. Whereas Urizen requires certainty and stability in order to measure and control, I advocate a response to Urizen that permits openness and uncertainty.

### **9.1: Re-thinking the Patient/System Relationship**

One step towards changing healthcare policy would be to alter the relationship between the individual entering the health system and the system itself. Earlier, I referred to the work of Ruti (2012) who, drawing on Badiou's (2005) idea of the *event* and Žižek's (2009b) view of the *act*, stresses the importance of critical moments that can shape someone and give them the opportunity to reappraise their subjectivity. I propose an approach to wellbeing which would help the subject within the healthcare system to cultivate their capacity to respond to an event when it occurs. Instead of attempting to cure the person within the limits of the system, the healthcare services would prepare people to challenge the ideological processes that have contributed to their problems.

The esoteric subject will have a different relationship to the healthcare ideology, unlike the subject created by IAPT, a mythical creature which exists in neutral space and for whom it claims to be beneficent. For under that mythology, if the idealised healthcare subject can access IAPT, they will be treated for the ills generated by the system that is treating them; they will become – in the eyes of that system - an improved version of the subject already interpellated by the institutions that founded the health structure. The esoteric subject is oriented towards the unknown – they keep open the possibility of something beyond the conformity demanded by IAPT.

A therapeutic system which factors in the failings of the surrounding social order has implications for the therapist as well as the patient. The patient would not just be encouraged by the therapist to become well enough (as defined by certain metrics that predefine wellness) to resume their place in the social structure – this is the thinking behind IAPT (Layard *et al.* 2006). Instead, both parties would be preparing for an event that challenges them in an extreme way but which has the potential to radically alter the co-ordinates of their being and how they relate to their social order.

To attempt to prescribe the exact circumstances of an event and the response to it would be to create a false truth event, and Zupancic (2011) warns that attempts to artificially induce such moments lead to tyranny. IAPT is an artificially imposed masquerade of an event. But alterations could be made to healthcare delivery which would make the patient, the therapist and the system more open to radical change.

Under Urizenic conditions, the therapist is alienated from the results of their work. The IAPT coup has created a new form of indentured worker: people trained to

deliver therapy a certain way and needing continued employment within that narrow field in order to live. They can rebel to a limited degree, but, after Bhabha (1994), it is the *sly civility* of someone caught within a system who is covertly doing what they can to make the performance metrics work despite the rules placed upon them. Instead of this, what we may aim for as an effective strategy can be informed by other disciplines, in keeping with McGilchrist's advocating of a holistic approach. IAPT is based on reproduction, not preparation for the unique moment of potentially radical change. The esoteric subject, whether a patient or a clinician, is one that recreates and prepares themselves. This reinvention is closer to the value that Žižek sees in Christianity but which I do not see as unique to that tradition. In the next chapters I will explore what might open up the possibility of change.

## **9.2: A Wellbeing Policy that Challenges the Social Order**

One of the implications of the changes that I am proposing would be a direct correlation between psycho-social treatment and the challenging of the ideologies which have played a part in the distress of the patient. Soler (2016) believes that more attention is placed on depression above many other mental health conditions because those individuals withdraw from the production process. She sees anguish as capitalism's true emotional disorder, an affect she sees as being tied to subjective destitution but also one that does not place a great cost on the productive processes and may even stimulate them.

The idea of embracing the real runs counter to the prevailing attitude which favours an emotional homogeneity so that psychological reactions can be policed. The stress that is caused or exacerbated by the dominant social system is treated as a



psychological matter for the individual and not as a signal that the system itself should address its shortcomings.

### **9.3: Accommodating the System's Limits**

The narrative around the delivery of psycho-social care would also be changed. The investment of money and reputation require IAPT to succeed at any cost, including alteration of targets so that it is never seen to fail (Dormon 2015). A rupture of the current arrangement would entail a realistic acknowledgment of the limits of psychological treatments. The possibility of failure has to be recognised in order for the metrics to reflect reality. My proposed response will also require a spirit of enquiry different from that which is fostered today. Critical theory has maintained its link to psychoanalytic ideas but this form of connection between the sociological and the psychological was lost with the turn to behaviourism. With CBT there is no critical enquiry into the surrounding culture and the sociological setting of CBT is regarded as an ideologically free neutral space. There might be any number of variables beyond the psychological but the Urizenic mindset present within the current healthcare system fails to recognise what does not fit its worldview. There is no space for an exploration of society or ideology in a CBT session. Clement's (2015) criticism of the early development of psychoanalysis as a clinical practice, before it assumed its place in cultural studies and critical theory (that it was a treatment process undertaken for spectators who would marvel at the cure), can be also be applied to IAPT: a sweeping gesture to make onlookers gasp at its apparently miraculous effects. Psychoanalysis was able to offer ideas that provided depth and meaning to other areas, such as art, literature, film and the humanities within its host culture, but the same cannot be said of IAPT. To be truly effective at resolving

problems that are systemic within the culture, the treatment has to apply across different fields, including the non-psychological. The IAPT system has not made the leap from clinical spectator performance to something potentially subversive that Clement (2015) describes of its predecessor.

Money is also a factor when discussing models of treatment that deal with uncertain psycho-social factors, for it is hard to engineer them as a source of wealth generation because they are amorphous and subject to the specific conditions of a therapy session. There would be no trademarked unique selling point to which access could be controlled and sold.

Instead of the current model, which assumes a coherent subject acting rationally, a system that recognised rupture would understand its manifestation at different levels: the inherent self-division of the patient, the clinician and the healthcare organisations. Just as with those esoteric practices that recognise an incompleteness, the individuals and the structure would acknowledge and embrace points of failure that reveal the truth of a situation. Data would not be manipulated to present a false image. The metrics used to monitor would not be used to punish (National IAPT Programme Team 2012) underperforming bodies which were showing their failures. Programmes such as IAPT would be permitted to fail because the difficulties of the social system underpinning the mental health problems, the Urizenic tendencies in institutions and across society, would be recognised as an important contributory factor. There would also be an understanding that someone who is at odds with an Urizenic system, someone who feels unable to find self-coherence in it, is revealing the deficits of that system as well as maintaining the

potential for change. Differences to the system could be fostered in the hope that they may provide a solution which is beyond the scope of that system. McGilchrist does not prescribe specific responses to the ideology he describes, but he does state that change “would require a willingness to accept being seen as naïve for not getting caught up in the dialectic of the clever ironies, on the one hand, or of scientific materialism, on the other” (2009, p. 450). Žižek (2016, 2017) warns that the current global pressures on nation states, such as economic collapse, refugee movement and racism, are too great for any single group of politicians to solve alone. Institutions basing policy on a limited perspective and acting too closely within their own confines will not be capable of responding to increasingly complex social demands.

A healthcare model which truly recognised its own inherent inadequacies would diverge from the model of distress and its cure propounded by Layard *et al.* (2006) by seeing the individual as mattering more than the psychological methodology purporting to cure them. An effective therapy model under my proposals would accommodate what Frank and Frank (1991) see as the rituals that the person would readily engage in and the rationale they give themselves for doing so. This process identified by Frank (1974) correlates with Žižek’s work on ideology as they both examine the processes shaping someone as a subject. According to Douglas (2001), ritual does not have to be a secondary process; there are some things that cannot be experienced without ritual and the language uttered creates thoughts that would not have been the same otherwise. Frank’s (1974) ideas of correlation to ritual and the common factors approach derived from ideas first put forward by Rosenzweig (1936) are unlikely to be adopted widely because they do not lend themselves to the

monocular approach that Urizenic healthcare systems find easier to organise. Under my proposals, the subject's relationship with the symbolic order would be seen as a factor in distress and healing.

#### **9.4: Embracing the Marginal**

A structure that recognised the neglected area of the esoteric would tacitly accept the influence of what it does not know and would be more accommodating of the marginal spaces which are unacknowledged but exert an influence, the pressure points that can erupt as a *passage a l'acte* for want of expression through other means, eruptions that can be misinterpreted by mainstream institutions. Žižek (2009) saw the 2005 riots in the Parisian *banlieues* as well as those in London in 2011 (Žižek 2011) as examples of the *passage a l'acte* and he highlighted the lack of understanding among social commentators who attempted to impose a meaning on them rather than acknowledge the absence of one. The practical effect of my approach to psycho-social care will be to include those clients who occupy the marginal spaces. These are the clients who, because they do not fit easily within the pre-arranged treatment pathways provided for them, fulfill a role akin to that of Agamben's (1995) *Homo Sacer*. These clients possess a mixed identity of those who need help but who do not meet the criteria demanded of them, they are marginalised and have to accept treatment on terms which are not their own or else be excluded from treatment entirely. Someone's anger at an unfair system that disadvantages them can be pathologised as a psychological problem about their inability to regulate their emotions. Under my proposals, the system would recognise the part played by the social structure itself in contributing to violent reactions and it would also consider its inability to formulate a response. Instead of classifying the subjects as

psychological patients, the system would seek to alter how it classifies people and accept that it may have no way of accommodating a new social phenomenon. Complex social incidents are categorised by templates that take the existing healthcare architecture as fixed and as something to be accessed as a corrective outside of normal daily life. Organisations are funded to deliver services in a certain way based on the pre-existing structure that the patient finds themselves subject to. This inflexibility in doctrine and funding leads to the patient being treated as a product, as something that can be manipulated for profit. The patient is placed in a state of exception, that of *Homo Sacer* (Agamben 1995): someone demarcated to be treated in a certain way but unable to benefit from privileges that might correspond to their unique status. The patient who does not fit IAPT criteria is recognised as an individual with some form of diagnosis but with an altered status as a subject of the healthcare system. They are excluded from treatment in case they pollute the data sets by their inability to achieve a successful outcome from treatment and the system is structured so that this is permissible and acceptable. Embracing the marginal will mean an acceptance of low performance measures but also an understanding that they are reflecting the scale of the problem. I am proposing a system that accepts that its anticipated performance metrics might not succeed. This would require an acceptance of the weight of social factors that lie beyond the scope of psychological methods. The potential inadequacy of any intervention should be transparent and should not carry a penalty.

There should be a greater recognition of societal factors such as debt on mental health (Stepchange Debt Charity 2013), which require something other than psychology for their alleviation. Recruitment into IAPT and training of its staff would

include expertise in other social science disciplines, even to the extent that there would be a preparedness to spend the bulk of the funding on, for example, social workers and teachers, if it was felt that investment should be focused on preventing cycles of social deprivation from affecting the next generations. For those who have already left school, the emphasis may be best placed on legal advisors, debt managers and probation officers. This re-direction of funds would be an acceptance that those entering the care system might have problems of a cyclical nature – that similar difficulties can cross generations and that without significant social change, the problems may never be fully resolved but fluctuate in severity. This view contrasts with IAPT's perceived linearity, which sees the population as self-actualising through psychological techniques. The difference is between a system that accepts that it has failed to reduce recurring inequalities and one that aims to conceal those failings by classifying the problems as psychological. Urizen regards those within its population who are experiencing emotional difficulty as faulty mechanisms, straying from their original design of linear improvement through upwards social mobility. This thinking fails to account for their unchanged social circumstances or the human propensity for disavowal, to repeat harmful behavior in spite of oneself: the Lacanian formula of *Je sais bien, mais quand même...* (Mannoni 1968). Urizen will not acknowledge that people can act against their best interests and that they do not always reason. The provision of mental health services could take on the role of an inoculation to prevent the cycles repeating. There could be a critical appraisal of the reasons for distress that result from the surrounding social system, even if that includes the one responsible for delivering healthcare.

The idea of embracing the marginal does not only apply to patients. Although these social factors might have a psychological effect, there would be an understanding that the answer to psychological distress does not necessarily lie in psychology. The funding for IAPT services would be available to non-psychological disciplines. Our healthcare service should aim to develop individuals, both patients and clinicians, to make choices that the system will find unacceptable. If it is to become innovative enough to face the social difficulties that Žižek (2016, 2017) warns are beyond the scope of any single government programme, the health system needs to permit the intrusion of the real through ideas and practices that might threaten the current social framework.

I interpret the delivery of a homogenised therapeutic process under IAPT as a perceived restoration of order out of the danger of marginality. The marginal is unwanted by the hegemony, but I see it as a source of true transformation. The IAPT programme follows a ritual, even if it is unreflexive about what it is, but ignores the origin of any transformative elements in its structure. Even if a client has a successful outcome in terms of how it is measured by IAPT, the question of transformation is not substantially answered beyond the claims that IAPT makes for itself. As the aim of IAPT is to get the unwell back into their jobs, one can argue that it is against meaningful transformation. It would rather people just got back to doing what they did before. The possibility of change at the level of the individual is connected to the wider society but with far more subtlety than that envisaged by the planners of IAPT.

### **9.5: Firebreak**

Rather than target the current adult population only to repeat the problems in a few years, the psycho-social care system could consider focusing on the upcoming generations. Those that will benefit have not been born yet. But no politician in an Urizenic system would invest in something that would not provide a return within the lifespan of their career.

A problem for a mental health strategy built on adjusting cognitions or changing behaviours is the idea that our resilience develops over time, based on early life experiences. Policies based on lifelong development reformulate psychological problems in the present as social problems spanning generations. A study of Danish veterans of Afghanistan (Bernsten *et al.* 2012) indicated that trauma symptoms were far more likely to develop in those who had had adverse childhood experiences, whose developmental circumstances had left them less able to cope than their peers. This research suggests that the money invested into IAPT would be better spent on services for young people so that future generations receive greater protection against developing problems. To focus on the younger generation, care services would have to accept that there would be a limit to what they could do with the adult generations in the present. Seligman (2002) also recognises that although individuals can be encouraged to be in their best possible state of mind, there remains what he describes as a *set range* that delineates the extent of what that person's responses to adversity might be.

The concepts I am proposing would, in the field of emotional wellbeing, challenge the dominance of clinical psychology and psychiatry as the arbiters of the human mind



via the DSM. While categorisation is helpful in understanding the similarity between different forms of experience, the dominance of the DSM has devolved into something more suited to resolving legal disputes and inter-agency debates about who should take responsibility for a patient. Even if someone feels helped by being able to give a name to what is happening to them, it is not a name of their choosing, they have been told what language to use, they are a subject spoken by the system. They have been subjected to the medical gaze (Foucault 1994). The response to this power imbalance could be to place the emphasis for that person's treatment away from medicine and onto reduced income inequality, improved education and more investment in social care during the formative years. But the treatment would also not follow IAPT's utilitarianism. As Layard, an economist, has been permitted to grossly influence mental health policy, I see no reason why we cannot ask anthropologists to assess the state of our human population and sociologists or cultural theorists to critically appraise our mental health services. Based on comments by the economist Murray Rothbard, they would be far better suited:

There is no objection at all to discussion of ethical concepts when they are needed, provided that the economist realizes always (a) that economics can establish *no* ethical principles by itself—that it can only furnish existential laws to the ethicist or citizen as data; and (b) that any importation of ethics must be grounded on a consistent, coherent set of ethical principles, and not simply be slipped in *ad hoc* in the spirit of “well, everyone must agree to this...”. Bland assumptions of universal agreement are one of the most irritating bad habits of the economist-turned-ethicist (Rothbard 2006, p. 169; italics in the original).

Rather than further investment in IAPT, the funding would be diverted towards building a firebreak between the generations. Those who are born into disadvantage would have extra investment in non-psychological services such as schooling and social support so that the next generation does not repeat the cycle of poverty and lack of opportunity. Imposing the firebreak would also be to acknowledge that there is a limit to what psychology and psychiatry can achieve against problems rooted in social inequality.

In recruiting from the field of psychology, IAPT ensured that the profession received government funding for a new generation of trainees, even though other fields - sociology, philosophy, anthropology, human geography, the humanities and the arts - have long traditions of the study of humans, their societies and their problems. This point becomes even more relevant if we consider the variations of the liberal, capitalist, democratic model of society across the globe as well as the variety of ways in which emotional distress can be interpreted within different sub-cultures within the Western cultural model.

## **Conclusion**

I have described a type of problem and potential responses to it using McGilchrist's (2009) ideas in the wider setting of Žižek's worldview of ideology. The influences that McGilchrist describes are hard to detect because they occur over generations and appear in subtle features of culture. Žižek's (2016, 2017) view of world events leads him to conclude that the impending social problems are too great for our current institutions to deal with in their present way. Both McGilchrist and Žižek describe

effects which influence the psycho-social conduct and outlook of people living within current technologically developed societies. In drawing on their ideas, I have also sought a place from which to respond to the influences they describe.

Traditions that embrace non-doctrinal thinking have existed within the ideologically driven social structures that McGilchrist and Žižek describe and offer a form of response to those systems. Ideas found in doctrines that can be labelled as mystic or esoteric represent features that are on the margins of what is accepted or understood by the mainstream and with elements that escape full capture by the prevalent ideology. These spaces permit unusual situations to occur, the potential for an *event* (Badiou 2005) or *act* (Žižek 2009b) that can reset the co-ordinates of what went before. Such exceptional circumstances should not be artificially attempted (Zupancic 2011) but it may be possible for a population to be prepared for those moments when the surrounding social order can be changed. In the field of psycho-social healthcare, this means that people can have an opportunity to alter the circumstances which have created or contributed to their distress.

This invitation will not be welcomed by the current social apparatus because it places the emphasis for treatment on the questioning of the social structure itself and because it invites those within it to challenge it as part of their means of recovery. If one accepts the arguments put forward by McGilchrist and Žižek, the problems that industrialised capitalist societies face are deeply rooted within our individual and collective mental frameworks. Changing them will require people to relinquish strongly held views. Until this is possible, psycho-social care can at least create the conditions for change by placing the weight of investment in future generations

rather than attempting to resolve a swathe of social and cultural difficulties that are beyond the reach of the very system that is creating them. I am advocating interventions from a range of disciplines, ones that go beyond the treatment of symptoms, ones that interrogate the society that is not only permitting psycho-social problems but is also corrupt in the claims it makes for the alleviation of that suffering.

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Appendix One: List of Brain Hemisphere Traits from McGilchrist (2009)

I have included a combination of ideas about the neurological processes and the cultural significance of those traits along with the page reference for where the information can be found. In order to more easily manipulate it, I am parsing up the overall information provided by McGilchrist and categorising it: a left hemisphere function but working in harmony, when it is not giving rise to Urizen.

The Right and Left Hemispheres Working in Harmony:

The left hemisphere should return what it has processed to the right hemisphere (p. 177) which underwrites the work of the left (p. 197). The arrangement between them works on a veto system, it is permissive in that each hemisphere can say ‘no’ to what is given to it by the other (p. 197 – 198). Each hemisphere ‘knows’ things that the other does not because their work has to be compartmentalised, but only the right is in direct contact with the external world as an embodied, lived experience (p. 199). Despite the necessary ignorance of one another’s work, the hemispheres must also co-operate (p. 210). However, the right hemisphere also looks out for the left, while the left is concerned only with itself.

Each cultural shift is a response to a sense of inauthenticity (p. 255) and develops via imitation (p. 256) as a feedback loop between individuals and their culture as a form of *Aufhebung* (p. 352): integration.

Both hemispheres can work in harmony when they develop what McGilchrist terms a “necessary distance” (p. 282): to step back and appreciate what has been developed. Greek culture at its best, with its reciprocal relationship between the citizen and the polis was an example of this (p. 282).

The Right Hemisphere:

The Left Hemisphere:

- p. 177 Works well at local level but has difficulty when it has to encompass more.
- p. 195 Requires clarity and fixity as these help it to manipulate the world. Wholeness is broken in to parts. Things are categorized so that they become familiar.
- p. 197 As in sculpture, the work of paring away things results in a certain increase. It only knows what the right hemisphere presents to it.
- p. 199 Because it deadens things in order to manipulate them, it tries to re-animate its world through novelty, excitement and stimulation.
- p. 209 Competitive – its main motivation is power.
- p. 218-219 The left is better at suppressing the right than vice versa. Although the left must work in concert with the right, it perceives this as undermining its supremacy.

<p>p. 222-224 Can participate in a world of flow. Understands that which is implicit, intuitive, unattended to.</p> <p>p. 228 The right does not build systems. It can perform parallel processing of information rather than using a sequence.</p> <p>p. 234 The right appreciates the work of the left.</p> <p>p. 302 The right can accept mortality.</p> <p>p. 312 Sees the world as semi-transparent that hints at something more, rather than as a brute fact.</p> <p>p. 321 Space is experienced, lived via the body, articulated by personal concerns.</p> <p>p. 323 This list is taken from McGilchrist's analysis of the Puritan movement as an example of a culture influenced by left hemisphere thinking styles.</p> <p>Preference for: ambiguous and undecided, multiple, fluid, moving and contingent, the image, metaphorical meaning, that which refers to something Other beyond,</p> <p>p. 354 Can use what the left also uses as well as its own preferred way.</p>	<p>p. 222–224 The left has to have things stopped so that they can be analysed. Excels at over-learned and routine behaviours.</p> <p>p. 228 Utilises the means of argument: language, logic and linearity. It builds systems and uses sequential processing.</p> <p>p. 234 It is rivalrous towards the right.</p> <p>p. 235 It does not take responsibility. Employs denial, has a tendency to conformism, a willingness to disregard evidence, prefers theory over experience.</p> <p>p. 254 The only value it recognises is utility.</p> <p>p. 302 Death threatens the left's sense of control.</p> <p>p. 319 Seeks to eradicate what it cannot control.</p> <p>p. 319 Requires abstraction as this facilitates generalisation.</p> <p>p. 321 Space is symmetrical, measured and positioned by abstract metrics.</p> <p>p. 323 This list is taken from McGilchrist's analysis of the Puritan movement as an example of a culture influenced by left hemisphere thinking styles.</p> <p>Preference for: clear and certain, single fixed, static and systematised, the word, literal meaning, language referring to other texts or explicit meanings, tendency towards abstraction – a downgrading of the physical, a concern with re-presentation rather than presentation, an attack on music, the attempt to do away with the past</p> <p>p. 354 The left does not have the reciprocity or flexibility of the right.</p> <p>p. 360 A rationality that demands fixity.</p>
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<p>p. 360 The faculty of reason that appreciates an evolving nature.</p> <p>p. 363 Can accept that contradictory emotions can be generated by the same experience in the same moment.</p> <p>p. 366 Appreciation of that which is individual, unique, fleeting.</p> <p>p. 367 Sees the field of experience rather than a linear view.</p> <p>p. 369 Can accommodate partial information.</p> <p>p. 373 Possesses the faculty for metaphor, nuance and a broad, complex field of associations.</p> <p>p. 374 Utilises indirect means such as poetry.</p> <p>p. 374 Responds to the familiar via seeing things anew and from an original perspective.</p> <p>p. 379 The right reaches beyond itself.</p> <p>p. 381 Leaps of intuition – inspiration.</p> <p>p. 419 In music; consonance, harmony and complexity (including complex rhythms).</p>	<p>p. 363 Binary experiences.</p> <p>p. 369 Insists on exactness.</p> <p>p. 374 Exemplifies the familiar and the inauthentic and responds to it with novelty.</p> <p>p. 379 The left is repetitious.</p> <p>p. 381 An unbroken line of rationality – passive.</p> <p>p. 408 Recombines rather than creates.</p> <p>p. 419 In music; dissonance and rhythm.</p>
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Similarities between a culture dominated by the left hemisphere thinking style and subjects with a right hemisphere deficit or schizophrenia (p. 392 - 394):

Difficulties understanding context and therefore the overall narrative of what is occurring. Difficulties interpreting another's point of view. Problems with intuitive processing and understanding metaphor. Understanding of the flow of time replaced by units of stasis. Difficulty understanding the uniqueness of an event, object or person. Lack of common sense. Loss of the stabilising, coherence-giving, framework-building performed by the right hemisphere. Narrow focus of attention; particularistic, over-intellectualised and inappropriately deliberate. Reliance on piecemeal analysis instead of intuition, spontaneity or global apprehension. The living are regarded as machine-like. Everything has utility. Aspects of the self and of personal experience which need to remain intuitive and unconscious fall under a detached, alienating gaze – an excess of attention and consciousness.

As a thought experiment, McGilchrist (2009) invites us to consider what a culture dominated by left hemisphere tropes would look like. Here is a brief summary of the key points (p. 428).

A narrower view of the world preventing a clear understanding of the wider picture. The disassembled aspects of anything become more important than the whole. Increased specialisation would substitute information for real, experiential knowledge. Skill and judgement would be replaced by quantifiable and repeatable processes. Acquired expertise would be replaced by 'experts' of theory and algorithmic processes. The body and art would become abstracted and the

world more represented than lived in. There would be an expansion of bureaucracy to justify procedures and to assist in manipulation of the world for its own sake. There would be greater inflexibility as binaries replaced matters of degree in decision-making. Consciousness would be dominated by thinking that aligned with technological and industrial processes. The questions raised by the sense of being would be relegated to a series of problems for which technology would find solutions. The impersonal would replace the personal, the material would be more important than the living. Social cohesion and a person's sense of place would be diminished. Uniformity and equality would become the ultimate desirables and individuals would be made to fit artificial categories which would become resentful of each other. The state would take more power and individual responsibility would become diluted. That which would be beyond such control, such as death and disease, would require someone or something to be blamed. Reason would be replaced by rationality but there would be a reduction in common sense, which requires the hemispheres to work in harmony. Aggression, lateralised for the left hemisphere, would be more prevalent. There would be a loss of insight, unwillingness to change or take responsibility, but also unwarranted optimism. Individuals would see themselves as increasingly passive and suggestible, lacking self-control and self-motivation, but not lacking the will to manipulate and acquire. Our natural sense of wonder would be dismissed as fantasy but it would result in a lack of meaning in life and an increased sense of boredom. Tacit knowledge would disappear from the wider culture and it would be hard for people to understand the non-explicit. The rise in explicitness would be accompanied by an increase in rules for each eventuality. Art would become increasingly conceptual and music reduced to rhythm with a loss of communal dancing. Language would become abstracted, managerial and lack definite meaning or the subtlety of metaphor. Nature would need to be managed in order to exploit it and bodies would be treated as machines. Past tradition would be superseded by a focus on the future.

**Appendix Two: Terrorist Suspect Hasna Ait Boulahcen Wearing a Headscarf  
but also Making an Offensive Gesture**

Image from BBC News 21 January 2016, [online]. Available at:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-35375297>. [Accessed 28 August 2016].

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### **Appendix Three: The Abraj al Bait Hotel and the Kaaba.**

The hotel which looms over the Kaaba (that site of spiritual significance appears as a tiny speck near the centre of the photograph) not only uses gigantism but its main feature is an enormous clock face. In my first project (Hanson 2014b) I described how power structures utilise gigantic scales in their planning. The overt demonstration of manipulation of the environment and the measurement of time are left hemisphere traits (McGilchrist 2009).

Image from WAINRIGHT, O., (2012), Mecca's Mega Architecture Casts Shadow Over Hajj, *The Guardian*, [online], [23 October 2012], available at:

<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2012/oct/23/mecca-architecture-hajj1>.

[Accessed 28 August 2016].

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This material filled the pages of newspapers and magazines and TV screens, forcing out real life, it seemed to me. Over the years these festivities changed considerably. The first marches were probably genuine demonstrations of solidarity, where people who sincerely believed in the revolution demonstrated their trust and hope. As time passed, it became an obligatory ritual for everyone ... For me, demonstrations became something absolutely kitsch and vulgar. I understood that the demonstration was not a carnival but some kind of Soviet crusade. When I found myself in a column, I sometimes felt that I was surrounded by cynics, victims and fools travelling in a herd, followed – as if by policemen – by people wearing red ribbons. I had a feeling that the demonstration was a way for the regime to take people’s wish for a festival and use it for its own purposes. And it was important for me to discover the Party and Soviet components of this march. To photograph in such a way so that one could tell the ‘Soviet’ from the ‘human’ (Boris Mikhailov 2016).

## **PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE - DOCUMENT SIX: N0286444**

### **REFLECTIVE STUDY**

#### **Introduction**

This reflective work is informed by the Vitae framework (Vitae CRAC 2011) and the ideas of Moon (2004). I will refer to those aspects that have an obvious match to the Vitae model where relevant but this document is not intended to follow a formal cyclical approach in the style of Gibbs (1988), by taking the lessons learned from the analysis and turning them into an action plan for a potential follow up piece of research.

## **Background to the Doctorate**

I started work in the NHS (National Health Service) in 2008, just at the time that the IAPT (Improving Access to Psychological Therapies) programme was starting. At that time I was working in a pilot study trialling a different form of psychotherapy from that used in IAPT so I was not within the same programme but I worked alongside its teams and was closely connected to its delivery in my geographic area of the NHS: Sandwell in the West Midlands. I was also starting a new career, having had no previous experience of the NHS or mental health services. I found myself able to question many of the accepted norms because I was an outsider who was partially connected with the process, witnessing the delivery of IAPT whilst not being indoctrinated into it. As time went on, I took on a more formalised role as a psychotherapist before becoming the manager of a combined mental health and social care team.

The original area for the doctoral study was to be around the practical application of a spiritual tradition on emotional wellbeing. In recent years there has been research into the use of chaplaincy services (Mowat 2008) as an adjunct to standard mental health programmes. As a focus for study, healthcare chaplaincy appeared to be of greater relevance during this time because it was a discipline that operated within the health system but which represented something as far from the dogma underpinning IAPT as it seemed possible to get within established models of emotional wellbeing. During my doctoral work in Sandwell there was a further study into chaplaincy there (McSherry *et al.* 2016).

Before starting my doctorate, I had once been advised by a well-informed mental health commissioner that the Sikh community in Sandwell and West Birmingham had an integrated network of wellbeing services based around their religious centres. But I was later told by a Sikh colleague that this structure was influenced by internal politics, that healthcare was under the control of certain individuals linked to specific Gurdwaras and was not as open or as beneficial as had been assumed. This prompted me to reflect on the hidden ideological underside of healthcare provision in both mainstream and spiritual approaches to healthcare. In 2016, at the end of the doctoral process, there were problems within the Sikh community reported in the media: younger Sikhs in some areas of the United Kingdom were adopting a more aggressive stance in their exercise of the religion than their forebears (Taylor 2016). Also, in November 2016, I saw for the first time placards on display outside a large Gurdwara in Sandwell demanding retribution against India for the 1984 raid on the Sikh complex at Amritsar.

In 2012, in preparation for my doctoral studies, I attended a conference organised by the Professional Association of Community Healthcare Chaplaincy (2012) titled *Restoring the Human Spirit in Healthcare*. The nature of that conference oriented me towards the idea that, rather than a new approach to mental healthcare, I was witnessing the expression of another ideology. Healthcare chaplaincy had initially appeared to be a solution to the institutionalised thinking of the NHS, but it now demonstrated that it too was influenced by certain ideological processes. The pervasiveness of ideology in healthcare delivery, however well-intentioned, became a focus.

I then had to educate myself about the nature of ideological processes and the best way to approach them. The properties that emerged at the meeting point of psychoanalytic theory and cultural studies drove the first project (Hanson 2014), which sought to uncover what a system said about itself without knowing that it was so doing. In his written work, McGilchrist's (2009) brief mention of psychoanalysis relates to its clinical guise. He does not explore it in its form as cultural commentary or its connection to art, literature and cinema, even in those parts of *The Master and His Emissary* which could accommodate it, such as the sections on cultural movements. I believe that this is based on simplicity because, as with Sufism, there is much to recommend in the psychoanalytically inspired ideas of Lacan and Žižek for McGilchrist's (2009) theory.

The first project (Hanson 2014) aimed to show more clearly the nature of the ideological systems operating in the health and social care fields. The second one (Hanson 2015) sought to map a tradition that had something of the real about it, a spiritual tradition. I was fortunate to have built a good relationship with the local Yemeni Community Association for the simple reason that one of the NHS commissioners preferred to locate her office there so that she could be accessible to the local community, rather than hidden away on one of the higher floors of the office block where NHS management normally dwelled.

My doctoral work came about through being open to a range of ideas as well as by a critical view of the original direction of my own planned research. I saw at a relatively early stage that, had I followed my original plan, I would have been reproducing the ideology I was already within whilst assuming that I was interrogating it. My study



became far more focused on ideology but I am left with the problem that, having apparently side-stepped one ideological trap, I will never be fully aware of the precise ideological points that bind me to my new position.

### **Vitae Framework: Knowledge and Intellectual Abilities**

The first section that is listed in the Vitae framework (Vitae CRAC 2011) covers areas for review of knowledge and intellectual abilities. My study has taken account of recent changes in mental healthcare but includes a longer historical and cross-cultural view. It has been an attempt to look beneath the monocular vision of IAPT and the NHS.

I have not gathered quantitative data as I do not see it as the right approach for the problem I am dealing with, for reasons that are similar to those behind my choice of taking up this professional doctorate: I did not know how it would evolve and wanted to give myself the broadest possible scope to move across different social science disciplines. In choosing to do a doctorate in social practice, there is the possibility of going too broadly across the social science spectrum and trying to cover too many fields, increasing the risk that the research might not be rigorous enough. But I believe that my research has been “flexible and vigorous” (Vitae CRAC 2011, p. 3).

My approach has been to go against the prevailing positivist conditions that dominate healthcare research. The current strategic direction within healthcare, and the economy which funds it, appears to be Urizenic and operates at an international level: I am up against a certain view of what constitutes an evidence base. I mistrust the very things that the healthcare system regards as closed to further questioning,

such as the overreliance on quantitative measures as a gauge by which to apportion expenditure, but I am interested in how these closed areas are manifestations of a wider ideological process. I am not only concerned with how IAPT corresponds with other, mutually supportive ideological structures, but also with what may be underpinning these institutions, with what may lie at their source. In aiming at a deeper level than the apparent structure of the ideological formations, it becomes very hard to empirically prove what I am claiming. The system I oppose only recognises the type of definitive proofs that are anathema to my arguments. Over the course of my time in the NHS, I have seen how obedience to limited types of data creates an agenda for many of the activities undertaken but the distortions that occur to meet the targets imposed by this system are unacknowledged. There are difficulties which are seemingly non-existent to the system although for many people they are the pressing reality of daily life.

As a professional doctorate, my studies are situated within the working environment itself and not at a distance. My objectivity has been compromised in that I have developed a viewpoint from being within these structures, but had I not been affected by what I experienced then there may have been no study at all and areas requiring interrogation might never have been placed under effective scrutiny. I have also had to use fixed concepts to make things understandable and to use established language. I am falling under the same ideological rubric that I cited earlier (Hanson 2014). The question would be the degree to which this undermines my work.

As well as McGilchrist, I drew on the work of Žižek throughout the programme. I first read Žižek in 2011. It was his (Žižek 2011) commentary on the 2011 riots which first

helped me to think about the problem in the way that I have. Where other media commentators tried to interpret the events through a fairly predictable formula involving education, criminality and closure of public services, Žižek focused on the very meaninglessness of the violence itself and the importance of that absence. I began to see Žižek's Lacanianism as a useful lens for interpreting events.

The development of these ideas over the last four years has had non-academic applications for my approach to psychotherapy. Whilst a component of the psychotherapy treatment I deliver originates from psychology and neuroscience, such as an explanation of symptoms and advice on how to counter them, the importance of social factors in my case formulation of a patient has increased. Patients feel pressured by factors external to the therapy room, issues such as financial problems, migration status as asylum seekers, unemployment, employer relationships, or eligibility for benefits. In mitigating these effects, the patient's capacity for appreciating ideas of value and meaning become more significant once the basic psychological explanations have been dispensed.

### **External Events**

The landscape beyond my immediate research area has seen changes. The period of these doctoral studies coincided with the rise of Islamic State (IS), marked by its media presence, which had implications for my work because it demonstrated not only the distortions of a spiritual tradition but also something in common with art forms in the West when it utilised media for propaganda. The associated phenomena touched on different points of interest to me: the misuse of spiritual ideas, the left hemisphere mindset, the manipulation of art and the betrayal of an event. There was

a question for the Western mindset in how to engage with this new Muslim landscape which included; conflict in Yemen and Syria, IS-inspired attacks on the Charlie Hebdo offices and the Bataclan theatre in Paris as well as Brussels airport, the return of a small contingent of British troops to Afghanistan, the campaign rhetoric of President Trump relating to Islam and the migrant crisis. It has also been tempting for me to look at other coinciding events such as the European Union referendum, but with a wariness about labelling something as specifically Urizenic or not and the way in which doing so would simplify a more complex issue.

It was hard to find a connection between my research and studies that had developed McGilchrist's ideas beyond Tweedy (2012). Further exploration could then lead me into realms of expertise on specific topics, into works that focused on Blake or Lacan but did not migrate between all the areas of interest to me. Initially, post-structuralism and Sufism seemed a strange pairing but there has been much work done already even at the broader level of Western philosophy and spiritual ideas from Asia and the Middle East. Almond (2004) sees some crossover between Sufism and post-structuralism but he keeps his work tightly delineated as a dialogue between the works of Ibn Arabi and Derrida. The discovery of Almond's (2004) research came right at the end of my research and I remain blind to the potential work yet to be translated from Arabic or Persian which might fuse similar ideas but from the perspective of someone embedded in another cultural tradition exploring Western ideas.

## **Lack of Closure**

At the end of the thesis, my conclusion is open-ended, in keeping with Žižek and Lacan (Parker and Pavon-Cuellar 2014). They frustrate critics because they can be mercurial, presenting different ways of viewing their ideas at different stages of their lives. Lacan changed his way of describing his concepts over time and Žižek's wider Hegelian project is a work in progress (Sharpe and Boucher 2010). My use of Lacan was to understand ideology much like a physicist would have used a Feynman diagram (Feynman 1985) to understand sub-atomic theory: to chart unseen processes by their visible results. The study then grew into other areas, from Lacanian theory as a standalone philosophy towards a practical look at liberalism and the eruption from the real of what was not represented: in current times the mass migration of a population who existed in our zones of conflict but who did not arrive on our shores until now.

Without knowing the precise direction it would lead in, I assumed at the beginning that the process of formulating a thesis would have to reach a definitively closed conclusion. As time went on, I found myself arriving at concluding points where I could go no further and yet issues that I had raised during the process remained open. I think that this is an example of where cross-pollination with ideas from the law doctorate candidates has been useful, for something that appears fixed, such as legal definitions, requires new interpretations in new settings. This open-ended research style matches my attitude and I did not originally think that the two elements - the presumably closed certainty of research and the openness to alternative possibilities - would be able to match. I thought I would have had to conform more.

### **Inter-disciplinary Study**

Nottingham Trent University's policy of combining the students of different fields onto the same taught modules provided a useful learning environment. The majority of my cohort peers on the taught sections of the programme were from the fields of law and education rather than disciplines related to health and wellbeing, but it was informative to learn about their areas of study because they too appeared to be looking at sites of tension, places where there are difficulties in the practical application of an ideal. From my point of view, these disciplines are also discussing the rules that govern a culture and the ways in which those things are transmitted: quilting points and ideologies. The course encouraged peer support but my preferred way of achieving a similar effect was by obtuse angles, abstract means and unusual reflective moments: activities that, according to McGilchrist (2009), combine the work of the two brain hemispheres.

### **Sufic Concepts**

The development of *sirr* emerged while attempting to get to the foundation level of what constituted the human. This was based on what I was seeing daily during my therapy work. People would want different things from treatment and it was rarely clear exactly what it was they wanted, nor what it was that was changing their emotional condition. Once a certain element of psychology had been covered – the treatment of symptoms – conversations would often be based on a broader field. These conversations were held against the backdrop of the government's austerity measures which many people in the geographic area of my practice found hard to cope with. Other than *sirr*, an alternative pathway would have been to consider another Islamic idea, that of *jihad*, which would have led from the blunt instrument of

*jihad* as conflict (*lesser jihad*), potentially to change social conditions, to the variant more in keeping with Sufism, that of *greater jihad*; i.e. forms of self-mastery. But self-mastery and the psychological techniques associated with it would have remained a surface matter which would have had more in keeping with the cognitivist behaviourist school. *Sirr* lies beneath all of these methods and appears to get closer to the indefinable essence from which stems a person's formulation of a problem and its response.

The misuse of the Islamic concept of *jihad* is often utilised to show the disparity between deliberate distortions of Islamic ideas and their spiritual origins. As something acted, *jihad* can be observed as a form of restraint, a tool. If we focus on *sirr* then we have to consider what the tools are aiming to instill. As with the rejection of an overly behaviourist approach to therapy, *sirr* is an idea about a person's interior, which may be at odds with the behaviour of the individual. The *malamati* (the way of blame) tradition of Sufism seeks to challenge the *ego* through inviting opprobrium (Toussulis 2010). It is an inversion of the behaviourism which has become the standard today. I also briefly explored the concept of *ruqiyah*, the traditional Islamic practice of reciting certain Quranic verses deemed to have healing properties, but I found that even something so basic and available to be practiced by anyone could easily be utilised within a rigid framework because any behavior regarded as undesirable, however mild, could be framed in supernatural terms.

### **Psychotherapy – Different Views Within the Mainstream**

The more I looked into how psychotherapy was delivered, the more it appeared that the specifics of technique or model were being unfairly privileged as factors worth

accounting for above the innate qualities of the individual clinician or patient. Asay and Lambert (2004) identify client factors (such as motivation and psychological understanding) as a key component of recovery. My research goes further to ask what might be at the core of such client factors, at a level deeper than standard metrics on client feedback which deal with rapport or congruence, for example. I also ask about how society and something innate to humanity combine to shape the formation of client factors. My research raises the question of whether what is necessary to a successful outcome is an absence of the Urizenic tendencies which would naturally restrict a patient's self-insight and how that potential capacity within a person had either been cultivated or not. These ideas cannot be measured in the way that matters to health services currently. I am acknowledging the futility of fighting Urizen but recognising that there are means of escape. McGilchrist (2009) uses examples of cultural tropes that have rolled back Urizenic gains by *Aufhebung* – an ambiguous term incorporating ideas of, among others, integration, sublation, taking, cancellation. Also, the removal of a factor does not necessarily alter things. If any of what I discuss in the projects were to be implemented in some way, there is no certainty that the new approach would automatically make everything better.

### **Personal Effectiveness**

The second segment of the Vitae framework (Vitae CRAC 2011) deals with personal effectiveness: the qualities and skills needed for control of professional development.

Unlike those professional doctorates which have a definite career associated with them, such as clinical psychology, there is no specific professional role tied to a doctorate in social practice. The doctorate has been a method for exploring an idea



and for self-development rather than gaining a qualification with a specific career goal in mind. The best way that I can describe the process is that it allowed me to channel and shape my thinking on the issues that I have covered in the course of the programme. It provided a disciplined process of study which I needed in order to gain some coherence about the different ideas that I was assembling. If I later choose further study, I am likely to continue in that vein, to select something informed by the direction my interests take me at that time. Brunel University's cross-cultural psychology or cultural studies at The School of Oriental and African Studies have been two courses that may hold further routes for learning. My personal development during the doctorate has application in different fields: teaching, psychotherapy, work with other organisations, or training of clinicians from a stance critical of the health system. There is also scope for interdisciplinary work as I am responding to a pervasive trope occurring in different fields. It may be possible to look at moving into some form of teaching role and there is an opportunity to do so via a higher learning institution in India modelled along the lines of a liberal arts college. There is also the opportunity of providing training in a healthcare setting, teaching mainstream clinicians to utilise interpersonal skills to get the most from their encounters with their patients, the sort of work pioneered by Lieberman and Stuart (1999).

The doctoral process has changed my approach to my NHS work. The scientific rigour which is promoted to workers in the health and social care professions seems to me to be more of an article of faith requiring belief via indoctrination. If one doubts, then the whole question of what constitutes an evidence base for policy falls under scrutiny. When I started in the NHS, I assumed that I would naturally direct my

further training towards psychology, which was the case for about the first three years. But over time, other areas grew in importance. Many of the clients entering therapy had problems caused by issues that fell within the domain of the social sciences in general. I also found that an exploration of their lives could be assisted by knowledge from fields such as cultural studies or anthropology, for example, in the way that cultural expectations shaped perceptions of normality yet were not themselves interrogated. This experience included areas such as emotions being affected by a local football team's performance, or how a client's perceptions and communication with others was influenced by media tropes, or how a fundamentally human process such as grieving was surrounded by ritual and opinions on what was deemed to be the *correct* way to grieve. In keeping with McGilchrist (2009), many clients found that others in their community or workplace were unable to understand the implications of an emotional difficulty for the individual undergoing it. At the start of the doctorate, when choosing how to articulate the problems I saw in healthcare and how I might respond to them, I believed that my studies would involve several disciplines - psychotherapy, psychology, sociology, philosophy and religion - but I was unsure exactly how they would be weighted and there was the added factor of the studies being embedded within my place of work. The professional doctorate in social science seemed to be the best fit for the point where these overlapped and in hindsight I think this assessment was justified.

The research process has involved touching on subjects but then having to move on. There are unexplored routes that I would have liked to have spent more time on, so I will re-examine those areas in future. An example of this is the work of Peter Sloterdijk (2009) who has written about how people adapt to new environments by

taking a microcosm of what sustains them into the new space. I had to strike a balance between capturing ideas and moving forward versus exploration in greater depth. I cannot be certain that I have the balance right as there is no template representing an ideal response. I have had to excise chunks of material, each elision carrying with it the implications of a narrative left unextended. I eventually arrived at a stage where I leave what I have in the form it is now and consider what to do with the material and the learning.

Having developed McGilchrist's ideas in order to identify a problem in the NHS, it remains highly unlikely that anything can be done on an institutional level and even if it were, there is the possibility that the alteration of certain elements within a system would not actually improve things overall. In my thesis I use conceptual art under Serota as an example of an Urizenic tendency and, extending the analogy, I am in a similar position to the Stuckists (Thomson 2004) who oppose what is occurring in the artistic field but who are unable to influence events beyond promoting an alternative. From this perspective, the professional doctorate has also been a means of uncovering an emerging difference between myself and the healthcare institutions and an awareness of the limits of what might be done.

The advantage of a doctorate conducted in a work setting has been the constant exposure to experiences of theory in practice, access to the raw material that drives research and an awareness of the implications of ideological processes as they affect people and settings. One disadvantage has been the lack of meaningful intellectual input at the workplace. In some ways the thesis was completed in spite of work rather than assisted by it. My agitation against the system has helped to

maintain the momentum of the thesis because I continue to see problematic practices around me and the institutional unwillingness to tackle them. The doctoral work has contributed to my decision to leave the NHS. It has allowed me to better assess what I observe in the workplace and what might occur in the future. It appears to me that structures revert easily to an Urizenic one at the earliest opportunity. The rhetoric of the health system sounds increasingly hollow and the practices within it make more sense at an institutional level when the processes are seen as a financial arrangement rather than primarily as a means for improving health and wellbeing.

### **Engagement, Influence and Impact**

Domain D of the Vitae Framework (Vitae CRAC 2011) invites exploration of the effects of research. A weakness of my thesis is that the ideas in it have not been widely presented. I have tried to stimulate debate at a personal level in the workplace but the prevailing atmosphere within the NHS is too closed. I believe that this is partly because of pressure to prove value for money in the state sector through targets. For as long as the ability to meet certain targets is linked to funding, any discussion about the subtleties of the interpersonal relationship in wellbeing and the relationship between the individual and the state is viewed as a luxury. It also appears that the functionaries within the system do not care enough: they accept the current arrangements because the targets are linked to financial incentives. But I also think that there is a lack of enquiry within the NHS in general, without linking that attitude to money. People can be concerned about what is impacting on their working arrangements but there is not much willingness to explore more deeply the reasons why. This may be because the quotidian working existence leaves no room

for investigation or it may also be because the thinking style necessary for criticism is not encouraged or developed.

### **The Possibility of Change**

If my doctorate is to help foster a new approach or a new way of seeing an issue, then one has to speculate on whether we will see a reaction to IAPT. I believe that in some quarters there is an acknowledgment about the failings of IAPT, but these remain undeclared because IAPT has been too great a commitment by successive governments. Without acknowledgement of the true nature of the problem, the difficulty of implementation by managers who do not really understand the extent of the issues remains an obstacle.

In discussing the treatment of people, everyone within that closed system has to use the language of the institutions in order *make sense*. Greater ambiguity of meaning within the health system would allow patients to register their experience on their terms, in collaboration with those treating them, so that healthcare is truly a joint enterprise rather than an injunction. But ambiguity is a problem when the benchmarks are based on financial precision weighed against an imagined view of how each unit has produced value for money. I have found myself differing with the NHS mainstream in my understanding of how data which appears precise can actually be telling a greater untruth than data which declares its ambiguity at the start.

## **The Working Process**

I found that I gained insight during occasions when I travelled, either abroad for several days or if I was on a long journey during a weekend; trips that were obligations rather than deliberately planned as routes to discovery. This is suggestive of pilgrimage and is in keeping with McGilchrist's (2009) predictions about the mind's reflective capacity and the ways that it can be engaged when it is open to a range of influences. Working within the Urizenic system of the NHS, I have been unable to clearly voice my ideas, so I am vulnerable to seeing only my own context, to be arguing from the same standpoint that I criticise. Events at my workplace during the period of the doctorate have been extremely challenging as there have been some serious matters involving key staff members and significant restructuring. The doctorate has provided some form of continuity through this time. Also, as my attitude towards my NHS work has changed, the need to remain embedded within the system that I have been studying has provided an incentive to stay within it in order to complete this process, despite the research guiding me towards leaving. In this way, the course has provided an opportunity to mentally stretch myself in an unexpected way.

In order to complete the doctoral course, I needed the left hemisphere traits which I critically examine in the thesis. For example, I would isolate certain pieces of information because they carried elements of some trace idea that I was forming. This represents how I am part of an Urizenic process with my own blind spots, hence the value of the Yemeni community in the second project (Hanson 2015) in trying to find a reflective surface against which to measure my own set of assumptions. I appear to have come full circle from the starting premise formulated after attending

the healthcare chaplaincy conference in 2012, where the idealised view of seeing a potential spiritual escape route was transformed into an observation of potential ideological markers. For the third sub-domain of the Vitae Framework (Vitae CRAC 2011), *Engagement and Impact*, my work might be seen as failed action research because I am admitting that the system is too strong to influence directly. It may be that the doctoral process has been my own Lacanian traversal of fantasy – seeing a structure and remaining a part of it but with a new perspective.

### **Conclusion**

The decision to do a professional doctorate in the social sciences was the right one for me. My personal needs had no defined career structure within the NHS that necessitated a certain type of qualification beyond what I already had. The doctoral process allowed me to complete what I intended to gain from it: to channel my observations into something more coherent by researching the areas which had influenced my professional practice. For me, the end of the process does not present an immediate starting point for something new because I would prefer to spend time considering what to do next. In the first instance, it will be to explore the reading that I left behind, to revisit texts to mine them for something that I have not seen in them yet.

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