

Christoph Bode

Aldous Huxley

(1894-1963)

It may seem somewhat presumptuous and bold to try and set out the character and scope of Aldous Huxley's cultural criticism in only a couple of pages. After all, in the span of his lifetime Aldous Huxley published 24 volumes of non-fiction, including first-time collections of essays, plus 10 novels, 6 gatherings of short fiction and another 6 volumes of original poetry, to all of which the posthumous publication in 1978 of his Santa Barbara lectures of 1959 must be added.

And all these writings - be they fiction or non-fiction, and even the poetry - contain material pertaining to the subject. What is more, it is well known that Aldous Huxley's unremitting intellectual curiosity led him into ever new fields of interest, knowledge and experience, and, concomitantly, to new perspectives on and more radical objections to Western industrial society. A presentation of his cultural criticism which did not chart the course of his intellectual and ideological development and the shifts in emphasis and concern would certainly be incomplete. And yet, on the other hand, the project is not as daring as it may look at first sight, because there is, as will be demonstrated in what follows, a deep and fundamental continuity in his cultural criticism, which can be traced without doing injustice to the specificities of the various phases in the evolution of his thinking: The problems that concerned him remained virtually the same for more than four decades, whereas his attitudes and reactions varied at times considerably. But underneath these variations a basic theme, a pattern of response is clearly discernible. What it looks like will, I hope, be apparent by the end of this essay.

In Aldous Huxley's oeuvre, we can distinguish two major phases: In the first, culminating in his masterpiece *Brave New World* (1932) and in the companion volume of essays *Music at Night* (1931), his criticism of society is almost exclusively negative and destructive, without, however, being totally unsystematic or being led astray by the will-o'-the-wisp of purportedly isolated phenomena. Increasingly, Huxley displays a sense of the interrelatedness, of the hidden logic connecting the various things he scorns or dreads in contemporary society, and in his much acclaimed negative utopia he presents, in fictional form, a piercing analysis of a society totally dominated by mass production and mass consumption.

But in this first phase, he refrains from sketching any viable positive alternative to 'things as they are' or things as they most probably will be - a reticence which has left many of his readers quite perplexed and disoriented.

It is only in the second phase of his intellectual odyssey - beginning after *Brave New World* and culminating in his last novel, the positive utopia *Island* (1962), and in the above mentioned Santa Barbara lectures - that his cultural criticism turns positive and constructive; and it is only then - after a hesitant and sometimes contradictory groping for concrete, feasible steps leading to a radical social change (a groping best epitomized in his "cookery book of reform", *Ends and Means* (1937)) - that an overall and stringent picture of his positive philosophical beliefs and political ideals begins to emerge: Huxley's answer, as it were, to the disquieting question of *Brave New World*.

Aldous Huxley often complained that he was no congenital novelist and that he lacked genuine literary imagination. Allowing for modesty, it is indeed true that much of what we find in his novels is taken over directly, barely transformed, from his non-fictional writings, and that much of what we find there is taken over from life and his own experience. That is the reason why biographical information on Huxley will be given separately for each stage of his intellectual career, side by side with the works that have been chosen as representative of his thinking at the given time.

After Aldous Huxley had given his literary debut in 1916 with a small volume of verse entitled *The Burning Wheel*, soon to be followed by three more collections of poetry (*Jonah*, 1917; *The Defeat of Youth*, 1918; *Leda*, 1920) and some short fiction (*Limbo*, 1920), his name became rapidly known first among the influential intellectual and artistic cliques of Oxford and London, then, after the publication of his first novel, *Crome Yellow* (1921), among a wider public.

Part of the reason for Aldous Huxley's "curiously precursory fame", as his biographer, Sybille Bedford put it,<sup>1</sup> is certainly that he knew the "right" people: He was personally acquainted with T.S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, Bertrand Russell, John Maynard Keynes, Vanessa and Clive Bell (all of whom he had come to know at Lady Ottoline Morrell's Garsington Manor near Oxford), and had met D.H. Lawrence as early as 1915. The reason for this, in turn, was that Aldous Huxley was by birth a member of Britain's "intellectual aristocracy", born into two of the most distinguished Victorian families: the Arnolds and the Huxleys.

His mother Julia was a granddaughter of Dr. Thomas Arnold, the eminent Victorian, headmaster of Rugby and reformer of English public school education. Her sister was Mary Augusta Ward, better known as Mrs. Humphry Ward, the successful novelist, and her uncle was Matthew Arnold, the fa-

mous poet, essayist and leading literary critic of his time. On his father's side, Aldous was a grandson of the biologist Thomas Henry Huxley, whose ardent support of Darwin's theory of evolution earned him the nickname of "Darwin's bulldog". Aldous's father Leonard was a respected scholar and biographer and later chief editor of the literary *Cornhill Magazine*.

Given this family background, Aldous's educational career was predestined: He went to Eton (1908) and studied at Balliol College, Oxford (1913-1916). Expectations were very high, but he met them, as did his elder brothers Trevenen (\*1889) and Julian (\*1887) - the biologist and first director-general of UNESCO - , and his younger sister Margaret (\*1899) and half-brother Andrew (\*1917), physiologist and Nobel prize winner of 1963. But Aldous's youth was not all sunshine. There were three heavy blows of fate which marked him for the rest of his life and left a lasting trace on his work: In 1908 his beloved mother Julia died of cancer. Three years later Aldous lost his eyesight through *keratitis punctata* and was virtually blind for almost one and a half years; his sight remained badly impaired for decades. Finally: In 1914 his favourite brother Trev committed suicide.

Very early, therefore, the theme of loss and disillusionment, of shattered hopes and brutal bereavement, so widespread in post-World-War-I literature, attains a highly personal significance for Aldous Huxley. It is true that practically everybody who meets him in or after Oxford is dazzled by his intellectual brilliance and conversational charm, by his deep erudition (in spite of his physical handicap) and his mocking wit - but behind the intellectual pyrotechnics of this "arch-highbrow of modern times" (Cyril Connolly)<sup>2</sup> there lies, even then, not the *idea* of futility and loss, but the actual *experience* of it.

After some odd jobs, Aldous Huxley turns to literary journalism for a living in 1919. There is now a family to support, for in the same year Huxley marries a young woman from Belgium, Maria Nys. Their only child, Matthew, is born the following year. Huxley suffers badly from excessive overwork, but after the success of his first novel, *Crome Yellow*, in 1921, he can settle down to the life of a writer. Except that there is not much settling down: The Huxleys love travelling and from 1923 onwards they live partly in Italy, then near Paris, before buying a house in Sanary-sur-Mer in Provence in 1930, where, in May 1931, Aldous Huxley will begin to write *Brave New World*.

Huxley's literary output of the 1920s and early 1930s is astounding: He published four novels (*Crome Yellow*, 1921; *Antic Hay*, 1923; *Those Barren Leaves*, 1925; *Point Counter Point*, 1928), seven volumes of essays (*On the Margin*, 1923; *Essays New and Old*, 1926; *Proper Studies*, 1927; *Do What You Will*, 1929; *Music at Night*, 1931) and travel writing (*Along the Road*,

1925; *Jesting Pilate*, 1926), and well as four collections of short fiction (*Mortal Coils*, 1922; *Little Mexican*, 1924; *Two or Three Graces*, 1926; *Brief Candles*, 1930), plus a number of articles and essays in journals and magazines.

In the 1920s, he laid the foundation for an ever-increasing popularity. As early as 1926 Edwin Muir remarked that "no other writer of our time has built up a reputation so rapidly and so surely; compared to his rise to acceptance that of Mr. Lawrence and Mr. Eliot has been gradual, almost painful."<sup>3</sup> Aldous Huxley became, in a way, the writer of his generation - a generation whose disillusionment and scepticism, whose disorientation he voiced and thematized like few others could, in a characteristic, unmistakable ironic stance and with grotesque wit, critical, irreverent, unabashed and - uncommitted. For Aldous Huxley's cultural criticism of the 1920s works like a demolition squad - it is not for him to offer blueprints for new buildings that could replace the dangerously dilapidated abodes of traditional beliefs and values or to shelter the rootless homeless, not yet for him to take a stand, to offer a panacea. And the literary form he found congenial to this detached attitude was the so-called novel of ideas.

In his novels of the 1920s, which, amusing and thought-provoking as they may be, are all more or less like pieces of the same cake, he always takes a couple of highly articulate individuals - artists, writers, scientists, intellectuals and the like, and their female counterparts - and lets them talk. There is comparatively little action (in the narrow sense of the word) in these novels and the characters are almost exclusively defined by their attitudes, philosophies and ideas. They are rather types or personifications of diverse *Weltanschauungen* than convincing, full-grown, contradictory characters and there is a clear recurrence of certain stock figures: the idealistic young man totally unfit for life, the old cynic, the femme fatale, the preposterous artist, the impractical scientist, all wrapt up in his theories, the disillusioned and alienated intellectual, the innocent, "pure" young woman etc.. Huxley skillfully juxtaposes these characters and has them relativize, criticize and destruct each other's positions, so that in the end none escapes undamaged. The message is unequivocal: Everybody is in his or her own way quite absurd and ridiculous, or to put it more bluntly: everybody is wrong. The author leans back and smiles wryly.

There are three major concerns for the cast of Huxley's novels of ideas - the first is an acute crisis of identity for the modern intellectual; the second is a generally felt loss of meaning in life and a consequent quest for new values; and the third is what Huxley called "the problem of leisure".<sup>4</sup> These concerns are, of course, interrelated, but I will deal with them one by one. The crisis of identity of the modern intellectual is certainly the one aspect about which he

felt most strongly, because he was personally and immediately affected by it. There is in each of his novels from *Crome Yellow* to *Point Counter Point* the figure of an intellectual which can at least be regarded as a partial self-portrait of the author. These intellectuals lack a social sense of belonging and cannot derive any meaning or gratification from their highly specialized praxis - or if they can, there are strong hints of this being a self-delusion. The crisis of the modern intellectual is one of alienation; for his unease and dissatisfaction and his not knowing who he is can be traced back to the kind of work he has to do and the role he has to play in a society which is characterized by a high degree of division of labour. It is a kind of work that rather hinders than furthers the realization of one's full human potential, and it is a thankless role to play - to provide ideas and concepts but to lack the power to put them into practice. Huxley's fictional intellectuals suffer from their specialism and from their impotence and lack of clout alike.

As they can derive no satisfaction from what they do or what they are, it is a further aggravation of their plight that remoter sources of traditional value seem to have dried up at the same time. Religion, art, romantic love, the quest for truth and progress - all these have become highly questionable. Science, philosophy, and the atrocities of World War I have done away with the notion of God; art is commercialized and exposed by psychoanalysis as the dubious product of neurotics; romantic love is unmasked as a self-deluding ideological construct covering brutish sex and the propagation of the species; and for truth and progress - what is truth? asked jesting Pilate, what progress? jesting Huxley.

At the bottom of this, at the bottom of Huxley's thematization of the loss of all values, there lies what I would call Huxley's nihilistic paradox: All those who say they still believe in something are shown to be ridiculous, pathetic, hypocritical or, at best, charmingly out of date; whereas those who are disillusioned and believe in nothing whatsoever any more are simply downright desperate and hopeless. In other words: In Huxley's fictional universe the systematic debunking of traditional values has not made anybody any happier. There is the pain of loss, the pain of not belonging, the pain of disillusionment and disorientation - and it is this pain which marks Huxley's protagonists as frustrated Victorians and undercover romantics. Huxley himself did not propagate nihilism - he suffered from it, and yet could offer no alternative:

He found himself, especially after the war, in a world he never made, and no matter how hard he tried to come to terms with it, no matter how he tried to gloss it, he was caught in the polarity between his background and the irreducible brute facts of the post-war era. Huxley's early work is largely a record of that polarity. When we turn from the journalistic writing to the more serious work, we can trace this polarity, this fluctuation

between nostalgia for the lost purpose and the vanished good of his grandfather's world and his fascination with the foibles of his own.<sup>5</sup>

In constantly reiterating the theme of loss and anomy Huxley betrays, in David Daiches's words, a "tendency to tug hardest at the tooth that aches most."<sup>6</sup>

What do Huxley's characters do to numb their pain and conceal their desperation, to suppress their knowledge of the ultimate vacuity and pointlessness of their existence? They plunge into a whirlpool of role-playing, hectic social life and compulsive good-timing - which brings us to the "problem of leisure", probably the most conspicuous aspect of Huxley's cultural criticism of his earlier phase. In his essay "Work and Leisure", first published in 1924 and reprinted a year later in *Along the Road*, we find a good entry into Huxley's ideas on leisure as a social problem. He starts out by saying that the amount of leisure enjoyed today by only a privileged few is made possible by the slavery of the many:

One must be most arrogantly certain of one's own supermanhood before one can complacently accept the slavery on which the possibility of being a superman is based. ... The majority of human beings are oppressed by excessive labour of the most senseless kind. That fact may, and indeed should, arouse our indignation and our pity.<sup>7</sup>

For these ethical reasons one should sympathize with the project of a substantial reduction of working hours. And yet, he wonders, what will people do with their extra spare-time? His answer, in a nutshell, is that, other things being equal, they will most probably - and the first signs of this are all too obvious - spend it as the leisured class spends theirs today:

If, to-morrow or a couple of generations hence, it were made possible for all human beings to lead the life of leisure which is now led only by a few, the results, so far as I can see, would be as follows: There would be an enormous increase in the demand for such time-killers and substitutes for thought as newspapers, films, fiction, cheap means of communication and wireless telephones; to put it in more general terms, there would be an increase in the demand for sport and art. The interest in the fine art of love-making would be widely extended. And enormous numbers of people, hitherto immune from these mental and moral diseases, would be afflicted by ennui, depression and universal dissatisfaction.

The fact is that, brought up as they are at present, the majority of human beings can hardly fail to devote their leisure to occupations which, if not positively vicious, are at least stupid, futile and, what is worse, secretly realized to be futile.<sup>8</sup>

Now, the interesting thing is that Huxley on the one hand is aware of the fact that this is by nature a *social* and *political* problem, ultimately a question of *economic* interest, which in turn is bound up with the question of *power* -

but on the other hand, he refuses to discuss remedies which lie on the same plane as the problem. He says, for example, that it is the *combination of such work and such leisure* which is detrimental to humanity:

The working hours of the day are already, for the great majority of human beings, occupied in the performance of purely mechanical tasks in which no mental effort, no individuality, no initiative are required. And now, in the hours of leisure, we turn to distractions as mechanically stereotyped and demanding as little intelligence and initiative as does our work. Add such leisure to such work and the sum is a perfect day which it is a blessed relief to come to the end of.<sup>9</sup>

But he does not discuss any perspectives - be they realistic or utopian - of changing the nature of work, of re-structuring the whole framework of human activities. There is in "Work and Leisure" a brief mention of Tolstoy's social ideas, but Huxley treats them only tangentially.

Or, to give another example, Huxley fully realizes the importance of the fact that in our society what people do in their free time is hardly the sum total of individual acts of freedom, but rather the pre-determined outcome of a highly organized and institutionalized process of streamlining and integration, which again finds its foundation in the economic make-up of our society:

All the resources of science are applied in order that imbecility may flourish and vulgarity cover the whole earth. ... Recreation is provided ready-made by enormous joint-stock companies. ... Iron, oil and textiles are controlled by a few trusts. The same is coming to be true of newspapers, the cinema, the radio, the phonograph. The great trust eliminates small individual ventures and aims at securing the maximum number of customers for the fewest products. Hence, its advantage is always to produce what is lowest.<sup>10</sup>

But against this *socio-economic* phenomenon of the "consciousness industry" he only sets the *individual*, who either is or is not disposed to fill his free time with meaningful and sensible activity (which, for Huxley, is by definition and unquestionably *intellectual* in kind: "Leisure is only profitable to those who desire, even without compulsion, to do mental work.").<sup>11</sup>

In other words, Huxley is deeply worried about "organized activities", "ready-made distractions" and "effortless pleasures", because they induce passivity and uniformity and thereby undercut all efforts towards emancipation:

In place of the old pleasures demanding intelligence and personal initiative, we have vast organizations that provide us with ready-made distractions - distractions which demand from pleasure-seekers no personal participation and no intellectual effort of any sort.

... The horrors of modern "pleasure" arise from the fact that every kind of organized distraction tends to become progressively more and more imbecile.<sup>12</sup>

But at this stage, Huxley lacks a supra-individual concept of emancipation to counter the combined onslaught of alienated work and alienated leisure. The only *social* road to emancipation he discusses - education - he sees blocked by psycho-biological factors: There are unalterable bio-genetical limits to what education can do; human beings are fundamentally different from each other and the idealists' and educationalists' dreams lie capsized on this rock of man's ineradicable biological inequality (an idea which finds its clearest expression in Huxley's *Proper Studies*, 1927). Man is thus caught between the dictates of his psycho-biological outfit and the dictates of a society systematically working against his potentials.

For Huxley, the two most prominent symptoms of this combination of restricting circumstances are the spread of boredom - leisure like an addiction is subject to the law of diminishing returns, i.e. after a while the doses must be augmented to achieve the same satisfaction - and the spread of stupidity. Huxley was maybe the first to realize that the spread of joyful stupidity, as he saw it most exemplary in Los Angeles ("And what joy! the joy of rushing about, of always being busy, of having no time to think, of being too rich to doubt. The joy of shouting and bantering, of dancing and for ever dancing to the noise of savage music, of lustily singing.")<sup>13</sup> was not only an accidental by-product of the present set-up of society, but served an inestimable, indispensable function in stabilizing the whole social fabric: Stability through uniformity, through the systematic stultification of the populace, and "happiness" as the hallmark of people's stupidity:

Q. On what condition can I live a life of contentment?

A. On the condition that you do not think.

Q. What is the function of newspapers, cinemas, radios, motorbikes, jazz bands etc.?

A. The function of these things is the prevention of thought and the killing of time.

They are the most powerful instruments of human happiness.

Q. What did Buddha consider the most deadly of the deadly sins?

A. Unawareness, stupidity.<sup>14</sup>

*Brave New World* lurks around the corner.

It is evident that Huxley's social criticism is primarily aimed at what Marxists call the *superstructure* of society. He is mainly worried about man's *mental* enslavement, about the *ideological* integration and subjugation of individuals and groups of people. It is true that every once in a while he touches upon questions of power, both economic and political: "Be rich, control your country's finance and industry, and you will find that you have political



leadership thrown in as a casual perquisite."<sup>15</sup> But the general drift of his argument betrays him as somebody who finds it far easier to think of social practices in terms of *ways of thinking* and *mental attitudes*. He is, even when recognizing the *material* conditions of man's existence, fundamentally (see *Point Counter Point* and *Do What You Will*) a philosophical *idealist*, prone to believe that consciousness determines existence rather than the other way round - only that, regrettably, some powerful people and organizations won't allow people to develop the right kind of consciousness.

Nevertheless, his verdict on capitalist society was not less outspoken for being passed from such a position, as we can see from the following passage from *Do What You Will* (1929):

The real trouble with the present social and industrial system is not that it makes some people very much richer than others, but that it makes life fundamentally unlivable for all. Now that only work but also leisure has been mechanized; now that, with every fresh elaboration of the social organization, the individual finds himself yet further degraded from manhood towards the mere embodiment of a social function; now that ready-made, creation-saving amusements are spreading an ever increasing boredom through ever wider spheres, - existence has become pointless and intolerable.<sup>16</sup>

Whence was change to come? Huxley saw no revolutionary subject to bring about a radical, historic change - the proletariat he deemed fully integrated, both materially and ideologically, into capitalist society, certainly no longer an antagonistic force to the Babbitts and Fords of the world. As early as in the 1920s Huxley recognized only one limit to industrial society, to mass production and mass consumption, the ecological limits to growth. He chastised a society which could only conceive progress in terms of *quantity* of production and waste, and not in terms of *quality* of living, and he maintained that such a system inevitably produced the conditions for its own collapse:

We are rich because we are living on our capital. The coal, the oil, the nitre, the phosphates which we are so recklessly using can never be replaced. When the supplies are exhausted, men will have to do without. Our prosperity has been achieved at the expense of our children. ... we are living on our cosmic capital. When that capital is exhausted, mankind will be bankrupt. Nothing could be more obvious.<sup>17</sup>

But even this last check to industrial capitalism is missing in *Brave New World*, the depressing *summa* of Huxley's social thinking of his first phase.

The society of *Brave New World* is artificially stabilized as the social engineers of this future world state have succeeded in "making people love their unescapable social destiny".<sup>18</sup> By means of genetics and bio-chemical tech-

niques human beings are massproduced "ectogenetically" ("babies in bottles") and are prenatally moulded to perform certain pre-established functions only and to do certain highly specific jobs only in this strictly hierarchical society. This deliberate production of well-adjusted citizens and narrow-minded specialists is post-natally continued and confirmed by behavioristic conditioning and the subconscious drill of a sleep-teaching technique called "Hypnopaedia".

The decisive point about these scientific procedures - which are explicitly presented as *means* to an end and not ends in themselves - is that they systematically *reduce* human potential. They impoverish what might otherwise have flourished, they spread atrophy instead of development. Only the governing Alpha class is exempted from this. *Brave New World* is an inverse utopia in that it does not show a society shaped according to human needs but, quite on the contrary, human beings shaped according to societal needs. The project evidently works - everybody is happy because everybody has been deprived of the possibility to differentiate between what he is or does and what he would like to be or do, has been deprived of the possibility even to imagine things different from what they are: "that is the secret of happiness and virtue - liking what you've got to do." (*BNW*, 31).

This social system is further stabilized by the specific use that is made of sex, drugs, religion and - this comes as little surprise - organized pleasures. The citizens of *Brave New World* are encouraged to have promiscuous sex without any deeper emotional detachment, because that and the ensuing perturbations of passion and jealousy would pose a threat to social stability. Instead, the sexual morals of *Brave New World* mirror a commodity or market economy: Everybody makes himself or herself available to everybody else, and one's social standing or market price depends on the demand one can arouse. The universal drug *soma* is used to plaster over frustration and unhappiness in case one should be confronted too harshly with an unpleasant reality - which, however, *Brave New Worldians*, given their conditioning and their planned environment, very seldom are. But *soma* is given out as a precaution and because the utopians' tolerance of frustration, due to their sheltered existence and the *instant* satisfaction of all needs that are allowed in this society, is extremely low. Religion in *Brave New World* is an organized affair of "Community Sings" and meetings of "Solidarity Groups", which regularly trail off into "orgy-porgies" to provide ecstasy and a feeling of unity. The pattern is always the same: A basic human need is taken up, satisfied in a way that does not threaten but strengthen the existing social order, and is thereby re-integrated into the present social set-up. Potential deviations are nipped in the bud by gentle precautionary integration.

The same is of course true for leisure and pleasure in *Brave New World*, as Huxley said retrospectively in 1958: In "*Brave New World* non-stop distractions of the most fascinating nature ... are deliberately used as instruments of policy, for the purpose of preventing people from paying too much attention to the realities of the social and political situation."<sup>19</sup> When we read that new distractions are only licensed if they are more expensive and wasteful than the old ones (*BNW*, 44), we realize that we are in a society of compulsive waste-makers, in a consumer's paradise. And true, the made-up history that links the future society of *Brave New World* to ours passes through the stages of forced consumption - " ... there was the conscription of consumption ... Every man, woman and child compelled to consume so much a year. In the interests of industry." (*BNW*, 62) -, and the crushing of the revolt of the "Simple Lifers" and "culture fans" against this, to "the final revolution": a society where "underconsumption [is] positively a crime against society" (*BNW*, 64), but where opposition to this is no longer clamped down but preventively made impossible by the scientifically induced consent of all. This society relies on people's sheep-like assent, not on force. Their stupendous immaturity makes them perfect subjects and is therefore the ultimate safeguard of the stability of the existing social order, and social stability is, after all, the ultimate good in this society: "'Stability', said the Controller, 'stability. No civilization without social stability. No social stability without individual stability ... Stability', insisted the Controller, 'stability. The primal and the ultimate need. Hence all this.'" (*BNW*, 55, 56).

But the real reason for "all this" is *economic*: Whether human beings are moulded to be perfect miners and steel workers (*BNW*, 31) or whether they are conditioned to love only what costs money (not nature and flowers, for example) - it is both in the sphere of production and in the sphere of consumption that this is being done "on grounds of high economic policy" (*BNW*, 37). *Brave New World* is the perfected consumer society, brought to its logical conclusion, but not in principle any different from ours. And how could it be otherwise? In writing *Brave New World* Huxley meant to criticize the *present* and the dangers inherent in the logic of our society. As the World Controller Mustapha Mond confirms in the final debate with John Savage, the swift in values from knowledge and truth to happiness (defined as the instant satisfaction of *material* needs) was predetermined by the mode of production, viz. capitalism:

Knowledge was the highest good, truth the supreme value; all the rest was secondary and subordinate. True, ideas were beginning to change even then. Our Ford himself did a great deal to shift the emphasis from truth and beauty to comfort and happiness. Mass pro-

duction demanded the shift. Universal happiness keeps the wheels steadily turning; truth and beauty can't." (*BNW*, 226)

In his contribution to a volume entitled *Science in the Changing World*, published in the same year as *Brave New World* (1932), Huxley underlined this point which escaped some of his readers: *Brave New World* is an *economist's*, not a *scientist's* ideal society:

What is the economist's ideal society? Briefly it is one where there is the maximum of stability and uniformity. The economists want stability because, once you set machinery going, it is hopelessly uneconomic to let it stop or run irregularly. Also industrialists and financiers must be able to look forward with confidence; in a stable world the machine is able to go on running steadily. Again, the economists want uniformity, because the most profitable form of mechanical production is mass-production. The mass-producer's first need is a wide market - which means, in other words, the greatest possible number of people with the fewest possible number of tastes and needs. Now stability and a certain amount of uniformity are essential pre-requisites to any rational plan for improving the quality of civilization. They are means to ends, not ends in themselves. But it is precisely as ends in themselves that the economist-rulers are likely to conceive them. It is easy to imagine an oligarchy of industrialists and financiers using all the recourses of science first to secure world-wide stability and uniformity and then, in the interests of production, to keep the world stable and uniform. The aim of the economist will be to make the world safe for political economy - to train up a race, not of perfect human beings, but of perfect mass-producers and mass-consumers. One of the things economist-rulers would be almost bound to do is to oppress science itself. Once stability has been attained, further scientific research could not be allowed. For nothing is more subversive than knowledge.<sup>20</sup>

For Huxley, full-scale industrialization and mechanization of labour was an immoral, degrading thing, because it denied human dignity, human potential and "because it militates against the abundance of individual life."<sup>21</sup> In industrialism Huxley saw the dangers of total fetishistic reification, of a man-made world of objects turning against their masters and subjugating them to sub-human slavery.<sup>22</sup> He identified the ideology and telos of mass production and mass consumption as utterly and essentially anti-humanist, and he dreaded the day when it would be possible for those in power to scientifically deprive people of the idea or feeling that something was fundamentally wrong with the way they had to live. That is, Huxley dreaded the "ultimate revolution" of "making people love their servitude" (Foreword [1946] to *Brave New World*, 14), which would lead to a self-perpetuating "non-violent totalitarianism"<sup>23</sup>, eclipsing all hope for change. Huxley's cultural criticism is unmistakably *ethical* in nature.

Entirely in the tradition of his novels of ideas, there is no positive alternative in *Brave New World*. John Savage, the outsider to this utopian world, is

sometimes misunderstood to be a kind of "Noble Savage" figure with whom Huxley is believed to have sympathized or even identified. Nothing could be further from the text of the novel, and from Huxley's manuscript revisions we can tell that he, quite on the contrary, was aiming at undermining John's position and at presenting him even more clearly as a hopeless neurotic, a psychopath who cannot overcome his oedipal trauma and who, when he finally tries to, commits suicide soon after.<sup>24</sup> It is of course true that Huxley puts some arguments and ideas with which we can identify into John's mouth, just as he lets Mustapha Mond highlight the undeniable advantages of *Brave New World* - the population explosion is successfully stopped, nobody suffers from hunger or disease, nobody is out of work and everybody participates in the general prosperity; fear and loneliness are practically unknown, life is long and death has lost its sting. All this is part of Huxley's strategy to tantalize the reader: the fulfilment of our wishes and dreams results in a horrible nightmare, and the main voice of opposition is given to a pitiful lunatic; or, in Huxley's own words: "At the time the book was written this idea, that human beings are given free will in order to choose between insanity on the one hand and lunacy on the other, was one that I found amusing and regarded as quite possibly true." (Foreword to *BNW*, 8). It was only in later years that Huxley identified the alternative of "happiness or consciousness" as a specious one and looked for ways of reconciling both and for forms of social organization that might promote the realization of both at the same time.

The reception history of *Brave New World* is varied.<sup>25</sup> The book was an immediate success in Britain (although initial sales were easily surpassed by his next novel, *Eyeless in Gaza*, 1936), but it did not sell particularly well in the United States of America. Over the decades, it has developed the profile of a typical long-seller and is today classed with Orwell's *1984* as the most important negative utopia of this century. However, symptomatic misreadings still crop up such as when *Brave New World* is taken to be a warning against science or a warning against sexual promiscuity or a warning against drugs and "community sings". These misreadings are symptomatic because they stick to surface phenomena of Huxley's fictional world and are blind to the underlying rationale and logic, although this logic is explicitly expounded and dramatically presented in the novel. Obviously, Huxley's analysis and findings are far too close and familiar, far too radical, too, for some to face and one prefers to repress a knowledge that might be applied to the present and to our society. Thus paradoxically, the topicality of *Brave New World* and the correctness of its insights is corroborated even by its misreadings.

After *Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley becomes more and more interested in practical remedies both against personal and social ills. So in 1935 he begins taking lessons with F. Matthias Alexander, whose kinetotherapy he

endorses enthusiastically, just as he will later, in the 1940s, become a proselyte to the "visual education" method of the ophthalmologist Dr. W.H. Bates, which Huxley, grateful for his markedly improved eyesight, expounds in *The Art of Seeing* (1942).

But more pertinent to Aldous Huxley's cultural criticism - although Huxley would have been the first to point out the relations between personal improvement and social reform - is his commitment to pacifism. Huxley joins the pacifist *Peace Pledge Union* in 1935, gives public lectures on the philosophy and practice of non-violence and publishes, in 1936, the pacifist pamphlet *What Are You Goin to Do About It?* Parallel to this, there is a growing interest in mysticism as a way to experience the ultimate, spiritual reality behind the world of phenomena, and an enhanced interest in all sorts of life reform and social reform. Aldous Huxley's cultural criticism turns constructive. He is no longer content to just chastise what he scorns and dreads, but looks for personal and political ways out of a society "that ... makes life fundamentally unlivable for all" (see above, p. 10). This move towards an affirmative, constructive position which can be characterized as a merging of pacifist, life-reformist and mystical ideas, is increasingly reflected in his novels of the time. In addition to the well-known cast of his 1920s novels of ideas there is now always a positive, preacher-like character whose barely concealed function it is to act as a mouthpiece for the author and to inculcate his latest insights on the disoriented and misled (Dr. Miller in *Eyeless in Gaza*, 1936; Mr. Propter in *After Many a Summer*, 1939; Bruno Rontini in *Time Must Have a Stop*, 1944). Whether this device is aesthetically pleasing and convincing is a point not to be discussed here - in any case, Huxley was increasingly unwilling to write "merely" negative novels and he came to believe that art and literature had better contribute something to the solutions of mankind's problems and do so point-blank.

In the winter of 1937/38, while on a lecture tour through the United States, Huxley and his family decided not to return to Europe. Whatever his motives were - and he had quite a number of good reasons for staying in California -, his move was bound to be misunderstood and cause derision and contempt in Britain (as it did in the comparable cases of W.H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood): the prophet of pacifism cowardly leaving the sinking ship under the threat of Nazi militarism, a course of action certainly not open to all of those whom he had tried to convert ... But Huxley remained convinced that you cannot fight war with war and that by fighting Fascism on this plane, Western societies would inevitably become more fascist themselves.

Huxley's 1930s and early 1940s cultural criticism and his views on pacifism, social reform and mysticism are best illustrated by his "practical cookery book of reform", *Ends and Means* (1937),<sup>26</sup> which shows him in the pro-

cess of trying to synthesize eclectic ideas into a coherent world-view. His line of argument is easy to follow. He starts by saying that there is general agreement about the "ideal goal of human effort" - "liberty, peace, justice and brotherly love" (*E&M*, 1) - but that opinions differ as to the right means to get there. His contention is that "the end cannot justify the means, for the simple and obvious reason that the means employed determine the nature of the ends produced" (*E&M*, 9). The whole book is an extended discussion of the various means to social reform and whether they are conducive or not to the realization of the ideal.

Huxley's findings are that reforms, if they are not to contradict the desired end, must always be peaceful, small-scale, gradual and never be imposed from above. Large-scale social reforms, often enforced by violence, as a rule thwart the professed end. If revolutionists do not revolutionize their means, adjust them to their ends, in other words, if they do not become non-violent, their action will not be radical enough, and the result of their push of change will simply be a slightly varied reproduction of the old order. For ethical and practical reasons every step towards social change must already anticipate the nature of the state of things people strive towards (see especially chapters III, "Efficacy and Limitations of Large-Scale Social Reform", and IV, "Social Reform and Violence"). Huxley is all in favour of economic and administrative decentralization and self-government, all for co-operatives practicing small-scale industrial democracy (see especially chapters VII, "Centralization and Decentralization", and VIII, "Decentralization and Self-Government"), all for the public ownership of the means of production (*E&M*, 52). But he insists that the decisive point is not alone the reforms themselves but the way they are implemented and the "administrative, educational and psychological contexts in which the necessary reforms are to be carried out!" (*E&M*, 52). "Unless carried out by the right sort of means and in the right sort of governmental, administrative and educational contexts, such reforms are either fruitless or actually fruitful of evil" (*E&M*, 59), as can be seen by the example of "collectivized Russia [where] a system of state capitalism has been established" (*E&M*, 19).

But how does he think this ideal society - which, by the way, is not a pastoral utopia of artisans, as in William Morris, but a society in which the dehumanizing effects of machine production are curbed or eliminated (cf. *E&M*, 157-160) - how does he think this ideal society can be brought about? By precept and example. For Huxley no longer thinks that man's psycho-biological outfit proves an unsurmountable barrier to education and reform. Quite the contrary, he now concludes that only a society which allows everybody to realize his or her particular potential is acceptable, so that equality of circumstances and chances is a demand directly following from the fact of human

diversity and inequality (see chapter XI, "Inequality"). And the means to get there is, amongst others, an "education for freedom and responsibility" (*E&M*, 185). But Huxley also believes that in the fold of the existing social order communities working for reform can be established according to the insights of specially gifted individuals:

The function of the well-intentioned individual, acting in isolation, is to formulate or disseminate theoretical truths. The function of well-intentioned individuals in association is to live in accordance with those truths, to demonstrate what happens when theory is translated into practice, to create small-scale working models of the better form of society to which the speculative idealist looks forward (*E&M*, 138).

It is easy to see that this approach to social reforms is not only idealistic in the sense that it virtually ignores the question of *power*, but also in the more philosophical sense of the word, because it maintains that social reality is ultimately a function of what people *think* and that in order to change society you just have to *will* it. Huxley's analysis of war and the causes of war (which figures largely in *Ends and Means*) is a good example for this. "War exists because people wish it to exist" (*E&M*, 94). Even after having surveyed a whole variety of reasons for this wish - and Huxley is uncompromising on the political and economic reasons for war under capitalism (*E&M*, 103-108) - he comes back to the idea that the *ultimate* cause for war is psychological:

It is convenient, I repeat, to class the economic and political causes of war under separate headings. But we must not forget that all such causes are ultimately psychological in their nature (*E&M*, 99).

Where we turn we find that the real obstacles to peace are human will and feeling, human convictions, prejudices, opinions. If we want to get rid of war we must get rid first of all its psychological causes. Only when this has been done will the rulers of the nations even desire to get rid of the economic and political causes (*E&M*, 121).

The overcoming of war by will and change of mind is a model for overall social change and for the alteration of human existence: "Our human world is composed of an endless series of vicious circles, from which it is possible to escape only by an act, or rather a succession of acts, of intelligently directed will" (*E&M*, 210).

If Huxley's cultural criticism in this phase is even more heavily tilted towards idealism than before, in his first, negative phase, this is because by the mid-1930s he had come to believe in an "ultimate reality behind appearance" (*E&M*, 286), "a spiritual reality underlying the phenomenal world and imparting to is whatever value or significance it possesses" (*E&M*, 4). It is important to note that here values are not conceived of as a result of human



*practice* but as an emanation from *transcendence*. The link between this mystical idealism and Huxley's ideas on social reform is double: (1) Social reform is desirable insofar as it helps man to "attend to our true relations with ultimate reality" (*E&M*, 298), and (2) those who have already seen through the limitations of an existence tied to the material world, through the binding phantasms of separateness, attachment and craving, are best qualified to constitute the vanguard for a truly fundamental revolution: "non-attached man" (*E&M*, 4) strives through self-consciousness towards self-transcendence, and, like the mystic, leaves the personal and sub-personal levels of consciousness behind to reach the super-personal level (*E&M*, 323-325), to experience the impersonal and non-ethical ultimate reality (*E&M*, 300). A society or culture is acceptable only to the degree that it allows people to achieve this. The ultimate gauge is transcendental and by this our present society fails disastrously, because it does not even allow people to become *persons*, let alone merge into super-personal consciousness. One might sum this up by saying that for Huxley our society denies man's spiritual essence and must therefore be radically reconstructed.

There is a continuity in that Huxley's cultural criticism remains idealist, but the turn-about from negativism to an constructive view, radically affirmative of the supreme virtues of love and awareness and of transcendental values, could not be more marked. Huxley himself comments upon this at great length:

... like so many of my contemporaries, I took it for granted that there was no meaning. This was partly due to the fact that I shared the common belief that the scientific picture of an abstraction from reality was a true picture of reality as a whole; partly also to other, non-intellectual reasons. I had motives for not wanting the world to have a meaning; consequently assumed that it had none, and was able without any difficulty to find satisfying reasons for this assumption.

Most ignorance is vincible ignorance. We don't know because we don't want to know. It is our will that decides how and upon what subjects we shall use our intelligence. Those who detect no meaning in the world generally do so because, for one reason or another, it suits their books that the world should be meaningless (*E&M*, 269/270). For myself as, no doubt, for most of my contemporaries, the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation. The liberation we desired was simultaneously liberation from a certain political and economic system and liberation from a certain system of morality. We objected to the morality because it interfered with our sexual freedom; we objected to the political and economic system because it was unjust. The supporters of these systems claimed that in some way they embodied the meaning (a Christian meaning, they insisted) of the world. There was one admirably simple method of confuting these people and at the same time justifying ourselves in our political and erotic revolt: we could deny that the world had any meaning whatsoever (*E&M*, 273).

Huxley had outgrown this attitude. But *Ends and Means* shows signs of being an intermediary stage only in the evolution of his thinking. Apart from his neglect of the question of *power* - a central aspect, one should think - and apart from Huxley's habitual mixing of "eternal truths" and "scientific truths", whose limitations he denounces or forgets about just as it suits him, there are other weaknesses as well: *Ends and Means* contains a number of contradictions, not all of which are so ephemeral like "Nothing succeeds like success" (*E&M*, 66) and "Nothing fails like success" (*E&M*, 131): Huxley is contradictory on the question of "human nature", of which he says that "[it] is not unchanging, but can be, and very frequently has been, profoundly changed" (*E&M*, 24) - but that does not prevent him from taking recourse to purportedly permanent human traits if it fits his argument ("Human conservatism is a fact in any given historical situation." *E&M*, 30). And he is also - quite surprising - contradictory and inconsistent on the question of ends and means. On the one hand, the basic message of his book is, of course, that means are not neutral but *determine* ends. On the other hand he says that "instruments ... can be used either well or ill" (*E&M*, 155, footnote) and that all instruments "can be used either for good or evil purposes" (*E&M*, 187). Maybe there are two kinds of instruments and means - neutral ones and determining ones - but then the distinction would be so essential to his argument that its absence in his book can only be regarded as an incredible omission.

It has already been remarked that for Huxley consciousness determines existence; he says, for example, that "our metaphysical beliefs are the finally determining factor in all our actions" (*E&M*, 10), or "All that we are, is the result of what we have thought" (*E&M*, 252, an unacknowledged quote of his). But, on the other hand, we can also find a passage like the following: "Knowledge is always a function of being. What we perceive and understand depends upon what we are; ..." (*E&M*, 287), until, in the end, Huxley opts for a dialectical relationship - "What we think determines what we are and do, and conversely, what we are and do determines what we think" (*E&M*, 329) - which, however, given the drift of his argument, leaves no doubt as to the predominant factor in this relationship: it is, of course, the one which links us to the ultimate, *spiritual* reality.

In *The Perennial Philosophy* (1945), an anthology of mystical thought from Buddhism to the *Bhagavad-Gita*, and from Meister Eckhart to Jakob Boehme, Huxley goes even further in stressing the transcendental aim of human existence: "The aim and purpose of human life is the unitive knowledge of God,"<sup>27</sup> which is "a direct insight into the Nature of Things" (*PP*, 160), the experience of "the divine Ground" (*PP*, 40), identical with "the knowledge of the immanent and transcendent Ground of all being" (*PP*, 9). This state can only be reached by those who have become desireless, non-attached

and indifferent (*PP*, 116), who, pure in heart and poor in spirit (*PP*, 50), discover through "annihilation of the self-regarding ego" (*PP*, 57) that the Kingdom of Heaven is within (*PP*, 202), not outside, not in the future (*PP*, 106). Again Huxley repudiates a notion of "progress" that relies on *material* growth and squandering of resources and proclaims *spiritual* progress instead:

... the important thing is that individual men and women should come to the unitive knowledge of the divine Ground, and what interests them [the proponents of the Perennial Philosophy] in regard to the social environment is not its progressiveness or non-progressiveness (whatever those terms may mean), but the degree to which it helps or hinders individuals in their advance towards man's final end" (*PP*, 109).

In *The Perennial Philosophy* Huxley is very critical of Christians who regard action (directed towards material and social progress) as the end, and analytic thought (there is no question any longer of integral thought, or contemplation) as the means to that end.

In traditional Christianity, as in the other formulations of the Perennial Philosophy, the secret of happiness and the way to salvation were to be sought, not in the external environment, but in the individual's state of mind with regard to the environment. Today the all-important thing is not the state of the mind but the state of the environment. Happiness and moral progress depend, it is thought, on bigger and better gadgets and a higher standard of living (*PP*, 204).

This is an extreme point in Huxley's career where he seems to denounce *all* action that is not directed towards "the divine Ground". But after 1945, the pendulum would swing back to a more balanced position.

In the 1940s and 50s, Aldous Huxley was much in demand as commentator, guest lecturer at American universities and speaker at various conferences all over the world. At this time, his reputation as an immensely erudite pundit, an enlightened sage and incorruptible critic of society reached its height. It is true that his narrative powers were flagging - neither his negative utopia *Ape and Essence* (1948), which shows, in the form of a film-script, the world AD 2108 after an all-out nuclear war, nor the novelette *The Genius and the Goddess* (1955) could quite convince critics or public. But his non-fiction - for example *Science, Liberty and Peace* (1946), *The Devils of Loudun* (1952), *Brave New World Revisited* (1958) and *Literature and Science* (1963) - continued to impress his readers and through it he left an unmistakable mark on the post-World-War-II cultural debate in the west. Huxley achieved a certain notoriety for publishing in *The Doors of Perception* (1954) and *Heaven and Hell* (1956) accounts of his experiments with LSD,

mescaline and other drugs (characteristically conducted in the presence of others and with the tape-recorder ready). The public's interest in these more sensational and thrilling aspects of his life and thinking regrettably eclipsed much of what he urgently told it about the dangers of mind manipulation, rampant consumerism and looming ecological catastrophes. In 1962 Huxley published his last novel, the positive utopia *Island*, which he regarded as the sum total of a lifetime's thinking, the fictional blueprint for a viable synthesis of mysticism and social reform, for a feasible reconciliation of happiness and awareness. But in the critics' and public's eyes *Island's* muted optimism proved no match for the sheer desperation of the fool's paradise *Brave New World*.

Aldous Huxley died of cancer in 1963 (his wife had died of the same disease seven years before). The news of his death was drowned in the outcry following the assassination, on the same day, of US president J.F. Kennedy.

As I said in the very beginning, the problems that concerned Huxley remained virtually the same for more than 4 decades:

Who are we? What is the nature of human nature? How should we be related to the planet on which we live? How are we to live together satisfactorily? How are we to develop our individual potentialities? What is the relationship between nature and nurture?<sup>28</sup>

But in his attempt to answer these questions, both his indictment of the present set-up of society and the urgency with which he pressed for social change became more and more uncompromising - it was the rapid deterioration after 1945 of the prospect of humane living that made Huxley take a pragmatist turn and advocate "large-scale popular movement[s] towards decentralization and self-help" (Foreword to *BNW*, 13), even if their final aim was *not* transcendence.

In his cultural criticism of the late 40s and 50s we find a recurring line of argument: In our society, power is lodged with Big Business and Big Government.<sup>29</sup> This increasing concentration of economic and political power leaves only the trappings of democratic procedures, making sure at the same time that the electorate will never vote for any *fundamental* change of the system (cf. *BNWR*, 90-93) and that power, only seemingly in the hands of the people, will remain where it actually is. This is ensured by (a) the bribery of material prosperity and (b) by the new manipulative possibilities opened up by modern science, which is, as in all hierarchical societies, at the disposal of those on top. More than once Huxley approvingly quotes Tolstoy to the effect that

If the arrangement of society is bad (as ours is), and a small number of people have power over the majority and oppress it, every victory over Nature will inevitably serve only to increase that power and that oppression. This is what is actually happening.<sup>30</sup>

A science subservient to anti-humanistic ends - the elimination of freedom, human dignity and self-determination - becomes anti-humanistic itself (*SLP*, 78, 79, 113) and by playing into the hands of the powerful enemies of freedom it perpetuates the very society that has made its use *against* mankind possible. "The ideals of democracy and freedom confront the brute fact of human suggestibility" (*BNWR*, 154), and it is the systematic exploitation of this malleability of the human mind that leads to the ultimate revolution, to a state where "people love their servitude" (Foreword to *BNW*, 14): "The victim of mind manipulation does not know that he is a victim" (*BNWR*, 176).

"The welfare-tyranny" (Foreword to *BNW*, 16) of material prosperity works in the same direction. Huxley is convinced that "if offered the choice between liberty and security, most people would almost unhesitatingly vote for security" and, against their proper interests, clamour "for ever greater governmental control of everything" (*SLP*, 120, 121). The theme is, of course, that of *Brave New World*, the threat of a systematized consumerism which narrows man's conception of himself and perfectly satisfies the yearnings it leaves over: "... it is the Earthly Paradise at the price of the total loss, for the great majority, of personal liberty and its corollary, personal responsibility, of the very possibility of wisdom and spiritual insight."<sup>31</sup> Huxley saw this come true in the USA of the 1950s:

That so many of the well-fed young television-watchers in the world's most powerful democracy should be so completely indifferent to the idea of self-government, so blankly uninterested in freedom of thought and the right to dissent, is distressing, but not too surprising. (*BNWR*, 186),

and in *Island* he once again highlighted the nexus between mode of production, mode of consumption and ideology:

... what are boys and girls for in America? Answer: for mass consumption. And the corollaries of mass consumption are mass communications, mass advertising, mass opiates in the form of television, meprobamate, positive thinking and cigarettes. And now that Europe has made the break-through into mass production, what will its boys and girls be for? For mass consumption and all the rest - just like the boys and girls in America.<sup>32</sup>

Considering the political effects of the large-scale introduction of nuclear energy - "In view of all this, we must conclude that atomic energy is, and for a long time is likely to remain, a source of industrial power that is, politically and humanly speaking, in the highest degree undesirable." (*SLP*, 162) -, con-

sidering, too, the increasing reliance of the economic system on arms production -

One of the most alarming things that has happened under the present dispensation is that this piling-up of armaments has come to play a vital part in Western economies, particularly in the American economy, which depends completely on the expenditure by the government of approximately forty billion dollars a year on the manufacture of armaments. (*HS*, 85). -,

considering also that the aggressive exploitation of natural resources and energy, full-scale industrialization and unchecked increase of population could only lead to the catastrophic collapse of the planet's ecological system, Huxley came to ask himself if a society which chooses to ignore these problems and plans space programmes instead can still be regarded as sane. His answer was in the negative. He identified "the three pillars of Western prosperity" as "armaments, universal debt and planned obsolescence - "If war, waste, and moneylenders were abolished, you'd collapse. And while you people are over-consuming, the rest of the world sinks more and more deeply into chronic disaster." (*I*, 170) - and the refusal to face the madness of this as a symptom of collective neurosis, as an indication of a lost grasp of reality. In fact, Huxley agreed with Erich Fromm in seeing "normalcy" and the very lack of panic as disturbing symptoms of a spreading collective mental sickness:

... they are normal only in relation to a profoundly abnormal society. Their perfect adjustment to that abnormal society is a measure of their mental sickness. These millions of abnormally normal people, living without fuss in a society to which, if they were fully human beings, they ought not to be adjusted, still cherish 'the illusion of individuality', but in fact they have been to a great extent de-individualized. (*BNWR*, 38/39).

The outlines of Huxley's ideal society - "a society composed of freely co-operating individuals devoted to the pursuit of sanity" (Foreword to *BNW*, 9) - become ever clearer in contrast with this shocking diagnosis of "the present dispensation". Huxley believed in democracy not as a form of government, but as a form of life: "We know that, in a very large and complex society, democracy is almost meaningless except in relation to autonomous groups of manageable size" (*BNWR*, 185). Self-government - "the very essence of democratic freedom" (*SLP*, 115) - could therefore only be realized through a "highly desirable process of decentralization and deinstitutionalization", of which Huxley realistically observed that "in the present circumstances it is most unlikely that this ... will be carried out." (*SLP*, 142).

But nevertheless he upheld the

aim of providing individuals with the means of doing profitable and intrinsically significant work, of helping men and women to achieve independence from bosses, so that they may become their own employers, or members of a self-governing, co-operative group working for subsistence and a local market. (*SLP*, 123).

That is, in the late 1940s and 50s, Huxley came to realize that in order to solve political and social problems, in order to free man's potential from the shackles of a "badly organized" society and to reconstitute mankind as the subject of its history, one would have to change the entire social organization of man's activities:

It is up to us to decide now whether these conquests of nature and accessions of knowledge are to be used for frightful and inhuman ends, or whether they are to be used to create the kind of progress of which we have dreamed - and, indeed, they kind of progress of which nobody has ever dreamed, because the potentialities which are now opening up before us have never been present in the history of the world before. (*HS*, 109).

Individual answers to political problems would no longer suffice - and yet Huxley's ideas of a perfect society and of how to get there retained a distinct idealistic and individualistic tinge. This is born out by his legacy in political thinking, the positive utopia *Island*.

Huxley situates his utopia on the imaginary island of Pala, somewhere in the Indonesian archipelago. Pala is a third world country, but with none of the squalor and misery of neighbouring Rendang, where the military dictator Colonel Dipa follows the "normal" course of "development": exploitation and industrialization in the interest of first world companies, full-scale armament with production of biological and chemical weapons (Dipa: "the poor man's H-bomb", *I*, 52), no check to population growth etc.. Pala, by lucky circumstance, has taken a different road. As "Electricity plus heavy industry minus birth control equals misery, totalitarianism and war", it has opted for the opposite formula, "Electricity minus heavy industry plus birth control equals democracy and plenty." (*I*, 169). The principle of Pala's society is that "we ... have always chosen to adapt our economy and technology to human beings - not our human beings to somebody else's economy and technology." (*I*, 164). Consequently, "in Pala maximum efficiency isn't the categorical imperative that it is with you. You think first of getting the biggest possible output in the shortest possible time. We think first of human beings and their satisfactions." (*I*, 173). The result of this philosophy is a relatively happy society in equilibrium, which has set itself the task of eliminating as much as possible of the "two thirds of all sorrow [that] is home-made and, so far as the

universe is concerned, unnecessary." (I, 99). But Pala's future is threatened by its richness in oil (which the Palanese do not exploit), or rather, by the greed and aggressiveness it provokes in dictators and businessmen. Will Farnaby, a journalist working for the press magnate Lord Aldehyde, who also owns the Sout-East Asia Petroleum Company and Imperial and Foreign Copper Limited, enters the forbidden island in order to explore the possibilities of take-over. He finds that the Rani, a pathetic spiritualist and over-protective mother, and her son Murugan, 17 year old future Raja of Pala, are already more than willing to cooperate in Pala's downfall - ties with Colonel Dipa and Lord Aldehyde have already been established and both mother and son dream of industrialization and exploitation of Pala's resources: she to finance a "Spiritual Crusade", Murugan to realize his Sears, Roebuck & Co. Catalog paradise of consumerism. The meagre plot of this utopian novel need not concern us here - it only serves to acquaint the reader with the Palanese society and has no further pretensions of its own. Suffice it to say that Will Farnaby, "the man who won't take yes for an answer" (I, 22), a deeply hurt cynic and typical product of Western society, is, of course, gradually converted to Pala's life-style and philosophy and finally refrains from taking an active part in the destruction of this earthly paradise.

What is striking about this positive utopia is the number of parallels to *Brave New World*. Like in *Brave New World*, the nuclear family has been abolished. Instead, there are "Mutual Adoption Clubs", consisting "of anything from fifteen to twenty-five assorted couples". (I, 104). Children are thereby spared the psychological dramas and traumas of too exclusive relationships in "Home Sweet Home". Like in *Brave New World*, there is early behavioristic conditioning, although not by electric shocks but by stroking and cuddling and repetition of positive key-words:

'Pure Pavlov.'

'But Pavlov purely for a good purpose. Pavlov for friendliness and trust and compassion. Whereas you prefer to use Pavlov for brain washing, Pavlov for selling cigarettes and vodka and patriotism. Pavlov for the benefit of dictators, generals, and tycoons.' (I, 221).

Huxley seems to have settled for the idea that means *can* be used either way, that they are in fact neutral like instruments, and that it all depends on who uses them to what end. For the same formula of "it depends" also applies to drugs and sexuality in Huxley's positive utopia. In Pala there is communal taking of "*moksha-medicine*" as there is the *soma*-habit in *Brave New World*, but here the drug is provided under spiritual guidance and in order to *increase* awareness, to give people "the full-blown mystical experience" (I, 161). Sex has the same function. It is not the mindless promiscuity of *Brave*



*New World*, which it resembles only superficially, but *Maithuna*, the Tantric yoga of love, which does not increase *separateness*, as does mechanical sex, but furthers *awareness*. The yoga of love, which fills neurotics like the Rani and her son with horror, is a form of *contemplation*, and as such it is only one among many techniques to transform the experience of "concrete materialism" into the experience of "concrete spirituality":

It's through awareness, complete and constant awareness, that we transform it into concrete spirituality. Be fully aware of what you're doing, and work becomes the yoga of work, play becomes the yoga of play, everyday living becomes the yoga of everyday living. (*I*, 174/175).

Huxley is still a mysticist, believing in a unified spiritual reality of which individual consciousnesses are only derived - "You're assuming ... that the brain *produces* consciousness. I'm assuming that it transmits consciousness." (*I*, 161) -, but it is, in marked contrast to *The Perennial Philosophy*, a Tantric mysticism, which does not, as it were, "take off", but is re-applied to this world:

If you're a Trantrik, you don't renounce the world or deny its value; you don't try to escape into a Nirwana apart from life, as the monks of the Southern School do. No, you accept the world, and you make use of it; you make use of everything you do, of everything that happens to you, of all the things you see and hear and taste and touch, as so many means to your liberation from the prison of yourself. (*I*, 87).

It is self-evident that in such a society education, in the broadest sense of the word, is of vital importance. Education on Pala takes account of the biopsychological differences between human beings and aims at developing their specific potentials, at "a training of the whole mind-body in all its aspects" (*I*, 243). Here, as in *The Human Situation*, it is Huxley's conviction that

It is important to stress the fact that in order to make the most of genetic variability we have to improve the environment to the greatest possible extent. It is only when everyone has equal nutritional and educational opportunities that we shall be able to see to the full what his native capacities are. (*HS*, 77).

Palanese education is primarily a practical affair, because one has realized the danger of taking abstractions (and words in particular, those arbitrary symbols) for facts. The Palanese philosophy is geared to remind men of the arbitrariness of their ideas of "reality", ideas which are formulated from within "semantic prisons" (cf. *HS*, 166-179), which give only a very limited outlook on "what is".

The liberating use of psychology figures also largely in *Island*. There is such a thing as "psychological first aid" (I, 21), which prevents people from developing fears and traumata by helping them to face and control recent situations. Mental "Destiny Control" works in the same way: "It isn't a matter of forgetting. What one has to learn is to remember and yet be free of the past." (I, 124). Simple techniques in "Elementary Practical Psychology" may "help you by liberating you from the hauntings of your own painful memories, your remorse, your causeless anxieties about the future." (I, 264).

And Will Farnaby, to be sure, has a cupboard full of hauntings, as he comes to admit in the end. Having related all his losses and hurts, pains and humiliations, he sums up the experience of his life as follows: "The facts, the basic and ultimate facts, are always no. Spirit? No! Love? No! Sense, meaning, achievement? No!" (I, 276). Consequently, he wants to be *less* aware, not more. But even Farnaby is granted, by help of *moksha* and the understanding Susila, the experience of "luminous bliss", a glimpse into ulterior reality. It is not all fun. In his vision, he sees "the Essential Horror" of existence even clearer - but he does get an inkling of the fundamental and indissoluble interrelatedness of "Essential Beauty" and "Essential Horror" in the stream of existence.

Will Farnaby returns to a comparatively pedestrian horror: Colonel Dipa has just invaded Pala and puts an end to this peaceful utopian community. Farnaby, still overflowing from gratitude for his mystical experience, is witness to the destruction, but finds consolation in the new-found knowledge of salvation through awareness:

And yet in spite of the entirely justified refusal to take yes for an answer, the fact remained and would remain always, remain everywhere - the fact that there was this capacity even in the paranoiac for intelligence, even in a devil-worshipper for love; the fact that the ground of all being could be totally manifest in a flowering shrub, a human face; the fact that there was a light and that this light was also compassion. ...

And yet the fact remained - the fact of the ending of sorrow as well as the fact of sorrow. (I, 335).

What are we to make of this? *Island* offers an interesting and thought-provoking blueprint for a truly humanistic society that *might* work in isolation or on a world-wide scale. But the novel makes it equally clear that this society could not possibly survive in a world like ours. *Island* is an experiment in pure utopian thinking, with no pretence to practical feasibility *here and now*. What is more, by furnishing Pala with a very ideosyncratic history indeed - its society is the making of a Scottish doctor and the old Raja, who, in the last century, among them agreed to make the best of both worlds, East and West, and combine spirituality and technology in the interest of the people -, Hux-

ley circumvents the question of how such a society could evolve out of the existing one. Of course, it is known that Huxley advocated "education for freedom" and non-violent forms of direct action as means for social change, but my point is more fundamental: It can be argued that Huxley's thought is utopian (in the derogatory sense of the word) in at least two respects: 1. He offers no indication as to where in the folds of the existing social order there might exist forces which could bring about this new kind of society. Pala is mere wish-fulfillment. It works in theory, but how do we get there? 2. Huxley admits that even if pockets of utopian communities should somehow come into existence, they would, given the world as it is, most certainly be crushed by the old order.

The muted optimism I spoke of comes in only on a *personal* level, as the awareness of the *possibility* of sanity in a world that evidently goes in the opposite direction. As Keith May remarked à propos *Ape and Essence*, in *Island*, too, "the way out of the morass is personal rather than collective, for the personal reaches out into the universal whereas the collective reaches out to the internecine."<sup>33</sup> Whether this personal and spiritual consolation is enough in a world where, admittedly, two thirds of human misery is "home-made" and *could* be done away with if only things were managed differently, may rightfully be doubted. What a typically Huxleyan dilemma: Individual answers to political problems would no longer suffice - but collective answers had little hope of working. At least, Huxley harboured no delusions.

I hope it has by now become apparent what the pattern discernible in Aldous Huxley's responses to the social and cultural problems of his time looks like: His "ideological profile" is decidedly that of an inveterate idealist and individualist. By this I mean that all his life long it was natural for him to think of human existence as primarily the product of man's consciousness (rather than the other way round) and to think of society as "an organization within which individual organisms have their place" (*HS*, 110) (rather than an entity which is more than the sum total of its individual components). He understood the great social and cultural problems of his time in these terms, and therefore all of his answers, however varied they may look on the surface of it, lie on the corresponding level and point in the same direction: You can change your life by looking at it in a different way, and if enough people do so, society will eventually change. The world can be changed by *thinking* and imagining it different from what it is, and the change is made by *willing* it. Already in Huxley's fictional protagonists we can see this tendency to *think* oneself out of one's problems and predicaments; it is basically the same strategy he endorses in his non-fictional writings. But a strategy which is already of only limited use in individual life must be next to ineffectual in so-

cial and political matters, where undeniably the objective obstacles to the thrust of awareness and willpower are much stronger.

Of course, it was not by mere chance that Aldous Huxley adhered to this philosophy and brand of cultural criticism. It came congenial to him as he found an irrefutable proof of its correctness in the example of his own life. Without pushing deterministic analogizing too far, one can say that this was indeed *the experience of his life*: he had changed and become different by *thinking*, by *mental* power, and, in the end, by the grace of *spiritual* forces higher than himself. Stepping outside Huxley's frame of reference one could of course object that his "ulterior, spiritual reality" is nothing but the extreme reification of his own extremely one-sided intellectual practice - a philosopher's heaven, an intellectual's worldview -, a philosophy which, standing things on their head, speaks of a "higher reality" to the denigration of everyday existence and of "things spiritual" to the disadvantage of the material conditions of man's life. But then Huxley could easily have provided a similar "positioning" critique of such criticism in turn, according to *his* frame of reference ... And he became, it must not be forgotten, very tolerant of diverging opinions: "I myself happen to believe that the deeper self within us is in some way continuous with the mind of the universe or whatever you like to call it. But as I say, you don't necessarily have to accept this." (*HS*, 211).

No matter what we think of a spiritual, higher reality as the ultimate gauge or test for a culture, it can be observed that Huxley's ideas of man and society are characteristically hypertrophied in two respects and curiously atrophied in another. What I mean is that Huxley places a high importance on man as a *biographical* being, on his bio-genetical and bio-physiological and bio-psychological outfit - *and* he places an even higher importance on the *spiritual* dimension of man's existence. What might be seen as lying in between - viz., the mediating institution of society, which lifts mankind to consciousness out of animal existence, the forces of history and circumstance, man as a *concrete*, socio-historical being which is *realized* in a *social* and *historical* evolution continuing and superseding the biological and aiming towards a perfection as "Aufhebung" of spirituality in meaningful *material* practice - all this plays a minor part only in Huxley's thinking.

There is, at the very end of his Santa Barbara lectures, a very telling passage which beautifully sums up the stance of Aldous Huxley's cultural criticism. It says:

I think that if in everybody, again following a phrase of Blake's, the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would be seen as it is: infinite. And if we all had the doors of our perceptions cleansed, and if we habitually saw the world as infinite and holy, we should obviously find it a great deal less necessary to go in for bullfighting, attacking mi-

norities or working up frenzies against foreign peoples. So all these things work together. Let us hope that sooner or later we shall find some method by which, combining awareness with these various trainings in good feeling, we may increase the sum total of human decency and make the realization of many of our latent potentialities possible. (HS, 246).

To each, through a combination of awareness and happiness, a higher degree of *decency* and the opportunity to realize *potentialities* - which Victorian would have disagreed? In naming his supreme values, Aldous Huxley reveals the roots of his thinking, to which he had returned, as it were, on a higher plane. But then, our world could, of course, well do with a bit more of decency.

### Notes

- 1 Sybille Bedford, *Aldous Huxley: A Biography* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973, 1974 resp.), 2 vols., 1:121.
- 2 Cited in Donald Charles Murray, *A Study of the Novels of Aldous Huxley* (Diss. Syracuse University, 1966) 10.
- 3 Cited in William C. Frierson, *The English Novel in Transition: 1885-1940* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1942, repr. New York: Cooper Square, 1965) 244.
- 4 For all this cf. Christoph Bode, *Intellektualismus und Entfremdung: Das Bild des Intellektuellen in den frühen Romanen Aldous Huxleys* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1979).
- 5 Jacob Vinocur, *Aldous Huxley: Themes and Variations* (Diss. University of Wisconsin, 1958) 16.
- 6 "The Novels of Aldous Huxley," *New Republic* 100, 1 November 1939, 362-365, here 364.
- 7 Aldous Huxley, *Along the Road: Notes and Essays of a Tourist* (London: Granada, 1985) 138.
- 8 Huxley, *Along the Road* 142.
- 9 Aldous Huxley, "Pleasures", in *On the Margin: Notes and Essays* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1923, 1971) 51.
- 10 Aldous Huxley, "The Outlook for American Culture," *Harper's Magazine* 155, Aug. 1927, 267, 268.
- 11 Huxley, *Along the Road* 242.
- 12 Huxley, *On the Margin* 48, 47.
- 13 Aldous Huxley, *Jesting Pilate: The Diary of a Journey* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1926, 1930) 267, 268.
- 14 Aldous Huxley, *Those Barren Leaves* (London: Grafton, 1978) 99.
- 15 Huxley, *Jesting Pilate* 114.
- 16 Aldous Huxley, *Dot What You Will* (London: Chatto & Windus 1929, 1931) 224, 225.
- 17 Aldous Huxley, "Progress", *Vanity Fair* 29, Jan. 1928, 69, 105.

- 18 Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (London: Grafton, 1977, 1989) 31. Page references in the text preceded by *BNW* are to this edition.
- 19 Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World Revisited* (London: Grafton, 1983, 1988) 61.
- 20 Aldous Huxley, "Economists, Scientists and Humanists" in Mary Adams (ed.), *Science in the Changing World* (London: Unwin, 1933) 209-223, 212, 213.
- 21 Aldous Huxley, "Machinery, Psychology and Politics," *Spectator* 142 (23 No. 1929) 749-751, 750.
- 22 See for example Aldous Huxley, "The New Romanticism" in *Music at Night* (London: Grafton, 1986) 150-156.
- 23 Huxley, *Brave New World Revisited* 178.
- 24 For an analysis of the character of John Savage see Christoph Bode, *Aldous Huxleys "Brave New World"* (München: Fink, 1985) 75-84. For Huxley's manuscript revisions see Donald Watt, "The Manuscript Revisions of *Brave New World*", *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 77 (1978), 367-382.
- 25 For a longer account see Bode, *Huxleys "Brave New World"* 103-147.
- 26 Aldous Huxley, *Ends and Means: An Enquiry Into the Nature of Ideals and Into the Methods Employed For Their Realization* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1965) 10. Page references in the text preceded by *E&M* are to this edition.
- 27 Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (London: Grafton, 1985, 1989) 305.
- 28 Aldous Huxley, *The Human Situation: Lectures at Santa Barbara*, ed. Piero Ferrucci (London: Grafton, 1980, 1989) 10. Page references in the text preceded by *HS* are to this edition.
- 29 See Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World Revisited* (London: Grafton, 1983, 1988) 37. Page references in the text preceded by *BNWR* are to this edition.
- 30 Aldous Huxley, *Literature and Science and Science, Liberty and Peace* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970) 105. Page references in the text preceded by *SLP* are to this edition.
- 31 Aldous Huxley, "Brave New World," *Life* 25 (20 Sept. 1948), 63, 64, 66, 68, 70, here 64.
- 32 Aldous Huxley, *Island* (London: Granada, 1976) 235. Page references in the text preceded by *I* are to this edition.
- 33 Keith M. May, *Aldous Huxley* (London: Elek, 1972) 190.

### *The Works of Aldous Huxley*

*Note.* The *Collected Works* of Aldous Huxley have been published by Chatto & Windus, London; practically all his major writings are available as either Triad/Grafton or Triad/Paladin paperbacks.

*Crome Yellow* (1921)

*Mortal Coils* (1922)

*On the Margin* (1923)

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- Antic Hay* (1923)  
*Little Mexican and Other Stories* (1924)  
*Along the Road* (1925)  
*Those Barren Leaves* (1925)  
*Two or Three Graces* (1926)  
*Jesting Pilate* (1926)  
*Proper Studies* (1927)  
*Point Counter Point* (1928)  
*Do What You Will* (1929)  
*Brief Candles* (1930)  
*Music at Night* (1931)  
*Brave New World* (1932)  
*Texts and Pretexts* (1932)  
*Beyond the Mexique Bay* (1934)  
*What Are You Going to Do About It?* (1936)  
*Eyeless in Gaza* (1936)  
*The Olive Tree and Other Essays* (1936)  
*Ends and Means* (1937)  
*After Many a Summer* (1939)  
*Grey Eminence* (1941)  
*Time Must Have a Stop* (1941)  
*The Perennial Philosophy* (1945)  
*Science, Liberty and Peace* (1946)  
*Ape and Essence* (1948)  
*Themes and Variations* (1950)  
*The Devils of Loudun* (1952)  
*The Doors of Perception* (1954)  
*Heaven and Hell* (1956)  
*Brave New World Revisited* (1958)  
*Island* (1962)  
*Literature and Science* (1963)  
*The Human Situation: Lectures at Santa Barbara* (1978)