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SCREENING PSYCHEDELIC
AESTHETICS: FILM AND TELEVISION
REPRESENTATIONS OF THE LSD
EXPERIENCE

CJ CLARK

PhD

2022

SCREENING PSYCHEDELIC
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requirements of the University of
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Abstract

This thesis explores film and television representations of the psychedelic experience using a neoformalist-intertextual analytical framework developed specifically for this purpose. In doing so, it contributes to a small body of existing screen studies literature that interrogates psychedelic aesthetics. However, in contrast to other film and television studies scholarship, which typically discusses the psychedelic experience in vague terms, this thesis employs a neoformalist-intertextual approach to meticulously analyse film and television representations of the drug-state. Indeed, the structure of this thesis, which eschews a case study led approach to ensure its analysis of the psychedelic drug-state is as comprehensive as possible, enhances the originality of its scope. As the first academic study of its length to interrogate psychedelic aesthetics, it addresses a significant gap in the film and television studies literature.

The distinction this thesis makes between the phenomenology of experiences produced by different psychedelic substances, which are largely overlooked by existing screen studies scholarship, is an original aspect of its contribution to knowledge. It also underpins the rationale for the study's primary focus on representations of a single psychedelic, LSD. The scope of the study is further limited to an interrogation of films and television shows that attribute the drug-state to the subjective experience of characters. This enabled the thesis to engage with set and setting, which is a significant psychedelic concept that is rarely addressed in the analysis of audio-visual depictions of the drug-state. Further, as LSD features in a substantial number of films and television shows released since the 1950, the thesis examines a broad array of psychedelic phenomena depicted in productions released during various historical periods.

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Declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas and contributions from the work of others.

Any ethical clearance for the research presented in this commentary has been approved.

Approval has been sought and granted through the Researcher's submission to

Northumbria University's Ethics Online System on 25th June 2020.

I declare that the Word Count of this Thesis is 75,824 words.

Name: Craig John Clark

Signature:

Date: 23/12/2012

1. Introduction

*To fathom hell or soar angelic
Just take a pinch of psychedelic.*

- Humphry Osmond (Lee and Shlain, 2001, p. 55)

Psychedelic substances, some of which are thousands of years old and have been used by human beings for centuries, are having a modern-day revival (Pollan, 2018, pp. 2-3). The seeds of this psychedelic renaissance were planted in 1999 when, for the first time in decades, the US Food and Drug Administration approved the use of a psychedelic in a research study involving healthy human subjects (Pollan, 2018, p. 60). It was not until seven years later, however, that the findings of this landmark investigation into the drug's psychological effects was published and the renaissance began in earnest (Pollan, 2018, p. 29). Subsequently, in 2012, the use of psychedelics reached historically high levels (Lundborg, 2012, p. 17) and, in the years since, consumption has surged among increasingly diverse groups of people (Prideaux, 2021). Prohibition, which has done little to deter individuals from using psychedelics, is now being challenged by voters and administrators throughout America, where several cities and states have passed legislation to decriminalise their use for therapeutic and recreational purposes (Tullis, 2021).

Popular culture plays a significant role in defining the drug-state experience for large swathes of the global population, particularly those who have never taken psychedelics and have no intention of ever doing so (Siff, 2015, p. 189). It is significant, then, that the psychedelic renaissance has been accompanied by a concomitant resurgence of psychedelic aesthetics in “digital-era” mainstream films and music videos (Church, 2018). Equally, psychedelics are gaining greater exposure in various forms of popular media. For example, an increasing number of celebrities and public figures have shown willingness to openly discuss their experiences.¹ However, as Lana Cook observed in 2014, critical frameworks must be developed if both scholars and nonexperts alike are to

¹ See, for example, *Have a Good Trip* (Cary, 2020).

fully appreciate and comprehend aesthetic representations of the psychedelic drug-state (p. 33).

Cook's thesis contributes to a burgeoning field of screen studies literature by interrogating the formal and thematic components of cinematic psychedelic aesthetics (2014, p. 16). However, her study encompasses not only film, but various other forms of media and literature, including print scholarship, confessional trip reports, narratives, performances, and visual art (2014, p. 19). Other scholars of film and television, meanwhile, frequently discuss the psychedelic experience in assumptive, generic terms.² In response to Cook's call to action, this thesis addresses a significant gap in the screen studies literature as the first scholarly work to focus exclusively on film and television depictions of the psychedelic drug-state. The originality of its scope is matched by the novelty of its structure, which eschews a case study led approach to foreground the analysis of psychedelic phenomena.

The thesis takes a meticulous approach to the analysis of film and television representations of the psychedelic experience. It focuses primarily on depictions of just one psychedelic, LSD, in narrative-based films and television shows. The next section of this introduction provides an overview of psychedelics, beginning with a summary of their effects and the most significant concepts associated with the drug-state. Subsequently, a brief history of psychedelics and their longstanding relationship with media is outlined, which provides context for the literature review that follows in chapter two. The introduction concludes with an outline of the study's aims and objectives, its rationale and scope, and an overview of the structure of analysis.

² This claim is evidenced in the literature review.

An Overview of Psychedelics

Psychedelic Effects

Invented by Humphry Osmond in correspondence with Aldous Huxley in 1956, the term psychedelic is a relatively new addition to the pharmacological lexicon. Comprised of two Greek words, which together mean “mind manifesting” (Pollan, 2018, pp. 162-163), it is the etymologically accurate term for these substances (Pollan, 2018, p. 19), which stimulate a dreamlike conscious awareness of thoughts, perceptions and emotions that are otherwise unconscious, subconscious, repressed, and filtered (Doblin, 2001, p. 1). However, psychedelics are still occasionally referred to by other terms, such as psychotomimetic drugs, hallucinogens, and entheogens (Hartogsohn, 2020, p. 18).

In their 1966 study, *The Varieties of Psychedelic Experience*, Robert Masters and Jean Houston present findings from first-hand observations of 206 psychedelic drug sessions, and a selection of interviews with a further 214 people who served either as volunteer subjects, psychotherapy patients, or who had taken psychedelics recreationally. The authors include an extensive, but by their own admission incomplete, list of psychedelic effects to highlight the potency of these substances and the vast array of phenomena they produce:

Changes in visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, gustatory, and kinesthetic perception; changes in experiencing time and space; changes in the rate and content of thought; body image changes; hallucinations; vivid images – eidetic images – seen with the eyes closed; greatly heightened awareness of color; abrupt and frequent mood and affect changes; heightened suggestibility; enhanced recall or memory; depersonalization and ego dissolution; dual, multiple, and fragmentized consciousness; seeming awareness of internal organs and processes of the body; upsurge of unconscious materials; enhanced awareness of linguistic nuances; increased sensitivity to nonverbal cues; sense of capacity to communicate much better by nonverbal means, sometimes including the telepathic; feelings of empathy; regression and “primitivization”; apparently heightened capacity for concentration; magnification of character traits and psychodynamic processes that makes evident the interaction of ideation, emotion, and perception with one another and with inferred unconscious processes; concern with philosophical, cosmological, and religious questions; and, in general, apprehension of a world that has slipped the chains of normal categorical ordering, leading to an intensified interest in self and world and

also to a range of responses moving from extremes of anxiety to extremes of pleasure.
(2000, pp. 5-6)

The psychedelic experience is, as the foregoing list suggests, in many respects unique to each subject and their circumstances (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 6). Consequently, it is not possible to accurately discuss the drug-state in broad generic terms (Hartogsohn, 2020, p. 13). The list of effects also indicates that the psychedelic experience is comprised of several aesthetic elements, each of which relates to various forms of drug-state perception. Further, and of equal significance, the nature of altered sensory perception is often determined by the subject's psychological condition and emotional state (Masters and Houston, 2000, pp. 91-92).

Masters and Houston conducted most of their research with LSD and peyote (2000, p. 5). Peyote, the psychoactive element of which is mescaline, and LSD (d-lysergic acid diethylamide), are two of the substances categorised by Rick Doblin as psychedelics. The others are psilocybin (found in a certain class of mushrooms), ibogaine (derived from the iboga root), MDMA (methylenedioxymethamphetamine), ketamine, and DMT (dimethyltryptamine) (2001, pp. 1-2). Michael Pollan and Patrick Lundborg focus their writings on the "classical" or serotonergic psychedelics, which are ayahuasca, LSD, mescaline, psilocybin, and DMT (2018, p. 18; 2012, p. 18). Lundborg adjudges MDMA, aka ecstasy, to be a "quasi psychedelic" (2012, p. 189) because of its failure to produce many of the effects that are characteristic of the psychedelic experience (2012, p. 400).³ Further, as Pollan observes, MDMA impacts different pathways in the brain to its classical psychedelic counterparts (2018, p. 18).

Hashish, which is derived from the cannabis plant, is capable of producing "full-blown psychedelic experiences" when consumed in its edible form (Hartogsohn, 2020, p.

³ MDMA is more accurately classified as an empathogen. Lundborg, P. (2012) *Psychedelia: An Ancient Culture, A Modern Way of Life*. Stockholm: Lysergia.

25). However, while Doblin agrees that the effects of marijuana can be somewhat psychedelic, he excludes the drug from his study (2001, p. 2). Indeed, like MDMA, it acts upon different parts of the brain to the classical psychedelics (Pollan, 2018, p. 36). Further, it is also associated with its own unique culture, which is distinct from psychedelia (Lundborg, 2012, p. 425). Adrenochrome, which is an amineochrome that forms naturally when adrenaline decomposes and possesses a similar molecular structure to mescaline, has also been experimented with as a psychedelic (Stevens, 1987, p. 28). However, despite showing promise in the 1950s, research into this more obscure substance was abandoned due to its chemical instability and proneness to cause depression (Lundborg, 2012, p. 155).⁴

The US military developed several extremely potent psychedelic substances in the 1950s. BZ, which was first synthesised in 1959, was tested on approximately 2,800 soldiers before research was brought to a close in 1975 (Lee and Shlain, 2001, p. 42). The drug was also deployed as an incapacitating agent during the Vietnam war and considered as a chemical solution to domestic incidents of civil unrest (Lee and Shlain, 2001, p. 235). In 1964, an extremely potent psychedelic known as STP (2,5 dimethoxy-4-methylphenethylamine) was also concocted by military scientists. The CIA conducted experiments with it as an incapacitating agent and explored its potential in behaviour modification studies. In the late 1960s, black market chemists also produced the drug and distributed it among recreational users (Lee and Shlain, 2001, p. 187).

The classical psychedelics can be placed into subcategories, which are defined by the distinct phenomenology of experience they produce. LSD and mescaline are unusual in that the experiences they stimulate are almost identical to one another (Lundborg, 2012, p. 258). The phenomenology of LSD and mescaline drug-states are, however, significantly

⁴ Terry Gilliam mistakenly credits Hunter S Thompson with inventing adrenochrome, which he classifies as a fictional drug. The use of the substance in both book and film versions of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is based upon Thompson's fictional definition rather than the substance investigated by researchers in the 1950s. *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: audio commentary track with director Terry Gilliam*, 2003a. DVD. Directed by Gilliam, T. USA: Universal Pictures, Criterion Collection.

different to the unique forms of perception, vision, emotions and insight triggered by the tryptamine containing substances, DMT, ayahuasca, and psilocybin (Lundborg, 2012, p. 367). Further, Lundborg distinguishes between the personal intimacy of a typical ayahuasca trip, which he likens to the experience of watching a home movie in a comfortable setting, with the drier, more clinical atmosphere of the LSD drug-state, which he equates to the viewing of an educational film in a classroom (2012, p. 456).

The energy of the LSD drug-state manifests entirely from within the subject. This contrasts with the tryptamine experience, which is inhabited by entities that seem to exist apart from the subject's consciousness (Lundborg, 2012, p. 174). These humanoid beings offer instruction and guidance throughout the drug-state experience (Lundborg, 2012, p. 456). Lundborg refers to the psilocybin version of this phenomenological presence as the "Mushroom Voice" (2012, p. 174). Similarly, an overseer or "Master of Ceremonies" is also present in the ayahuasca and DMT realms. However, while the subject may question the Mushroom Voice and ayahuasca overseer, it is impossible to establish a similar line of communication with the equivalent DMT entity due to the rapid speed at which the experience unfolds (Lundborg, 2012, pp. 456-457).

Further, while DMT is the psychoactive ingredient found in ayahuasca (Lundborg, 2012, p. 461), the two substances produce closed eye visual (CEV) experiences of radically different phenomenology (Lundborg, 2012, pp. 454-455). The pure DMT drug-state is characterised by the presence of mischievous diminutive people, which are sometimes described as elves or children, that feature in many hallucinogenic traditions. Indeed, it is from these elfish characters, other alien creatures, and assorted golden contraptions, that the DMT subject receives communication. The ayahuasca experience, by contrast, is populated by helpful *doctores* and angels (Lundborg, 2012, p. 456). The various phenomenological distinctions between the two drug-states are also characterised by the different environmental settings in which CEV visions unfold. That is, while DMT realm is typically consists of spaceships, control rooms, laboratories, futuristic lounges, and alien

planets and civilisations, the ayahuasca experience usually unfolds in jungles, vast, wide-open landscapes, and large, empty oceans (Lundborg, 2012, p. 491).⁵

Dosage and Duration

In the 1960s, doses of LSD ranging between 25 and 100 micrograms were commonly dispensed to patients in therapeutic research settings (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 48). The Californian psychedelic therapist Leo Zeff, meanwhile, typically administered 250 micrograms to patients in the 1960s and 1970s (Lundborg, 2012, p. 205). Intriguingly, this is the same dose that many teenagers consumed recreationally in the 1960s (Lundborg, 2012, p. 198). However, a decade earlier, professionals deemed 250 micrograms to be a riskily high dose (Lundborg, 2012, p. 205). Similarly, Lundborg recommends dosages in this range be taken only by experienced psychedelic users (2012, p. 205). Further, Masters and Houston consider doses of between 400 and 500 micrograms to be “very strong” (2000, p. 13), and describe the use of 600 and 1500 micrograms of LSD in treatment contexts as “too large” and “enormous” respectively (2000, p. 48).

The onset time of an LSD experience varies according to the method of administration and whether the subject has fasted. If consumed orally, it ordinarily takes between 30 minutes and an hour for the psychedelic experience to commence (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 48). Taken on an empty stomach, the onset time shortens to approximately 20 minutes (Leary, Metzner and Alpert, 2008, p. 82). This duration is further reduced if LSD is administered intramuscularly (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 48). The drug-state itself typically lasts for between eight and 10 hours (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 48; Lundborg, 2012, p. 167) or, in some instances, up to 12 hours (Leary, Metzner and Alpert, 2008, p. 89).

⁵ There are some consistencies between DMT and ayahuasca drug-state phenomena but the differences outweigh the similarities. Lundborg, P. (2012) *Psychedelia: An Ancient Culture, A Modern Way of Life*. Stockholm: Lysergia.

Set and Setting

Set and setting plays a defining role in shaping the psychedelic experience (Lundborg, 2012, p. 161; Leary, Metzner and Alpert, 2008, p. 84; Hartogsohn, 2020, p. 1). Basically defined, set pertains to the individual's preparation for their psychedelic trip (Leary, Metzner and Alpert, 2008, p. 84), while setting refers to the physical environment in which it takes place (Leary, Metzner and Alpert, 2008, p. 3; Lundborg, 2012, p. 161; Hartogsohn, 2020, p. 1). However, set can also be divided into its immediate and long-range components. Immediate set refers to the individual's reasons for taking the drug and their mental state at the outset of the trip (Leary, Metzner and Alpert, 2008, p. 84; Hartogsohn, 2020, p. 121). Long-range set, by contrast, describes the individual's "enduring" personality, which is determined by their life history, personal experiences, and character traits (Leary, Metzner and Alpert, 2008, p. 84). While distinct from one another, these two categories are also intimately related. That is, the subject's belief system and attitudes determine how they think and feel about psychedelics and their effects (Leary, Metzner and Alpert, 2008, p. 84).

Hartogsohn identifies ten parameters of set and setting that diversify its definition. The first four, which are personality, preparation, expectation, and intention, each describe aspects of the subject's set. The fifth, which concerns the physical space in which the subject's experience unfolds, is the first to focus on setting (2020, p. 198). To stimulate a positive experience, Masters and Houston recommend the subject take psychedelics in a homely environment or a natural outdoor location, such as a forest, garden, lakeside, or beach (2000, p. 137). Further, the general atmosphere of a space also influences the nature of the subject's drug-state experience (Leary, Metzner and Alpert, 2008, p. 3). That music

is a particularly significant aspect of setting is indicated by the development of playlists designed to accompany each phase of the drug-state (Shapiro, 2020).⁶

The sixth and seventh parameters encompass the broader social and cultural aspects of setting (Hartogsohn, 2020, p. 198). Social set and setting pertains to the nature of the relationship between persons in attendance at a psychedelic session (Leary, Metzner and Alpert, 2008, p. 3). The most significant is the dynamic between subject and guide, which pertains to the eighth parameter identified by Hartogsohn as the researcher-subject relationship (2020, p. 198). The guide, which is a hallmark of 1960s psychedelia (Lundborg, 2012, pp. 165-166), remains a central figure in contemporary psychedelic drug trials (Pollan, 2018, p. 227). The guide's role has been compared to that of an airport ground control operative, who is always on hand to receive messages and answer questions from the "high-flying aircraft" (Leary, Metzner and Alpert, 2008, p. 89). The "finest precedent" of the guide is, according to Masters and Houston, Virgil of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. It is Virgil, they explain, who guides Dante through the "realm of changeless eternity and there shows him the manifold aspects of reality" (2000, p. 130).⁷

Typically, the guide is responsible for curating a trip setting designed to elicit a positive experience (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 136). Prior to administering the drug, they are tasked with establishing themselves as a figure of trust. It is also their duty to prepare the subject for the drug-state by offering advice and information, and addressing any misconceptions (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 129). They also navigate the subject on their journey through the novel psychedelic terrain (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 131). It is for this reason that, in the 1960s, most researchers believed the guide should

⁶ Researchers at Johns Hopkins have developed a playlist that corresponds to the arc of a medium or high dose psilocybin experience. It is intended to support the subject's experience and its seven-hours and 40-minutes runtime can be extended to match the variable duration of psychedelic sessions. Shapiro, M. (2020) *Inside the Johns Hopkins Psilocybin Playlist*. Johns Hopkins Medicine. [hopkinsmedicine.org](https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/news/articles/inside-the-johns-hopkins-psilocybin-playlist); The Johns Hopkins University. Available at: <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/news/articles/inside-the-johns-hopkins-psilocybin-playlist> (Accessed: 06 July 2022).

⁷ See Alighieri, D. (1995) *Dante's Inferno, the Indiana Critical Edition*. Translated by: Musa, M. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

possess considerable first-hand experience of the drug-state (Leary, Metzner and Alpert, 2008, p. 89). Indeed, during sessions attended by two guides, it was not uncommon for one to participate in the psychedelic experience while the other remained sober (Leary, Metzner and Alpert, 2008, p. 90). Many advocates of the dual guide approach also favoured the presence of a man and a woman in each role (Leary, Metzner and Alpert, 2008, p. 92).

The ninth parameter established by Hartogsohn, which he refers to as freedom to choose activity, also pertains to the role of the guide or researcher (Hartogsohn, 2020, p. 198). In an experimental setting, the subject may be restricted to the completion of psychological tests or, conversely, be provided with an array of creative materials, such as art and music, which they are free to engage with at their leisure (Hartogsohn, 2020, p. 198). Further, the guide's duties also encompass the post-trip stage state, which Hartogsohn defines as matrix and support. This tenth parameter pertains to the context within which the subject retrospectively interprets the content of their experience (Hartogsohn, 2020, p. 208).

Leary et al warn guides not to impose their will on the psychedelic experience (2008, p. 89). It is not without a substantial degree of irony, then, that Leary himself has been criticised for "trip programming" (Lee and Shlain, 2001, p. 113). Indeed, his methods have been likened to those employed by the CIA (Lee and Shlain, 2001, p. 109), which experimented with LSD as a brainwashing agent that they hoped could be used to reprogramme the minds of enemy soldiers (Lee and Shlain, 2001, p. 23). The CIA also shared the belief that first-hand experience of the LSD experience was necessary and agents regularly conducted large scale experiments on themselves and colleagues to gain insight into the subjective effects of the drug (Lee and Shlain, 2001, p. 29). LSD was also used by cult leaders Mel Lyman and Charles Manson to hypnotise, brainwash, and mentally manipulate their followers (Lundborg, 2012, p. 352).

Psychedelic aficionados with a preference for tryptamines often reject the notion of a trip guide because the role is enacted by the humanoid entity that appears within the drug-state itself (Lundborg, 2012, p. 456). However, the guide has not, as Lundborg asserts, become “passé” in the years since its 1960s heyday (2012, p. 166). In subsequent decades, the concept of a trip “sitter” has gained traction and become an increasingly popular alternative to the guide. The sitter’s role is considered particularly important for maiden psychedelic trips. In contrast to the “omniscient” presence of the guide, the sitter’s role is less involved. However, many psychedelic veterans prefer to take psychedelics alone or with friends (Lundborg, 2012, p. 166). The notion of a guide was also rejected by LSD users in the 1960s. Hunter S Thompson, for example, scoffed at the idea of guided LSD trips and preferred to engage in public life during the psychedelic experience (Gilliam, 2003b).

A Brief History of Psychedelic Use

The social and cultural parameters of set and setting identified by Hartogsohn also refer to the sociocultural conditions that determine the types of set and setting available within any given society (Hartogsohn, 2020, p. 189). The psychedelic experience that emerged in 1950s and 1960s America was, he explains, very specific to the sociocultural context of that historical period (2020, p. 2). Indeed, had LSD emerged elsewhere and at another point in history, the psychedelic experience would have assumed a very different form (Hartogsohn, 2020, p. 208). Significantly, ideas and concepts developed during this era remain influential on contemporary understandings of psychedelics and continue to shape drug-state experiences (Hartogsohn, 2020, p. 2).

Peyote had been used by Mexican Indians for centuries before it reached the North American Comanche and Kiowa tribes following the end of the Civil War. It was also the first of the psychedelics to attract the attention of Western intellectuals in the late 19th century. During a visit to the American southwest, toxicologist Louis Lewin gathered

several peyote samples and, upon his return to Berlin, administered them to a colleague, Arthur Heffter. Lewin's scientific research, which marked the beginning of a miniature psychedelic epoch, was succeeded by the recreational use of peyote among intellectuals, and then, up until the onset of the First World War, the bohemian residents of London, Paris and New York (Stevens, 1987, pp. 5-9).

Psilocybin mushrooms, meanwhile, which are also known as *teonanácatl*, or "flesh of the Gods," have been used sacramentally by the indigenous peoples of Mexico and Central America for hundreds of years (Pollan, 2018, p. 2). It was not until the 1950s, however, that R. Gordon Wasson and his colleague Allan Richardson identified themselves as "the first white men in recorded history to eat the divine mushrooms" after they partook in a ceremony overseen by a *curandera*, or shaman, and her daughter (Wasson, 1957, pp. 104-120). Similarly, the use of ayahuasca by Amazonian tribes predates Western knowledge of its existence (Lundborg, 2012, pp. 49-50). It was around the same time that Wasson first took psilocybin mushrooms that the author William Burroughs met with the ethnobotanist Richard Evans Schultes in Bogota, Colombia. It was Burroughs, rather than the field researcher Schultes, who identified *chacrana* as the source of DMT in the ayahuasca admixture (Lundborg, 2012, pp. 55-56).

In contrast to its plant-based counterparts, LSD is the product of Western scientific research and is not associated with indigenous cultural applications. A synthetic substance, it was first synthesised in the laboratory by Swiss chemist Albert Hofmann in 1938 (Pollan, 2018, p. 1; Hartogsohn, 2020, p. 29). The CIA began conducting experiments into its psychological effects in 1947 (Plant, 1999, pp. 12-13). Paralleling the turn of the century trajectory taken by peyote, LSD use was subsequently dominated by an intellectual elite that counted Aldous Huxley among its most prominent members (Lundborg, 2012, p. 269). Simultaneously, psychiatrists began treating various psychological ailments with the drug (Lundborg, 2012, p. 150). It was not until the mid-1960s that LSD emerged as the drug of choice among counterculture bohemians (Lundborg, 2012, p. 305).

In America, LSD was initially defined as a psychotomimetic and employed in research studies that established the psychedelic drug-state as an analogue for schizophrenia (Lundborg, 2012, p. 18). This research paradigm, which was pioneered by the man credited with first bringing LSD to American shores, Max Rinkel (Lee and Shlain, 2001, p. 20), occupied numerous leading academic psychiatrists in North America throughout the 1950s (Lundborg, 2012, p. 25). In the wake of its eventual demise, a new psychological research model was advanced by the Harvard Psilocybin Project, which was founded by Timothy Leary (Lundborg, 2012, p. 157). Interest in LSD exploded and, by 1965, more than 1,000 scientific papers had been published on the subject of psychedelic drug therapy (Pollan, 2018, p. 44).

The most significant research study undertaken in the 1960s was not, however, conducted within the disciplinary realm of psychiatry. The findings of a scientific study of spirituality and mysticism, which is commonly referred to as the Good Friday Experiment, proved the validity of drug-induced mystical experiences (Lundborg, 2012, pp. 159-160). Leo Zeff also emphasised the relationship between psychedelics and spirituality in his work and claimed to have been transported to “the lap of God” while holding the Torah close to his chest during his first LSD trip (Pollan, 2018, p. 226). Significantly, contemporary approaches to psychedelic therapy are influenced by the philosophical and theoretical concepts developed by Zeff and Leary (Pollan, 2018, p. 225).

The shaman is an antecedent of the guide, whose role in indigenous rituals involves entering an altered state of conscious to traverse between the “Lower and Upper Worlds” (Harner and Doore, 2000, p. 3). In the Native American Church, a shaman-like role is performed by the Road Chief, who is the first of the group take peyote and also brings the ceremony to a close (Lundborg, 2012, pp. 248-249). Inspired by the Native American Church’s legal right to use peyote as a sacrament, Leary campaigned for LSD to be protected from prohibition for use in religious rites (Lundborg, 2012, p. 342). However, as the integration of psychedelic experiences by the Uniao do Vegetal and Santo Daime

ayahuasca churches attests, Western cultures failed to cultivate and establish similar religious contexts for the use of LSD (Lundborg, 2012, p. 349).

In the late 19th century, Havelock Ellis shared mescaline with artists he thought might benefit from its capacity to unlock creative potential (Ellis, 1898, p. 134). In the 1950s, peyote re-emerged as the artistic tool of choice among writers and artists of the Beat generation (Lundborg, 2012, pp. 254-255). The Beat poet Allen Ginsberg, who also experimented with LSD in the 1960s (Lundborg, 2012, p. 275), wrote the second part of his poem *Howl* while high on peyote (Lundborg, 2012, p. 254).⁸ The Amerindian narrator of Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, meanwhile, was a product of the author's peyote experimentation (Lundborg, 2012, p. 255).⁹ Several musicians and bands, most notably the Beatles, were also heavily influenced by their use of psychedelics (Lee and Shlain, 2001, pp. 180-182). Further, psychedelics have also been credited with facilitating scientific and technological breakthroughs, including Steve Jobs' radical ideas about computers, and the insight Francis Crick gained about the double helix structure of DNA (Lundborg, 2012, p. 169).

Stages of the Psychedelic Experience

The structure of this thesis, and the analysis undertaken within it, are informed by Patrick Lundborg's psychedelic trip schematic, which graphically illustrates Masters and Houston's "model LSD experience" and consists of four distinct experiential stages, a brief but clearly perceived peak experience, and an ego-loss event (figure 1.1) (2012, p. 166). The first three phases of the trip, the sensory realm, the recollective-analytic stage, and the symbolic level, are labelled in direct accordance with terminology used by Masters and Houston (2000, p. 142). However, Lundborg deviates from the integral level, which is

⁸ See Ginsberg, A. (1986) *Howl and Other Poems*. San Francisco: City Lights Books.

⁹ See Kesey, K. (1962) *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. New York: Viking Press.

their term for the fourth stage of the experience (Masters and Houston, 2000, pp. 148-150). Critiquing their use of psychoanalytic and religious frameworks of analysis, he refers to this highest realm as the transcendental level (2012, p. 431).

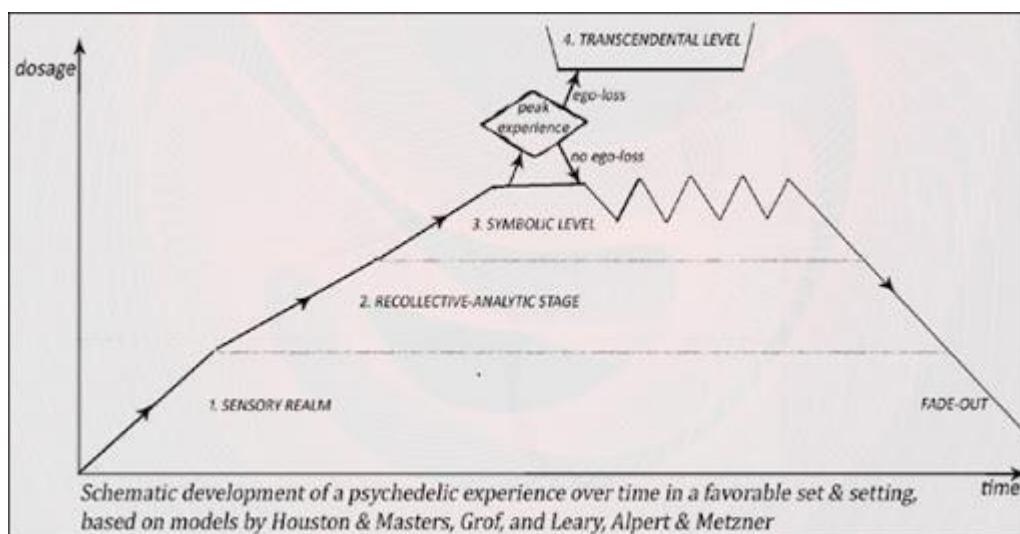


Figure 1.1: Patrick Lundborg's psychedelic trip schematic (2012, p. 166)

Lundborg's schematic is also a composite of two other trip models, including one developed by Leary, Metzner, and Alpert, and another by Stanislav Grof. The former, which was never formally published, was the first ever trip model to be developed, and is explicitly identified by Lundborg as an influence on his work. However, he does not specify which data he derived from it, and its impact on his schematic is thus rendered intangible (2012, p. 165). He is more specific about the influence of Grof's LSD research. Lundborg's concept of ego-loss as a distinct trip event, which functions as a gateway to the transcendental realm of the psychedelic experience, is derived from Grof's work (Lundborg, 2012, p. 166). However, as some people are incapable of experiencing ego-loss, the highest realm of the drug-state remains inaccessible to them regardless of their "personal readiness" and the quantity of psychedelic imbibed (Lundborg, 2012, p. 166). This is evidenced by the mere five percent of Masters and Houston's subjects who reached the transcendental level (2000, p. 148).

The stages of the psychedelic experience are briefly outlined in the remainder of this section and then more thoroughly introduced in the relevant sections of subsequent chapters. While the stages are distinct from one another, it is worth noting that phenomena

characteristic of one level may manifest during another (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 144). The initial period of the drug-state is dominated by sensory experience (Masters and Houston, 2000, pp. 142-143), which is characterised by altered states of perception and the heightened stimulation of each of the senses (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 152).

Typically, subjects report being able to hear, see, smell, and taste “more fully than ever before” (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 10). Perception of the body and its image is often altered while spatiotemporal orientation is also transformed (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 143). Upon closing their eyes, the subject may perceive a series of entertaining but purposeless aesthetic images (Masters and Houston, 2000, pp. 156-157).

The transition to the recollective-analytic stage may occur after several hours spent on the sensory level. The shift to this characteristically introspective stage of the experience is instigated by the guide, who directs the subject’s experience toward a meaningful consideration of their “place in the world” (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 144). This realm is dominated by eidetic images perceived with eyes closed, which are, in contrast to those on the sensory level, filled with purpose and meaning (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 156). The significance of these images to the individual is heightened on the symbolic level, where the subject encounters historical, legendary, mythical, ritualistic, and archetypal visions. Myths and legends may also be enacted by the individual, who occasionally feels a sense of continuity with historic and evolutionary processes (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 147).

The “spectacular visual effects” perceived during the psychedelic peak (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 260) include blinding white light, “pure energy” (Lundborg, 2012, p. 447) and “dancing suns” (Lundborg, 2012, p. 485). Visual phenomena are attended by a sense that the body is comprised of, and surrounded by, a form of charged electrical energy (Leary, Metzner and Alpert, 2008, p. 28). Peak experience is sometimes followed by ego-loss, which triggers the subject’s ascent to the transcendental realm of “non-dualism and pure energy fields” (Lundborg, 2012, p. 166). Subjects often find it difficult to describe

transcendental phenomena, which challenge the limits of verbal and pictorial representation (Lundborg, 2012, p. 383).

Stanislav Grof identifies four stages of the psychedelic experiences as abstract and aesthetic experiences, psychodynamic experiences, perinatal experiences, and transpersonal experiences (2021, p. 36). The first stage of Grof's model is identical to the sensory level in Lundborg's schematic. In this thesis, phenomena identified by him as pertaining to the abstract and aesthetic stage are consequently discussed in the analysis of sensory level experiences. That the scope of the perinatal matrices is narrower than the symbolic level results from Grof's decision to focus on psychodynamics rather than address psychedelic phenomenology (Lundborg, 2012, p. 453). Nonetheless, there is an emphasis on birth and death experiences in the third stages of both models (Grof, 2021, p. 105; Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 220). The lack of correlation between the transcendental level and transpersonal experiences, meanwhile, is indicated by Lundborg's belief that that substantial transpersonal input may be attained without the subject experiencing ego-loss (2012, p. 432).

Two post-trip phases are included in a trip schematic produced by Majić, Schmidt and Gallinat (figure 1.2). The first is the afterglow, which refers to the near term of days and weeks, while the second consists of longer-term residual effects. Afterglow experience is typified by elevated mood and a sense of being liberated from feelings of guilt and anxiety concerning past behaviour and actions (2015). It is also characterised by an enhanced flair for written communication, which is evident in the trip reports composed during this post-trip phase (Lundborg, 2012, p. 450). The residual effects of the psychedelic experience, meanwhile, include therapeutically valuable changes to mindset and personality (Majić, Schmidt and Gallinat, 2015). Masters and Houston report varying degrees to which the subjects felt themselves to be changed by the psychedelic experience, which range from the 95% who felt they had benefited from their experience and were changed in some positive way, to the 40% who felt their positive transformation was

profound, and the 5% who believe themselves to have been radically transformed after an integral level experience (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 150).



Figure 1.2: Psychedelic trip schematic incorporating post-trip phases developed by Majić, Schmidt and Gallinat (2015, p. 243)

A Brief History of Psychedelics and Media

There exists a longstanding relationship between audio-visual media, particularly film, and the psychedelic experience. Scholars and recreational users alike have historically employed the cinematic metaphor to describe the drug-state. For example, the term “eyelid movies” was coined by Tom Wolfe to describe the closed eye visuals experienced by author Ken Kesey (1968, p. 45). In the 1960s, this phenomenon was often referred to as the “liddies” (Benshoff, 2001, p. 33). Today, the word psychedelic evokes an aesthetic style and a historical period, which began in the late 1950s and ended in the mid-1970s (Church, 2018). The history of this term also reveals a kinship between the psychedelic experience and media portrayals of the drug-state (Siff, 2015, p. 3). Indeed, it is from the symbiotic evolution of psychedelics and aesthetics (Cook, 2014, p. 45) that the “American psychedelic aesthetic tradition” emerged (Cook, 2014, p. 198). However, while psychedelic art, poster art, painting, and graphic design, have received substantial academic attention, there has not been a commensurate focus among film studies scholars on psychedelic aesthetics (Cook, 2014, p. 16).

Ironically, the same psychedelics that played a central role in Kesey’s creative process as a writer (Wolfe, 1968, p. 49) also revealed to him the limitations of the literary medium (Stevens, 1987, p. 237). Indeed, it was the psychedelic experience that convinced him to abandon writing and pursue a career as a filmmaker (Stevens, 1987, p. 238). He

realised, like Gene Youngblood, Aldous Huxley, and others, that film was well-suited to capturing the sensory effects of the drug-state (Cook, 2014, p. 198). However, his attempts to produce a psychedelic film inspired by the drug-state ultimately ended in failure (Wolfe, 1968, pp. 136-137). Nonetheless, this notion that cinema and other audio-visual media are better suited to the depiction of psychedelic phenomena than literature has, as Church and Cook observe, since been acknowledged by multiple scholars (Church, 2018; Cook, 2014, p. 199).

Prior to Kesey's transition to filmmaking, avant-garde directors had, in the mid-1950s, already begun to capture the psychedelic aesthetic in their work. The first among them to do so was Kenneth Anger, whose 1954 film, *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* (Anger, 1954), conveys the sensory effects of the drug-state (Church, 2018). Subsequently, purveyors of "expanded cinema" such as Jordan Belson, Scott Bartlett, Standish Lawder, and James Whitney, developed a distinct model for the recreation of psychedelic effects, which incorporated various patterns, abstract visuals, and structures (Ramaeker, 2016). However, as avant-garde films rarely incorporate drug-use, their representations of the psychedelic experience are typically implied rather than explicitly referred to. Indeed, it is often the filmmakers themselves who define the aesthetic of their films as psychedelic. For example, both Anger and Belson acknowledge the influence of the psychedelic experience on their work (Church, 2018).

In 1959, the first feature film to depict both the use of a psychedelic by a character and their subjective experience of the drug-state was released (Lundborg, 2012, p. 389; Benschhoff, 2001, p. 34). *The Tingler* (Castle, 1959) was produced almost two decades after LSD was first synthesised. It was, however, ahead of its time, appearing as it did almost ten years before other filmmakers began depicting the sensory effects of the drug-state (Lundborg, 2012, p. 386). This later corpus of films, which belong to Benschhoff's LSD film microgenre, employed cinematic techniques influenced by earlier avant-garde works to depict the psychedelic drug-state (Benschhoff, 2001, p. 30). These films were released at

around the same time LSD reached the peak of its mainstream popularity in 1967 (Lundborg, 2012, p. 201).

Roger Corman's creative vision for the psychedelic experience in *The Trip* (Corman, 1967), which is the most significant of the LSD films released during this period, was influenced by various works of experimental art and avant-garde cinema (Powell, 2007, p. 67). The director also took LSD prior to making the film and many of its psychedelic sequences were influenced by his drug-state experience (Corman, 2016b). This practice of using psychedelics as inspiration for cinematic depictions of the drug-state is not uncommon: Otto Preminger also took LSD in the 1960s before making *Skidoo* (Preminger, 1968), and incorporated aspects of his experience into the film (Benshoff, 2001, p. 40); experimental filmmaker Alejandro Jodorowsky frequently used LSD as a creative tool (Fleming, 2017, p. 124); and, more recently, Gaspar Noé took ayahuasca before making *Enter the Void* (Noé, 2009) with the explicit intention of deriving images from the experience for his film (Noé, 2019, p. 1).

Many of the people who worked on *The Trip* were involved with the drug culture (Corman, 2016b). Its writer, Jack Nicholson, and two of its stars, Peter Fonda and Dennis Hopper, were part of a 1960s Hollywood counterculture that freely admitted to using various recreational drugs, including LSD (Benshoff, 2001, p. 36). In the 1950s, meanwhile, Cary Grant underwent psychedelic therapy and, in 1959, claimed LSD had helped him become a better person and improve his acting skills (Siff, 2015, pp. 99-100; Pollan, 2018, p. 157). Psychedelics have also been used by actors on set. For example, Jodorowsky administered psychedelics to the cast of *The Holy Mountain* (Jodorowsky, 1973) during filming (Fleming, 2020, p. 191). In a more recent example, Gaby Hoffman credits her use of mescaline while filming a peyote scene in *Crystal Fairy and the Magic Cactus* (Silva, 2013) with making her feel "totally present in the experience of the making of the movie" (Hoffmann, 2013).

In contrast to directors who used psychedelics as inspiration for their films, Terry Gilliam professes to have never taken any of these substances (Gilliam, 2020). Ironically, his 1998 adaptation of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* includes a sequence credited with being “one of the most convincing LSD hallucinations committed to film” (Lundborg, 2012, p. 395). Similarly, *Taking Woodstock* (Lee, 2009) has also been praised for its “very convincing recreation” of the psychedelic experience (Lundborg, 2012, p. 129) despite its director, Ang Lee, having never taken LSD (metrowebukmetro, 2009). Further, while Johnny Depp and Benicio del Toro deny accusations of being “high” on the set of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, the allegations allude to the intensity of their enactment of various drug induced states of consciousness (Gilliam, 2003c).

Several avant-garde filmmakers who made films in the 1960s were inspired by their LSD experiences. Indeed, some of these directors intended their work to be viewed in the psychedelic drug-state (Benshoff, 2001, p. 30). These films belong to the head film genre, which also includes movies identified by audiences as being pleasurably enhanced by the psychedelic experience. However, head films typically evoke the psychedelic state without making explicit reference to drug-use and often eschew narrative form in favour of an episodic structure that primarily focuses on visual and auditory effects. Further, the genre consists not only of avant-garde films, but several works of cult cinema (Benshoff, 2001, p. 31).

Jodorwosky encouraged viewers to watch his films while “high” (Fleming, 2020, p. 186). In America, screenings of his work attracted a predominantly “head” audience of “drug-taking and stoned counterculture cineastes” (Fleming, 2020, p. 183). Similarly, cinemagoers were provided with a pamphlet instructing them when to take LSD during the intermission of the “Sacred Mushroom Edition” of Kenneth Anger’s *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* (Anger, 1966) to enhance their viewing experience of its second half (Church, 2018). The visual effects of *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Kubrick, 1968), meanwhile, were not identified by its director as psychedelic, but nonetheless appealed to drug using

spectators.¹⁰ Similarly, animated films, many of which were made for children, also proved popular among head audiences (Benshoff, 2001, p. 32). Indeed, The Beatles' *Yellow Submarine* (Dunning, 1968) is an example of a cartoon film that was specifically designed to be viewed on psychedelics (Lundborg, 2012, p. 389). The connection that formed between cartoons and psychedelic visuals in the 1960s remains a fundamental aspect of popular culture (Lundborg, 2012, p. 389).

Since the turn of the millennium, there has been a resurgence of psychedelic aesthetics in mainstream films and music videos that broadly coincides with the psychedelic renaissance. Church lists several films released since 2004 that conform to a visual psychedelic aesthetic of digitally rendered complex fractal forms, distorted photorealistic images and a dazzling array of abstract, kaleidoscope images. Notably, in his list of films, he cites a mixture of those that do and do not feature explicit use of psychedelics. For example, *Renegade* (Kounen, 2004) incorporates the use of ayahuasca into its narrative, while *Annihilation* (Garland, 2018) does not refer explicitly to drugs (Church, 2018).

Aims and Objectives

This thesis aims to identify and analyse specific psychedelic phenomena in film and television representations of LSD experiences. In doing so it meets the following objectives:

1. Contextualise the film and television representations of LSD experiences using a framework of set and setting
2. Outline the aesthetics of psychedelic experience(s)
3. Intertextually identify and analyse the form and content of audio-visual representations of psychedelic aesthetics

¹⁰ Kubrick denies Leary's claim that he had taken psychedelic drugs prior to making the film. Lundborg, P. (2012) *Psychedelia: An Ancient Culture, A Modern Way of Life*. Stockholm: Lysergia.

4. In relevant examples, establish connections between the subjective conscious state of characters and the content of their psychedelic experiences
5. Determine which level of the experience represented phenomena pertain to
6. Interrogate character development as it relates specifically to their LSD experiences

Rationale and Scope

In the preface to the 2000 edition of *The Varieties of Psychedelic Experience*, Robert Masters warns against the future monopolisation of psychedelic research by psychiatrists. He outlines a vision for psychedelic studies that is multidisciplinary, encompassing the fields of psychology, philosophy, theology, anthropology, art, the sciences, and engineering (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. vii). This note of caution, written before the contemporary psychedelic renaissance began, remains significant as research into these substances continues to flourish in various academic disciplines. However, as the small number of publications addressing film and television representations of the psychedelic experience attests, this has not been the case in screen studies.¹¹

This thesis addresses a significant gap in the screen studies literature and makes an important intervention in the broader, multidisciplinary field of psychedelic studies. As Lana Cook observes, critical frameworks play an important role in developing scholarly and public understanding of the representations of psychedelic experience. This is significant, she explains, because the aesthetic technologies used to mediate sensory experience of the psychedelic drug-state play a role in shaping human perception and contribute to knowledge on both an individual and collective basis (2014, p. 33). However, like others who have written about psychedelic cinema, Cook does not focus entirely on

¹¹ The small body of existing literature is explored further in the literature review.

film. Indeed, her thesis is predominantly concerned with literature and also interrogates visual art (2014, p. 12).

Other scholars, such as Anna Powell, discuss psychedelic experience as part of a broader study of altered states of consciousness. Powell also employs a very specific philosophical framework to examine cinematic psychedelic experiences (2007, p. 6). In contrast to these studies, and others outlined in the literature review, this thesis focuses exclusively on film and television representations of the psychedelic experience. It employs an intertextual approach to identify specific psychedelic phenomena in various portrayals of the drug-state via an examination of the psychedelic literature. This is an original aspect of this thesis, which creates a unique body of knowledge that simultaneously enriches the understanding of screened psychedelic aesthetics and of the psychedelic experience itself.

This thesis does not claim to be definitive in its analysis of psychedelic aesthetics. Indeed, aside from two exceptions, its scope is limited to an examination of films and television shows that feature the use of LSD by characters whose subjective experiences of the drug-state are audio-visually represented. The decision to focus on the case studies selected was informed by various considerations, not least the distinctions between the phenomenology of different types of psychedelic experience, which were outlined earlier in this chapter. In contrast to other screen studies scholarship, which typically overlook these differences, this thesis takes a meticulous and exact approach to psychedelic aesthetics by focusing almost exclusively on LSD.¹² As LSD experiences feature in a

¹² Another scholar, Brystal Karber, also focuses on the use of just one psychedelic, psilocybin mushrooms, in an analysis of oppression and social inequality in two television shows. However, as explained in the literature review, her approach differs significantly from that taken by this thesis. Karber, B. (2021) *Transformative Devices: The Rhetorical Nature of Psychedelics in Television*. Master of Arts Masters, University of Colorado Colorado Springs.

Only Kevin Fisher explicitly distinguishes between the phenomenology of LSD and mushroom experiences. He does not, however, draw comparisons between the representation of these effects in analysis. While such a study might prove interesting, its undertaking requires fundamental knowledge about represented psychedelic experiences absent from the screen studies literature. Fisher, K. (2019) 'Altered Consciousness in Easy Rider and Altered States: A Historical and Phenomenological Analysis', in Poller, J. (ed.) *Altered Consciousness in the Twentieth Century*. Oxon, UK: Routledge, pp. 219-234.

substantial number of films and television shows, a vast array of phenomena are depicted by them, which are analysed in this study. The thesis also addresses two phenomena depicted in cinematic portrayals of a psilocybin experience and a DMT trip to ensure analysis is as comprehensive as possible. Further, this thesis does not address every film and television show that depicts an LSD experience, and its scope is instead defined by the phenomenology of the drug-state itself.

Arranged in order of their original theatrical release date, the 15 films that include LSD trips studied in this thesis are:

- *The Trip* (Corman, 1967)
- *The Love-Ins* (Dreifuss, 1967)
- *Skidoo* (Preminger, 1968)
- *Psych-Out* (Rush, 1968)
- *The Big Cube* (Davison, 1969)
- *Easy Rider* (Hopper, 1969)
- *Conspiracy Theory* (Donner, 1997)
- *SLC Punk!* (Merendino, 1998)
- *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (Gilliam, 1998)
- *Taking Woodstock* (Lee, 2009)
- *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (Chbosky, 2012)
- *The Bad Batch* (Amirpour, 2016)
- *Mad to Be Normal* (Mullan, 2017)
- *Acid Test* (Waldo, 2017)
- *Trip* (Oliver, 2017)

The connection Anna Powell draws between psilocybin, mescaline, and plant-based psychedelics in her analysis of a psychedelic mushroom experience in *Altered States*, meanwhile, is not supported by the psychedelic literature. Powell, A. (2007) *Deleuze, Altered States and Film*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press.

The five television shows, arranged in order of the date their first episode was broadcast, are:

- *House* (Fox Network, 2004-2012)
- *Mad Men* (AMC, 2007-2015)
- *Ray Donovan* (Showtime, 2013-2020)
- *Aquarius* (NBC, 2015-2016)
- *You* (Netflix, 2018-)

The two films that feature use of a psychedelic other than LSD are *Tenacious D in The Pick of Destiny* (Lynch, 2006), which includes a psilocybin mushroom trip, and *Enter the Void* (Noé, 2009), which depicts a DMT experience.

This thesis defines characters as analogues of human beings.¹³ In each of the films and television shows examined, a psychedelic substance is consumed by a character, or characters, whose subjective experience of the drug-state are also depicted. The use of drugs by characters establishes the concomitant depiction of sensory effects as psychedelic without the need to refer to extratextual sources. This enables the study to focus exclusively on the identification and analysis of specific psychedelic phenomena. It also underpins the interrogation of set and setting in the context of aesthetic analysis. This is significant because psychedelic experiences are, as previously explained, very individual (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 6), and determined to a large extent by set and setting (Lundborg, 2012, p. 161; Leary, Metzner and Alpert, 2008, p. 84; Hartogsohn, 2020, p. 1). In the chapters that follow, phenomena are discussed with reference to characters' personality, mood, emotions, and cognitive states, and the environments in which their experiences unfold. Further, the psychological study of character is integral to one aspect of the study's originality, which is its extensive analysis of the higher realms of the

¹³ This definition of character is outlined further in the literature review.

psychedelic drug-state. The focus on characters as human analogues also provides scope for an investigation of the transformative impact of some psychedelic experiences.

Structure

Eschewing a case study led approach, this thesis is structured around the phenomenology of psychedelic experience. The next chapter introduces the small body of existing work focused on screened psychedelic aesthetics and identifies a significant gap in the existing literature. As this chapter outlines, the methodological and theoretical approaches applied to representations of the drug-state are diverse. However, what is absent from the literature is a broad study that addresses the film and television representations of specific psychedelic phenomena. Typically, assumptions are made about psychedelic aesthetics, which do not reflect their variety and specificity. The review of existing literature is followed in the same chapter by an overview of the methodological framework that has been developed specifically for use in this thesis. The analytical approach is comprised of a neoformalist led intertextual framework, which is applied to the psychedelic drug-states experienced by characters.

The third chapter uses a framework informed by set and setting to introduce the 23 case studies examined in this thesis. It places the use of psychedelics by characters in each of the films and television shows into context. Characters are introduced as analogues of human beings with reference to relevant factors of set and setting. The historical sociocultural contexts of both production and narrative settings are also outlined. In the four subsequent chapters, representations of psychedelic phenomena are analysed. Chapters four, five, and, six interrogate sensory level experiences which, as Master and Houston observe, consist of such a large variety of phenomena that it is impossible to catalogue them all (2000, p. 177). Chapter four focuses specifically on visual perception, which has been described as the “main representational mode” of the psychedelic experience (Lundborg, 2012, p. 437). The fifth chapter examines miscellaneous nonvisual

phenomena, including the auditory effects of the drug-state, tactile experiences, synaesthesia, and the transformative impact of LSD upon cognition and emotions. Chapter six, meanwhile, addresses the temporal dimension of psychedelic experiences. This extensive coverage of sensory phenomena, which encompasses a variety of senses, makes a significant contribution to the originality of this thesis.

The higher realms of the psychedelic experience and the two post-trip stages are addressed in chapter seven. The highest levels of the drug-state are less frequently represented in films and television shows and are rarely discussed by screen studies scholars. Consequently, the extensive analysis of non-sensory level phenomena undertaken by this thesis is another original aspect of its scope. The chapter is organised into sections arranged sequentially in accordance with Lundborg's schematic (figure 1.1). The first two sections examine the recollective-analytic and symbolic stages respectively, while peak experience, ego-loss, and the transcendental level are grouped together in part four. The chapter closes with a discussion of the two post-trip stages. Finally, the eighth chapter concludes the thesis by reviewing its findings and proposing potential areas of future research that sit within the traditional confines of film and television studies and beyond.

2. Literature Review

This literature review is split into two parts. In the first half, existing studies of various types of audio-visual depictions of the psychedelic experience are introduced and interrogated, while in the second the analytical framework employed by this thesis is developed and outlined. This thesis contributes to a burgeoning field of study that consists of a relatively small body of academic work which is, nonetheless, characterised by its methodological diversity. While several studies engage with the psychedelic literature, the analysis of specific drug-state phenomena is typically vague and somewhat haphazard. One of the reasons for this is the relatively small scale of the existing studies, none of which exceed the length of a journal article or book chapter. Further, several of the scholarly works take a multidisciplinary approach, which reduces their focus on audio-visual representations of the psychedelic experience. This thesis, by contrast, combines neoformalism with intertextuality to meticulously interrogate depictions of psychedelic phenomena in the first extensive analysis of this subject to be undertaken within the discipline of screen studies.

Screening Psychodelia: Existing Perspectives

Avant-garde Film and Expanded Cinema

In a 2016 essay, Paul Ramaeker observes that most studies of psychodelia typically ignore experimental film. Further, aside from William Wees's *Light Moving in Time* (1992), which he identifies as an exception, Ramaeker also observes a tendency among contemporary scholars to underplay the role of psychedelic experimentation in the production of avant-garde cinema (2016). Wees, whose book is cited by several of the publications reviewed in this chapter, compares fundamental aspects of abstract films to the forms, colours, and patterns of movement associated with LSD induced "hallucinations" (1992, p. 127). Wees was not, however, the first to make this type of comparison and, as David Church notes, Jonas Mekas, Sheldon Renan, and Gene

Youngblood were foremost among the scholars who chronicled the avant-garde interplay of films and drugs in experimental films of the 1960s (2018). Indeed, Youngblood's *Expanded Cinema* (1970) has influenced many of the studies discussed in this literature review.

The "expanded cinema" identified and defined by Youngblood is placed by Ramaeker into the broad context of American avant-garde cinema of the 1960s.¹⁴ Ramaeker's analysis encompasses not only the psychedelic experience, but psychedelia as a cultural phenomenon that influenced American experimental filmmakers during the period. He identifies two strands of avant-garde filmmaking, one of which is expanded cinema, the other a corpus of films that derive their symbolic and ritualistic representations of the LSD experience from a "Romantic" strain in American experimental film. The makers of avant-garde films employed various strategies, techniques, and experimental film practices to cinematically interpret and translate the psychedelic experience. Ramaeker focuses on these traditions of experimental filmmaking to trace the influence of the psychedelic counterculture on filmic adaptations of psychedelia's imagery (2016).

The creators of expanded cinema were not only directly influenced by their psychedelic experiences, they also used their work to attempt to connect to "some larger consciousness" (Ramaeker, 2016). In this context, it is interesting to note that Youngblood, who introduces the concept of expanded cinema, only uses the term psychedelic six times in his book. However, he also considers psychedelic and synaesthetic to mean the same thing and deploys the latter term more frequently throughout his study (1970, p. 81).¹⁵ In the book, which is a complex and experimental work, he defines expanded cinema not as a

¹⁴ The definition of the term expanded cinema has evolved over time. Broadly defined, it refers to the belief that the possibilities of cinema cannot be limited by either its physical medium or exhibition practices. Consequently, various types of multiscreen films, multimedia performances, light artworks, moving-image environments and installations, kinetic artworks, videos, holographic art, and computer-generated images have all been described as forms of expanded cinema. Walley, J. (2020) *Cinema expanded: Avant-Garde Film in the Age of Intermedia*. New York: Oxford University Press.

¹⁵ This thesis does not employ Youngblood's definition of synaesthesia, which is introduced, defined, and interrogated in chapter five.

collection of films, but a “process of becoming” (1970, p. 41). This type of cinema is, Ramaeker explains, more concerned with processes of thought and perception than it is with imagination. That is, filmmakers did not attempt to recreate physical reality in their work, but the contents of their own consciousness, mental processes, and those “expanded visions of the infinite” that are occasionally perceived during LSD experiences (2016).¹⁶

As this brief introduction to expanded cinema attests, Youngblood’s approach is primarily concerned with the potential for film to transform consciousness. Indeed, *Expanded Cinema* is an eccentric and esoteric text, which encompasses a broad range of perspectives. It is comprised of diverse speculations that range from assertions about the evolution of film language and its liberation from the influence of the dramatic form (1970, p. 75), to a conceptual vision of the future in which computers function as sublime aesthetic devices that have the capacity to produce a consciousness expanding experience in response to the artist’s emotional state (1970, p. 189). While the latter might be closer to fruition now than it was when Youngblood wrote his book, such a device is yet to be conceived. The diversity of the study is also highlighted by his inclusion of interviews with filmmakers, such as Jordan Belson, who acknowledges the influence of LSD and peyote experiences on his work (1970, p. 174).

Ramaeker summarises the aspects of Youngblood’s project that are most relevant to this thesis. Expanded films are typically dominated by visual and aural patterns, and abstract visual designs and structures, which Ramaeker compares to the experience of psychedelic transcendence. Thus, while these films rarely incorporate discernible human figures, let alone fully realised characters, he connects the aesthetic of expanded cinema to the psychedelic drug-state. He also identifies LSD experiences and Eastern mysticism as

¹⁶ The concept of expanded cinema evokes the ideas developed by one of Youngblood’s contemporaries, Marshall McLuhan, who claimed the proliferation of electric media, particularly television, awoke viewers’ senses to total depth involvement. For this reason, McLuhan considered the universal experience of television audiences to be analogous to the inner trip taken by the LSD user. McLuhan, M. 1971. Playboy Interview: Marshall McLuhan. In: Norden, E. (ed.) *The Playboy College Reader: Voices of Concern*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovic, Inc.

the primary sources of these audio-visual forms and, more specifically, connects the kaleidoscopic mandala patterns in James Whitney's *Lapis* (1966) to the spirals, tunnels, and cobwebs frequently described in psychedelic trip reports analysed by Masters and Houston (2016).¹⁷

Ramaeker's discussion of the American Romantic trend in avant-garde filmmaking focuses primarily on Kenneth Anger's *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome* (Anger, 1954/1966) and Ron Rice's *Chumlum* (Rice, 1964). He acknowledges that both directors use symbolism derived from mystical and spiritual traditions, which invoke Timothy Leary's philosophy of psychedelic liberation. While he identifies the most explicit references to drug use in *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome*, he also refers to psychedelic effects described by Masters and Houston, and the lattice patterns described by Wees, in his analysis of *Chumlum* (2016). Indeed, this explanation, and the references he makes to the psychedelic literature in discussion of *Lapis*, verge on the intertextual. However, as this is not the purpose of his study, he identifies only a small number of psychedelic phenomena in these films. Nonetheless, his tentatively intertextual approach indicates the potential for a more extensive intertextual study of avant-garde films, which is outlined in the concluding chapter of this thesis as a potential area of future study.

Psychedelic Genres: The LSD Film and the Head Film

Benshoff's "The Short Lived Life of the Hollywood LSD Film" is the first screen studies publication devoted to an analysis of mainstream psychedelic cinema. Its focus is the "historically specific microgenre" he refers to as both the LSD film and Hollywood LSD film (2001, p. 29), which, he observes, "flourished" in the late 1960s (2001, p. 31). Benshoff describes the LSD film as both a microgenre and a subgenre of the head film

¹⁷ In contrast to this thesis, which frequently refers to Masters and Houston's *The Varieties of Psychedelic Experience*, Ramaeker engages solely with another of their studies, the citation for which is Masters, R. E. L. and Houston, J. (1968) *Psychedelic Art*. New York: Grove Press.

(2001, p. 31). He notes that LSD films feature for at least a portion of their runtime “a cinematically constructed sequence reminiscent of an acid trip” (2001, p. 32).¹⁸ While not all of these films feature use of the substance itself, Benschhoff nonetheless explores their cinematic representations of the effects of LSD on characters and spectators alike (2001, pp. 31-32). He further defines the parameters of the genre through an interrogation of advertising campaigns, critical reviews, interviews, and personal memoirs (2001, p. 29).

In a 2004 essay, Mark Gallagher defines what he refers to as the “psychedelic film” more broadly than either the head film or LSD film to encompass “the countercultural sensibility discernible in many 1960s and 1970s commercial and experimental films, the iconography of the head movie, and the narrative experimentation and nonlinearity borrowed from the U.S. and European avantgarde” (2004, p. 162). Given the breadth of this definition, the name Gallagher gives to the genre is something of a misnomer. That is, his rationale for the genre is not, as the label he applies to it might suggest, specifically related to psychedelics. Indeed, the parameters of its scope are arbitrarily defined to enable discussion of films that would otherwise fail to meet the more prescriptive criteria of either the head movie or LSD film (2004, p. 162).

Gallagher discusses a variety of films, including *Zabriskie Point* (Antonioni, 1970), which are not classified as either head movies or LSD films. Interestingly, the primary focus of his analysis, *Performance* (Cammell and Roeg, 1970) (2004, p. 162), is included in Benschhoff’s provisional filmography of 1960s Hollywood LSD films (2001, p. 42). This is noteworthy because the film features psilocybin mushrooms rather than LSD. Thus, while Benschhoff is explicit about his inclusion of some films that were appreciated as head films, but which did not incorporate LSD use into their narratives (2001, p. 42), the

¹⁸ The term “acid” is an enduring popular American slang term for LSD, which was first coined in the 1960s. The psychedelic counterculture invented various other terms, including “acidhead” to describe frequent users of LSD, hit and tab to denote a single dose of the drug, and words such as groovy and heavy, which describe pleasurable and emotionally fraught experiences respectively. Stevens, J. (1987) *Storming Heaven: LSD and the American Dream*. New York: Grove Press/Atlantic Monthly Press.

inclusion of *Performance* indicates that the title he attributes to the genre is something of a misnomer.¹⁹ The too wide parameters of Gallagher's psychedelic film genre, and Benshoff's inclusion of films in his that feature psychedelics other than LSD, precluded the selection of case studies from either for analysis in this thesis.

Nomenclature is highly significant when discussing psychedelics. Benshoff's inclusion of *Performance* in his filmography of LSD films suggests a better name for the genre is the psychedelic film. Indeed, both Lana Cook and David Church use this more appropriate term when citing Benshoff's article (2014, p. 245; 2018). Ironically, Benshoff fails to use the word psychedelic in his article, and instead refers to LSD variously as "a synthetic hallucinogen" of "psychotomimetic" effects (2001, p. 29), and a "psychotropic" drug (2001, p. 32). As noted in the introduction, while LSD continues to be referred to as both a psychotomimetic drug and a hallucinogen, psychedelic is the more commonly used and "etymologically accurate" term for this category of substances (Pollan, 2018, p. 19). The term psychedelic is thus conspicuous by its absence from Benshoff's study.

The description of LSD as a psychotomimetic substance is also inconsistent with Benshoff's description of the effects of the drug, which he identifies as increased richness and intensity of sight, sound, taste, smell, and the blurring, enhancement, or distortion of sensory input. He explains that some of these psychedelic phenomena are depicted in films by superimpositions and dissolves, saturated, polarised, and solarised colours, filters and gels, and sound design. He does not, however, correlate each cinematic technique to specific psychedelic phenomena. Consequently, while he describes the use of these film practices in opening scene of *Head* (Rafelson, 1968), he does not specify what it is about the sequence that is psychedelic (2001, p. 32). Similarly, he acknowledges that props, polarised colour, and dissolves are used to represent an LSD experience in *Skidoo*

¹⁹ In a less relevant but nonetheless noteworthy discrepancy, Benshoff also includes films released in 1975 and 1977 despite also stating that the genre drew to a close between 1969 and 1971. Benshoff, H. M. (2001) 'The short-lived life of the Hollywood LSD film.(lysergic acid diethylamide)', *Velvet Light Trap*, (47).

(Preminger, 1968) but without detailing which aspects of the drug-state they depict (2001, p. 40).

Elsewhere in the article, Benschhoff identifies the use of colour inserts in early black and white LSD films as a “key semantic element” of the genre. He does not, however, specify what about this aesthetic is psychedelic (2001, p. 34). Similarly, while he identifies the influence of avant-garde visual style on the representation of the LSD experience in *The Trip* (Corman, 1967), he does not identify individual films or provide further details of their stylistic conventions (2001, p. 36). However, his identification of the crawling undulation of patterned surfaces and afterimage trailing in specific films is more exact, though analysis is limited to a description thereof (2001, p. 33). His assessment that it has proven difficult for filmmakers to “duplicate” the cognitive aspects of psychedelic experience on screen (2001, p. 33), meanwhile, ignores the intimate connection between cognition, emotion, and sensory response that is a facet of the psychedelic experience (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 92).

In an analysis of a scene in *The Trip*, Benschhoff describes the alternating use of slow motion and freeze-frame photography in tandem with montage images which, he concludes, represents the LSD effect of time passing slowly while the mind is simultaneously flooded with ideas (2001, pp. 32-33). This scene, which takes place on the Sunset Strip towards the end of the film, is analysed for its representation of a different psychedelic effect in the sixth chapter of this thesis. These examples demonstrate that, contrary to Gallagher’s assertion that Benschhoff deals “explicitly and thoroughly” with representations of psychedelic drug use (2004, p. 162), further research of the type undertaken by this thesis is required.

Deleuze and Affect

Benschhoff concludes his essay with two open questions, the answers to which sit outside the scope of not just his article, but the discipline of film studies as it is

traditionally defined. He asks: 1. Do LSD films have the same transformational effect on brain chemistry as the drug itself? 2. How does watching an LSD movie in the psychedelic state impact upon the viewer's neurochemical processes? (2001, p. 41). Question one has long been the concern of psychedelic filmmakers. For example, Alejandro Jodorowsky believed his films to be analogues of psychedelic drugs (Fleming, 2020, p. 183), while Gaspar Noé aimed to induce altered states of consciousness among the viewers of his film *Enter the Void* (Noé, 2009) (Brown and Fleming, 2015, p. 127). The Deleuzian approach to affect outlined in this section aligns with this perspective. That is, William Brown and David H. Fleming assert that Anna Powell's Deleuzian analytical model gives credence to Noé's claim that *Enter the Void* might leave its viewers "stoned" (2015, p. 127).

Powell's 2007 book, *Deleuze, Altered States and Film*, is the first to apply a Deleuzian approach to psychedelic films. The study aims to provide insight into the cinematic experience of "alterity" triggered by what she describes as a unique collection of films (2007, p. 4). She selects case studies from among films examined by Deleuze, and a mixture of other experimental works and successful mainstream cinematic releases (2007, p. 5). Her work, which contributes to the "under-researched" field of altered states (2007, p. 4), remaps the film experience as an altered state via her application of an approach derived from the works of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (2007, p. 1). She draws upon the aesthetic parallels between film and altered states of consciousness to explain how movies both represent and induce altered states (2007, pp. 10-11). Further, she defines aesthetics using Guattari's definition of them as "*affective contamination*" (Guattari qtd in Powell, 2007, p. 2).

Powell employs the Deleuzian and Deleuze-Guattarian definition of the term affect to analyse altered states films, the affective properties of which, she asserts, induce altered states among their spectators. She claims that editing techniques contribute to this "primal cinema of affect" by disrupting "spatial conventions of linear time" (2007, p. 3). She also details other cinematic techniques, including the aesthetic and affective qualities of special

effects, to convey a sense that individual encounters with film are unique. However, she also employs a variety of methods that enable her to respond to the distinct qualities of individual movies and an array of concepts. This approach, which she describes as eclectic, connects a diverse range of subject areas, including psychology, philosophy, aesthetics, film studies and cultural history. In some sections, she separates theoretical discussion from textual analysis, while in others she combines affects and concepts (2007, p. 5). This flexibility enables her to interrogate the film experience without abandoning an investigation of its function as, for example, political allegory (2007, p. 8).

In the first part of the book's second chapter, Powell focuses specifically on the psychedelic experiences of characters in three films. She analyses the films using a Deleuze-Guattarian model of pharmacoanalysis to interrogate their "intoxicant cluster of images, music, editing and other stylistic techniques" (2007, pp. 54-73). The saturated colours and light, perceptual distortions of motion and speed, pulsating images that flow in and out from a central light source, lattices, geometric forms, kaleidoscopic effects, and various other images that transform and merge, which she identifies in *The Trip*, exemplify what she refers to as "the narcotic properties of cinematic *style*" (2007, pp. 67-68). However, it is unclear from her analysis what the specific narcotic properties to which she refers are. That is, while several of the traits described are often associated with the psychedelic experience, her analysis makes assumptions about both the drug-state and the reader's knowledge of it. This thesis, by contrast, takes a meticulous approach to analysis by referring to specific phenomena outlined in the psychedelic literature.

In her analysis of *The Trip*, Powell also ponders what an LSD experience might have looked like in the 1960s (2007, p. 67). She contextually frames her study of *Altered States* (Russell, 1980), which features the use of psychedelic mushrooms rather than LSD, by observing its artistic and cultural response to psychedelics (2007, p. 54). She also analyses its connection to the cultural capital of psychedelia and to descriptions of the drug-state (2007, p. 67). More specifically, she draws correspondence between the film's

images of fireworks, coloured lights and flowing forms and the hallucinatory form constants of rotating jewels, lightnings, comets and explosions described by the psychologist Heinrich Klüver (Powell, 2007, p. 60).²⁰ Powell's acknowledgement of the relationship between cinematic representations of the psychedelic experience and accounts of drug-state phenomena is, however, relegated to the periphery of a study focused primarily on cinematic perception and film's capacity to alter consciousness (2007, p. 8).

Powell distinguishes her methodology from the structuralist approach used by other scholars interested in avant-garde film audiences. She contends that experimental films designed to derange the senses do not lend themselves to this type of problem-solving analysis (2007, p. 8). However, there are more significant issues with Powell's Deleuzian approach, which produce unfounded assertions about the capacity for cinematic techniques, such as those derived from expanded cinema, light-shows, and abstract animations, to induce among audience members both "hallucinogenic sensation" and a form of "contact high" (2007, pp. 66-67). Powell does not define either of these phenomena and it is unclear from her analysis how the techniques cited would cause a film spectator to experience either. This is a common failure of a Deleuzian approach that relies on the concept of a constructed of "ideal" viewer, whose experience of affect is assumed rather than analysed.

Powell's analysis of *Easy Rider* (Hopper, 1969) further illustrates this point. Discussing the film's LSD scene, she states that the use of blacked out footage invites interactive projection, while white inserts dazzle the viewer by overstimulating their optic nerves, which diminishes analytical thought (2007, p. 72). There are two things to note about this observation: first, she does not identify which aspects of the psychedelic experience either interactive projection or the inhibition of analytical thought pertains to; secondly, contrary to Powell's suggestion, it seems unlikely that a shot of the winter sun

²⁰ See Klüver, H. (1966) *Mescal, and Mechanisms of Hallucinations*. University of Chicago Press.

would be capable of overstimulating a viewer's optical nerves. This thesis takes a different approach to analysis, which is evidence based and focused on aesthetics rather than audience experience.

Brown and Fleming apply Powell's Deleuzian analytical framework to *Enter the Void* (2015, p. 127). According to the authors, the film's "psychedelic visuals" make it "an aesthetic landmark" (2015, p. 133). Powell's methodology is applied to the representation of psychedelic visions of "arborescent growths" that are experienced by the protagonist during a DMT trip, and to the film's "affective hallucinogenic *mise-en-scène*" (2015, p. 127). However, their analysis of the aesthetic of the DMT trip makes few references to the psychedelic literature. Indeed, they only make one comparison between the drug user's initial movement upwards and outwards to an account of Noé's personal experience with ayahuasca, and to psychedelic trip reports written by Alexander Shulgin (Brown and Fleming, 2015, p. 136).²¹

With reference to Powell's study, they conclude that *Enter the Void* alters the consciousness of its viewers by stimulating a contact high (2015, p. 127). In doing so, they argue that the film exemplifies cinema's ability to stupefy audiences by challenging the security of their sense of being (2015, p. 124). In another study, Fleming cites Powell again and reiterates the potential for viewers to experience a contact high while viewing what he refers to as "extreme cases" of drug films such as *The Trip* and *Easy Rider* (Fleming, 2017, p. 120). Fleming also employs a Deleuzian approach to the head films of Alejandro Jodorowsky in two book chapters. In the first, the influence of Deleuze is palpable in his examination of the director's approach to cinematic aesthetics and their capacity to stimulate thoughts and feelings among the films' spectators (2020, p. 184); in the second, he reiterates the capacity of film to function as a perception altering drug (2017, p. 120).

²¹ See Shulgin, A. and Shulgin, A. (1997) *Tihkal: The Continuation*. Berkeley, CA: Transform Press.

These studies fail to clarify exactly what a cinematic contact high is or how it is experienced by audiences. This highlights an inherent weakness in the Deleuzian model, which is rarely acknowledged by the various scholars who employ it. Consequently, while the approach is frequently used to analyse psychedelic films, its flaws preclude its use in the meticulous study of aesthetics undertaken in this thesis. Nonetheless, in “The “Pill Films” of Alejandro Jodorowsky: Expanding the Head Film into the Cinematic Body”, Fleming does touch upon the production and screening contexts of Jodorowsky’s films to determine their relevance to audiences of the period (2020, p. 184). Further, he also takes inspiration from Deleuze to undertake a “philosophical and aesthetic investigation” of Jodorowsky’s 1970s oeuvre (2020, p. 183). In doing so, he examines the director’s “deterritorialised, existential outlooks” and their role in shaping the unconventionally constructed characters that typify his films (2020, p. 184). Thus, while affect theory is not employed by this thesis, this aspect of Fleming’s use of the Deleuzian method has proven somewhat instructive to the analytical framework developed in the second section of this chapter.

Phenomenology and Reception

In the introduction to this thesis, the generic parameters of the head film were outlined with reference to Jodorowsky, who encouraged audiences to view his films while in the psychedelic state (Fleming, 2020, p. 186). In a 2018 essay, David Church argues that a film’s intended reception context, as defined by its director, constitutes a “lost” research method. He speculates that the experimental use of psychedelic drugs to recreate these “pharmacologically altered conditions” would allow scholars to better understand the impact of psychedelic cinema on historical audiences. He also poses a broader, open question about the potential use of psychedelics in film studies as a novel methodological tool which, properly applied, may produce answers to “phenomenological questions about specialised varieties of film interpretation” (2018).

Church does not, however, propose this methodology in isolation, and contemplates the reciprocity of drug and cinema with reference to both Benshoff and Powell. His essay addresses both questions posed by Benshoff in his article, which were outlined earlier, and Powell's assertion about the capacity of film to induce a contact high among its viewers. Further, he also refers to the claim made by Brown and Fleming that films have a similar stupefying effect on their viewers as psychedelics do their users. Where Church's approach differs to previous scholarship, however, is in its recognition of the need for these questions and assumptions to be tackled with a rigorously designed research method. Indeed, while he does not provide an extensive list of psychedelic effects, or how they are represented, he does explicitly acknowledge the unique, individual nature of the drug-state, which is evidenced by the wide ranging content of trip reports (2018).

The prohibitive legal status of psychedelics is acknowledged by Church as a barrier to an otherwise a promising line of inquiry. Indeed, findings from a tentative investigation of anonymously written accounts of intoxicated viewings of *Enter the Void* are, by his own admission, provisional at best. He also identifies other potential issues a scholar might encounter were they to administer psychedelics within a properly defined research context. During the psychedelic experience, he notes, the viewer might find it impossible to focus on a single aspect of the film's aesthetic for a substantial period of time, or it may become difficult to interpret the movie in its entirety. Further, from a practical perspective, the psychedelic drug-state might diminish the subject's ability to take coherent notes. Nonetheless, as contemporary attitudes toward recreational drug-use continue to evolve, an opportunity to undertake what he considers to be a necessary project, which would shift the balance in film studies away from a predominant focus on aesthetics, might arise in the not-too-distant future (2018). Indeed, such opportunities are explored further in the conclusion of this thesis.

Church acknowledges an overabundance of film scholarship focused on psychedelic aesthetics. However, the academic literature to which he refers is notable for

its emphasis on avant-garde films which, he observes, have been the subject of numerous formal analyses. These films are very different to the “mainstream narrative” movies he also identifies as examples of the “digital-era” resurgence of psychedelic aesthetics. In the essay, Church includes a list of exemplars, the first of which was released in 2004, that do and do not feature explicit use of psychedelics by characters. However, other than brief mention of abstract and kaleidoscopic imagery, and digitally rendered complex fractal forms and distorted photorealistic images, he does not specify what the features of this psychedelic aesthetic are. Indeed, he implicitly identifies the need for further research into digital-era psychedelia by observing this area of study sits beyond the scope of his essay (2018). This thesis addresses this gap in the literature by investigating the aesthetics not of avant-garde cinema, but films and television shows that incorporate the use of psychedelics into their narratives.

Church describes his proposed methodology as “a phenomenology of drug-induced spectatorship” (2018). Kevin Fisher’s analysis of the psychedelic experiences induced by LSD in *Easy Rider*, and psychedelic mushrooms in *Altered States*, is also phenomenologically and historically oriented (2019, p. 219). However, the phenomenological approach he takes is very different to that outlined by Church. Fisher’s decision to focus on two “Hollywood” films was informed by their attribution of the psychedelic drug-state to characters who are explicitly identified as drug users. This approach enabled him to demonstrate cinema’s capacity to transcend “the limits of intersubjectivity” through an interrogation of its assumption of the consciousness of a fictional character, and to illustrate film’s unique capacity “to turn the visual consciousness of an Other inside-out onscreen, making it visible and inhabitable to the spectator” (2019, p. 219). Fisher’s observation that the cinematic “simulation” of altered states of consciousness lends itself to “to an experience of mediation that emulates a consciousness-altering substance” evokes, without explicitly referring to, Deleuzian theories of affect

(2019, p. 219). However, like the Deleuzian studies outlined above, he does not provide tangible evidence to support these claims.

Fisher also discusses the production of both films within their broad historical contexts. *Easy Rider*, he explains, was released during the height of the 1960s counterculture, when LSD use reached its peak. With reference to the broader historical context in which this film was made and released, he notes the significance of the demise of the Motion Picture Production Code (MPPC), which had, since the 1930s, restricted film representations of drug induced altered states of consciousness to madness and addiction. It was the demise of the MPPC, he explains, that enabled Hopper to portray drug use and the psychedelic experience with a greater degree of creative freedom than would have previously been possible (2019, p. 220).

Fisher also explains that in a post-MPPC America the directors of both *Easy Rider* and *Altered States* were free to associate psychedelics with religious experience and self-transformation. Further, he contextualises the use of psychedelics in both films by noting that the drug-state unfolds in the narrative present, which refuses characters a secure position outside of the psychedelic experience (2019, p. 220). These aspects of his study are more directly relevant to this thesis, which outlines the context in which the psychedelic experience unfolds in each case study. The latter point concerning the temporal orientation of the characters' psychedelic experience is elaborated upon in the sixth chapter of this thesis. Ultimately, however, the scope of Fisher's article is limited by its focus on just two films, which portray the effects of two different psychedelics.

Textual and Rhetorical Analysis

Writers, artists, and filmmakers concocted new languages, metaphors, and visual forms in response to their psychedelic experiences (Cook, 2014, p. 13). These varied creative practices, which are used to represent the altered states of psychedelic consciousness and perception, define "a tradition in American literature, film, and visual

art” referred to by Lana Cook as “the psychedelic aesthetic” (2014, pp. 11-12). Cook describes the emergence of this aesthetic in a variety of works, from written scholarship and confessional trip reports to narrative forms, performances, visual artworks, and films, each of which share a thematic interest in consciousness and are comprised of stylistic combinations of realistic and fantastical forms. She identifies the remixing of, and borrowing from, modernist modes, genres, and tradition as one of its key features (2014, pp. 19-20).

Cook’s analysis focuses on the specific historical period of “the long 1960s” and its intersection with the emergence of postmodern philosophies (2014, p. 18). She argues that psychedelics taught American audiences “how to feel postmodern” and thus catalysed the nation’s “turn” to postmodernism. This was partly enabled by the thematic and formal representations of psychedelic experiences, which made postmodern abstractions of ontology and epistemology recognisable (2014, pp. 16-17). In cinema, the psychedelic aesthetic is identified for its contribution “to the postmodern deconstruction of visual and linguistic certainty” (2014, p. 203).²² The attention given to postmodernism is one of several ways her aesthetic project differs from the aims of this thesis.

The fourth chapter of Cook’s study, which focuses specifically on the psychedelic aesthetic in film, is the most relevant to this thesis. Like Ramaeker, who acknowledges the Romantic influence on the avant-garde films of Anger and Rice (2016), Cook notes the influence of the poetic and visual traditions of Romanticism, Surrealism, Expressionism, and Realism on the cinematic psychedelic aesthetic (2014, p. 200). She explains how filmmakers evolved this aesthetic by innovating special effects and experimenting with discontinuity editing and splicing, saturated lights, colour filters and special lenses (2014, p. 198). Her analysis focuses on Storm De Hirsch’s “9 minute avant-garde experiment in

²² Cook strays tantalisingly close to a potential avenue of research that intersects with Lundborg’s rejection of “lingo-centric theories” that “are not validated by the psychedelic experience”. Lundborg, P. (2012) *Psychedelia: An Ancient Culture, A Modern Way of Life*. Stockholm: Lysergia.

cinematic form” titled *Peyote Queen* (De Hirsch, 1965), Roger Corman’s *The Trip*, and Tobe Hooper’s *Eggshells* (Hooper, 1969), a trio of films she describes as “seemingly disparate” but which, she also contends, encapsulate the wider genealogy of the psychedelic aesthetic that emerged in American cinema during the 1960s (2014, p. 199).²³

A distinguishing feature of Cook’s analysis is her focus on Paul’s psychedelic quest in *The Trip*, which is comprised of medieval, Romantic, and carnival images (2014, p. 227). This approach contrasts with Anna Powell’s analysis, which, by her own admission, has limited interest in Paul’s psychedelic perception of Freudian gothic settings filled with torture and execution (2007, p. 68). Cook frames her interrogation of Paul’s experience with reference to the broader cultural contexts within which the psychedelic aesthetic emerged. She also observes the influence of various psychedelic motifs, literary tropes, cinematic references, and psychedelic scholarship on the content of his psychedelic visions (2014, p. 227). Most significant to this thesis is her examination of Paul’s “death trip”, which is represented by images of him being buried, entombed, and cremated in the context of “a medieval funeral feast and burial pyre” (2014, p. 227). In discussion of another scene, her assertion that Paul becomes estranged from traditional expectations of career and marriage to recondition his perception of value and relationships is also notable (2014, p. 228).

These examples are significant because they tacitly acknowledge the film’s representation of the higher realms of the psychedelic experience, which are analysed in chapter seven of this thesis. However, Cook’s discussion of the “death trip” is limited to a description of it as a “familiar trope” and her interpretation of its possible meaning is relegated to a footnote (2014, p. 227). She concludes her analysis of the second image sequence with the suggestion that Paul may have gained insight from it (2014, p. 229). She

²³ *Peyote Queen*, a film without characters or narrative, is defined by Cook as an example of Youngblood’s expanded cinema. Cook, L. (2014) *Altered states: The American psychedelic aesthetic*. Doctor of Philosophy PhD thesis, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, Northeastern University, Boston, Mass.

thus implies, without explicitly acknowledging, the potential for Paul to be personally transformed by this experience. Consequently, while Cook's findings suggest an appreciation of the various stages of the psychedelic experience, she does not explicitly refer to them or recognise their significance. Further, while this thesis examines some of *The Trip* scenes analysed by Cook, it takes a different approach to psychedelic aesthetics. That is, rather than identifying various cultural references and influences on depictions of the drug-state, this thesis identifies psychedelic phenomena via an intertextual analysis of films and television shows in conjunction with the psychedelic literature.

Jonathan Weinel explores a variety of stylised approaches to the representation of altered states of consciousness in audio-visual media (2018, p. 133). His acknowledgement of the influence of avant-garde cinema on the depiction of the psychedelic drug-state in mainstream films (2018, p. 123) recalls Benshoff's identification of the influence of avant-garde visual style on the representation of Paul's LSD experience in *The Trip* (2001, p. 36). His findings also align with Church's observation that the global resurgence in cinematic psychedelic aesthetics was catalysed by the evolution of computer-generated digital images, which have unleashed the full potential of avant-garde visuals (Church, 2018). Indeed, Weinel correlates advances in digital technology with what he deems to be gradual increases in the accuracy of film depictions of altered states (2018, p. 133). However, his study encompasses a broad variety of media, including a hallucinatory virtual environment installation at Burning Man festival, which he compares to "a spiritual DMT trip" (2018, p. 131). Consequently, his analysis of the technological developments in film does not extend beyond the 1998 release of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (Gilliam, 1998) (2018, p. 125).

Weinel's chapter is, nonetheless, a rare example of a study that interrogates both visual and acoustic elements of represented psychedelic experiences. For example, he mentions the special effects used to composite sound and image in 1960s feature films to render the psychedelic drug-state (2018, p. 123). He also notes the significance of the

development of computer computer-generated imagery (CGI) and new digital audio techniques since the 1990s in enabling filmmakers to produce enhanced representations of both visual and acoustic hallucinations (2018, p. 123). The latter is exemplified by his analysis of diegetic sound in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* which, he notes, represents hallucinatory impressions described by LSD study participants (2018, p. 125).²⁴ Significantly, however, does not specify which studies these data are derived from.

Though Weinel's approach to the audiovisuality of psychedelic aesthetics is commendably novel, the findings of his research are somewhat dubious. For example, his identification of the crackling sound of flames heard by Paul in *The Trip* as an auditory hallucination is inaccurate (2018, p. 124). This is explored further in chapter four, but it is worth noting at this juncture that Paul hallucinates neither the fire nor its sound, which manifest during an aesthetic image sequence perceived with eyes closed. Indeed, Weinel brands the sequence a "fantasy" but fails to make a distinction between open and closed eye experience (2018, p. 124). In his discussion of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, meanwhile, he identifies a drop in the pitch of a hotel desk clerk's voice and describes its transformation into "a demonic low-frequency rumble, layered with a hissing sound" (Weinel, 2018, p. 125). However, while the hissing sound is audible, there is no discernible change in pitch or frequency. Weinel's assertions are also referenced in footnotes to the analysis of this sequence in chapter four.

Aesthetics are also the focus of Ido Hartogsohn's speculative essay concerning psychedelic videos. He defines this corpus of media by their lavish displays of colour and effusive light, mandalas, tunnels, and kaleidoscopic imagery, and shifting contours and shapes. He also asserts that the content of these videos evokes multidimensionality, particularly via their portrayal of fractal forms and multi-perspectivism. Further, he

²⁴ Confusingly, Weinel incorrectly refers to Dr Gonzo as Duke, and Duke as Hunter S. Thompson, throughout his analysis of the *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. Weinel, J. (2018) 'Synaesthetic Overdrive'. New York: New York: Oxford University Press.

acknowledges the sound element of psychedelic videos and its development of the “inherently synaesthetic” quality of music videos. However, while he identifies a resemblance between video aesthetics and specific psychedelic visual phenomena, the examples he cites do not refer explicitly to drug use (2018).

Interestingly, despite being unable to identify a single academic publication focused on psychedelic videos, Hartogsohn does not acknowledge any of the studies discussed in this chapter. Nonetheless, by claiming psychedelic videos have the capacity to recreate the disorienting, harmonizing, and healing effects of psychedelics (2018), he evokes some of the speculative ideas about psychedelic media and its capacity to induce altered states of consciousness outlined in previous sections. Further, his proposal for a scientific study of aesthetics that encompasses cognitive psychology, evolutionary theory, religious studies, and computational theory (2018) is reminiscent of Powell’s mixed methods approach, which combines concepts derived from psychology, philosophy, aesthetics, film studies and cultural history (Powell, 2007, p. 5). The correspondences between Hartogsohn’s essay and the film studies literature demonstrates the applicability of screen studies methods to the analysis of psychedelic videos. However, such an analysis lies beyond the scope of this thesis, and it is identified as an area of future research in the conclusion.

Church identifies, but does not specify, countless music videos that demonstrate the contemporary resurgence of psychedelic aesthetics (2018). In a 2018 study, Jungsun Park and Kwangyun Wohn analyse the visual effects, narratives, and symbolic performances of specific music videos to identify their representations of psychedelic phenomena. The authors contend that the psychedelic drug-state is experienced not just at the level of the individual who takes psychedelics, but via its depiction in publicly shared artworks, films, games, and other media (2018). This assertion evokes Marshall McLuhan’s belief, expressed during a 1969 interview, that the inner trip of the LSD user is akin to the universal experience of television audiences (1971, p. 471).

Park and Wohn highlight the significance of digitally created images which, they contend, enable viewers to experience psychedelic phenomena in the form of bits and bytes. They conclude that the influence of psychedelia on music videos highlights the capacity for digital images to expand a viewer's sensory perception by facilitating their physical immersion in the experience (2018). While they do not refer to the film and television studies literature reviewed in this chapter, these assertions have much in common with claims made by other scholars, which were discussed in previous sections. Further, they utilise an approach that has more common with the analytical framework developed in this thesis than any of the existing film studies literature.

Park and Wohn analyse the form and content of music videos with reference to Masters and Houston's *The Varieties of Psychedelic Experience*. Significantly, and in contrast to other studies, they also refer explicitly to the different stages of the psychedelic experience. Indicative of their approach, they liken aspects of the video for Radiohead's *Daydreaming* (Anderson, 2016) to the forest setting frequently encountered on the symbolic level of the psychedelic experience (2018). However, while this approach corresponds to that undertaken in this thesis, their analysis and findings are limited by the different scope of their essay and its much shorter length. For example, in their analysis of the music video for Flume's *Never Be Like You* (Habicht, 2016), they refer to the psychedelic literature to identify drug-state distortions to the perception of body weight. However, it is difficult to discern from their descriptions of the video's visual content how it depicts the bodily sensations of melting, warping, and drifting they describe (2018). This thesis is more exact in its descriptions of film and television representations of specific psychedelic phenomena.

In the first study to focus solely on fictional television representations of psychedelics, Brystal Karber employs an analytical framework informed by feminist theory, queer theory, and critical race theory to explore portrayals of gender, race, and psychedelics in two shows (2021, pp. 4-5). Her approach, which considers the extent to

which the use of psilocybin by characters in *Betty* (HBO, 2020-2021) and *Dear White People* (Netflix, 2017-2021) enhances each television show's rhetorical goals (2021, p. iii), also addresses the ways in which media discourse shapes attitudes towards psychedelics (2021, pp. 2-3). Consequently, she locates her thesis in the broad context of media studies scholarship that examines the agenda setting role performed by news media, and among a body of academic work that interrogates the influence of media, culture, and societal factors on the phenomenology of the psychedelic experience itself (2021, p. 7). Like Hartogsohn, and Park and Wong, she does not refer to the film and television studies scholarship reviewed in this chapter.

Karber concludes from her analysis of characters before, during, and after their psychedelic experiences, that they are archetypally transformed by their use of psilocybin (2021, p. 82). She relates the audio-visual representation of psychedelic phenomena in *Dear White People* to a transformative psilocybin trip experienced by one of its characters (2021, pp. 71-72), and identifies the portrayal of psilocybin as a catalyst for personal change in *Betty* to be a product of contemporary understandings of psychedelics (2021, p. 57). Analysis of drug-state aesthetics is, however, largely omitted from her study. To a greater degree than Cook's study of aesthetics, Karber's thesis hints at the multileveled nature of psychedelic experience without explicitly referring to its different stages. Thus, while her interrogation of character transformation as a product of psychedelic experience is relevant to this thesis, her methodology differs significantly from that employed by this study, the scope of which is outlined in the next section.

Analytical Framework

This thesis follows Patrick Lundborg in refuting the "presumed ineffability" of psychedelic experience, which is a fallacy derived from the incorrect assumption that a written account of an experience should equate to the experience itself (2012, p. 434). It utilises written accounts of psychedelic phenomena to identify the depictions thereof in

films and television shows. In contrast to other studies reviewed in this chapter, this thesis does not investigate whether audio-visual media representations of the psychedelic experience induce altered states of consciousness. Instead, it employs a neoformalist-intertextual framework, outlined in this section, to analyse the form and content of represented psychedelic experiences.

This introduction to the study's analytical framework begins with an overview of neoformalism, which has been identified as the approach best suited to an analysis of psychedelic aesthetics. This neoformalist approach is also compatible with intertextual analysis, which is used to identify specific psychedelic phenomena in film and television depictions of the drug-state. Intertextuality is also outlined within the broader context of transtextuality, other relevant aspects of which are discussed where appropriate. Finally, as this thesis addresses the altered states of consciousness attributed to the subjective experience of characters, conceptual models of character are also outlined, along with an overview of how subjective states are signified in film and television narratives.

Neoformalism: An Aesthetic Approach

The Russian formalists, who were the first to apply formalist principles to the study of film (Thomson-Jones, 2008, p. 131), are cited by Kristin Thompson as a significant influence on her neoformalist approach to aesthetic analysis (1988, pp. 5-6). Formalism, which is defined by a "theoretical and critical emphasis on form", is used to analyse the structure of films construed as aesthetic objects (Thomson-Jones, 2008, pp. 131-132). Neoformalism, meanwhile, is a structural, phenomenological, and historical type of film analysis (Thomson-Jones, 2008, p. 140), which is defined as an approach to aesthetic investigation (Thompson, 1988, p. 5). According to Thompson, neoformalism is not, however, a method (1988, p. 6).

The distinction between method and approach outlined by Thompson is significant to the use of neoformalism in this thesis. Thompson explains that the use of a scholarly

approach enables the researcher to identify from a myriad of potential questions the most pertinent ones to ask of an artwork (1988, p. 7). She defines the method as the set of procedures used in analysis (1988, p. 3), which vary according to the questions raised by the approach (1988, p. 7). Neoformalism avoids what Thompson identifies as an “inherent” issue with the “self-confirming” method, which typically assumes each text is comprised of “a fixed pattern” that the analyst “goes in and finds” (1988, p. 7). In contrast to a method, neoformalism instructs the analyst to interrogate films as complex structures rather than as symptomatic texts (Thomson-Jones, 2008, p. 132). Further, as the neoformalist approach begets diverse and highly particular results (Thomson-Jones, 2008, p. 140), it lends itself to an analysis of represented psychedelic experiences that are as individual and multifaceted as the drug-state they depict.

Thompson’s aesthetic approach does, nonetheless, make assumptions about the traits shared by various artworks and the relationship between works of art and society.²⁵ It is the examination of these assumptions, she notes, that underpins the systematic approach to analysis (1988, p. 3). This is significant to this thesis, which systematically identifies and analyses psychedelic phenomena in numerous films and television shows. Indeed, an original aspect of the study is its eschewal of a case study led approach. Neoformalism not only provides a flexible and responsive approach to the broad variety of film and television representations of the psychedelic experience, it also rejects the distinction between “high” and “low” art in film (Thompson, 1988, p. 9). Thus, its applicability to all types of films, regardless of their critical appraisal (Thomson-Jones, 2008, p. 140), supports the research undertaken in this study, which interrogates a wide array of films and television shows.

Thompson contends that scholars often select films for analysis based upon their chosen method. That is, the critic selects a film in accordance with their chosen

²⁵ The assumptions neoformalism makes concerning “the general nature of art” enables Thompson to discuss various types of art without restriction. The assumptions it also makes about the processes by which audiences understand all types of art are, however, less relevant to this thesis. Thompson, K. (1988) *Breaking the Glass Armor: Neoformalist Film Analysis*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

methodology in the knowledge it will produce results in accordance with their preconceptions. Neoformalism, she notes, cannot be utilised in this way (1988, pp. 3-4). This is partly because it jettisons a communication model of art, which identifies specific types of media, such as television, as the means by which a message is transmitted from sender to receiver (1988, p. 7). This is the model used by Brystal Karber in her thesis, which she explicitly defines as an example of communication studies analysis (2021, p. 6). Indeed, she contends that all media creates meaning which, in turn, influences and instructs the people who consume it (2021, pp. 16-17). This thesis, which follows Thompson in rejecting this premise, is thus positioned in direct opposition to the analysis undertaken by Karber.

There is a tendency among communication studies scholarship, Thompson observes, to focus on the success with which the medium is adjudged to have conveyed its message to the audience (1988, p. 7). This is evident in Karber's assessment of how successfully her chosen case studies address issues of social inequality via their depiction of characters' use of psychedelics (2021, pp. 4-5). This thesis neither judges the successfulness with which the psychedelic experience is conveyed by films and television shows, nor the accuracy of its representation. Instead, it considers each psychedelic phenomenon depicted on its own terms and makes no prior assumptions about what each experience might mean within the broader narrative context of individual films and television shows. A neoformalist approach thus enables and supports a meticulous intertextual analysis of audio-visually represented psychedelic experiences.

This thesis analyses the form and content of film and television depictions of the psychedelic drug-state. It is significant, then, that film formalists dismiss the aesthetic relevance of the distinction between form and content (Thomson-Jones, 2008, p. 131). Indeed, while many formalists deny the aesthetic significance of content, neoformalists treat film as an integrated system that does not privilege the analysis of form at the expense of an examination of content. Consequently, the neoformalist critic remains committed to a

detailed analysis of the work, while also possessing a specialist understanding of its form (Thomson-Jones, 2008, p. 132). The elimination of the distinction between form and content is made possible by neoformalist assumptions about “defamiliarization and automatization” (Thompson, 1988, p. 11). These terms, and their significance to this study, are outlined below.

Defamiliarization, which is the Russian formalist term for the “aesthetic play” of art, is used by neoformalists to describe an artwork’s basic purpose or function (Thompson, 1988, pp. 10-11). An object must possess some degree of defamiliarization for it to be recognised as art. Even the most conventional artwork defamiliarizes ordinary reality via its purposeful arrangement of events in a way that differs from the real-world (Thompson, 1988, p. 11). Varieties of defamiliarization may result from the filmmaker’s manipulation and deformation of an array of materials (Thomson-Jones, 2008, p. 135). The originality of an artwork can be gauged by the extent to which it defamiliarizes not only reality, but the conventions established by previous works (Thompson, 1988, p. 11).

When a series of artworks repeatedly employ the same means, their defamiliarizing capacity is diminished. This results in the automatization of the artistic approach, which transforms what was previously defamiliarized into something familiar (Thompson, 1988, p. 11). Essentially, defamiliarization and automatization are inversely connected to one another. That is, when “an ordinary film” is scrutinised to the degree usually afforded its “more original” counterparts, its “automatized elements” are defamiliarized; conversely, automatization diminishes the defamiliarizing capacity of an unoriginal artwork (Thompson, 1988, p. 11). The symbiotic relationship between defamiliarization and automatization is indicative of the contextual factors that determine an artwork’s powers of defamiliarization (Thomson-Jones, 2008, p. 135). That defamiliarization may either strengthen or weaken over time (Thompson, 1988, p. 11) is illustrated by the example of a generic movie that is newly appreciated when viewed outside of its familiar context (Thomson-Jones, 2008, p. 135).

In this thesis, the degree of scrutiny afforded the various films and television shows, some of which might be considered conventional, enhances the defamiliarization of their represented psychedelic experiences. That is, in the context of narrative mainstream films and television shows, the representation of the psychedelic experience has a defamiliarizing effect because it involves at least some degree of manipulation or deformation of audio-visual materials. Further, as analysis in subsequent chapters explains, depictions of the LSD experience are largely unique and, even when the same category of experience or type of phenomena is recreated in multiple films and television shows, each portrayal is typically distinct. Thus, while each psychedelic experience examined signifies something specific about the drug-state, its aesthetic qualities do not become automatized.

It should be noted that the practice of viewing films outside of their familiar contexts has led to criticism of neoformalism as an “ahistorical” approach to analysis. It has been criticised for its failure to acknowledge the historicity of film form and the period specificity of stylistic tools available to filmmakers. However, as Thomson-Jones observes, there is nothing to prevent the neoformalist from taking a dynamic approach to the relationship between form and history (2008, p. 135). The films and television shows discussed in this thesis are not analysed without reference to the historical conditions of their production and reception. Further, they are also contextualised by their shared depictions of the psychedelic experience.

The Russian formalists have been criticised for taking an art-for-art’s-sake approach to film (Thompson, 1988, p. 8). Noël Burch, whose work is also credited as an influence on neoformalism (Thomson-Jones, 2008, p. 132), retrospectively dismissed his own formalist approach for its narrow scope, incompleteness, and avoidance of the significance of meaning in film analysis (1981, pp. vi-vii). To cite a specific example, he condemns his identification of 15 types of spatiotemporal shot-association as “useless” (1981, p. ix). However, just as Thompson defends the Russian formalists against their critics (1988, p. 8), Burch does concede that other scholars consider the findings of his

analysis to be useful (1981, p. vi). For example, Michael Frierson explains how Burch's study provided him with insight into the ways in which time and space are communicated via editing (2018, p. 82).

Frierson indicates how meaning can be derived from the formal analysis of a film. Indeed, neoformalists construe meaning as a formal component of art rather than its end result (Thompson, 1988, p. 12). Thus, while the neoformalist critic may emphasise meaning in their analysis, it is just one of numerous analytical tools available to them (Thompson, 1988, p. 13). Thompson identifies four types of meaning, which she defines as either denotative or connotative: denotative meanings, which are referential and explicit, are explicitly expressed by the film; connotative meanings, which are implicit and symptomatic, must be interpreted by the analyst (1988, p. 13).

Referential meaning describes the process by which a viewer recognises an artwork's inclusion of aspects of the real world. This type of meaning is evident in films that recount the life of an historical figure and are comprehended by the audience as doing so. Films also designate meaning explicitly by presenting abstract ideas unambiguously. That is, a film might make repeated reference to a concept such that it forms a pattern within its formal system. The viewer may or may not make sense of these ideas depending on their prior experience of artworks and the world. If, however, a scene does not appear to refer to something significant and its meaning is not explicitly identified, then interpretation is required to understand it. The implicit meaning of a scene may be suggested by its placement in the narrative and be revealed through an understanding of its relationship to other aspects of the film. Finally, the interpretation of a work's transcendence of its status as an individual text, and which identifies its reflection of real-world societal factors, pertains to symptomatic meaning (Thompson, 1988, p. 12).

Each level of meaning is relevant to the analysis of film and television representations of the psychedelic experience. In the case studies analysed, narrative content explicitly demarcates each scene and sequence as psychedelic via its portrayal of

the use of LSD, psilocybin, or DMT, by characters. The form and content of a sequence, meanwhile, is arranged to depict specific psychedelic phenomena. These meanings, which are both referential and explicit, can be said to justify the inclusion of stylistic elements that become the primary focus of the psychedelic scene (Thompson, 1988, p. 13). It is rare, however, for the text to explicitly identify the specific psychedelic phenomena it depicts. Typically, the analyst or viewer must interpret a sequence to identify which phenomenon a film or television show represents, and to determine on which level of the drug-state they occur. Further, the meaning derived from a psychedelic experience by a character might be explicitly stated, while on other occasions it must be interpreted based on the phenomena depicted.

Works of art are comprised of medium-specific techniques neoformalists refer to as devices (Thomson-Jones, 2008, p. 133). Different films mean different things because meaning, like any other single element or structure in an artwork, is a device. Other devices include camera movements, frame stories, repeated words, costumes, and themes. Each device used in the construction of a filmic system has equal potential to produce defamiliarization. The purpose of a device varies between works and, consequently, its function must be determined in various contexts (Thompson, 1988, p. 15). Typically, devices manipulate, transform, and structure cinematic materials, including *mise-en-scène*, sound, camera framing, editing, and optical effects, along with meanings accrued from real life and other artistic conventions (Thomson-Jones, 2008, p. 133). This thesis is neoformalist in its interrogation of the devices and cinematic materials used to construct representations of psychedelic experiences.

Thompson refers to the reason a device is included in a work as its “motivation” (1988, p. 16). Subsuming interpretation, the analysis of motivation and function are, she states, the analyst’s primary objective (1988, p. 21). The analyst who questions why an individual component occurs when it does interrogates its motivation (Thomson-Jones, 2008, p. 134). The use of different types of motivation in a single film, meanwhile, can

have a defamiliarizing effect (Thompson, 1988, p. 18). Three of the four basic types of motivation, which are compositional, realistic, and artistic, are outlined below (Thompson, 1988, p. 16). The fourth type, transtextual motivation, is of most relevance to this thesis and is introduced separately in the subsequent section.

Compositional motivation justifies the inclusion of devices required for the film's construction of narrative causality, space, or time. and also acts as a set of internal rules for the individual artwork (Thompson, 1988, p. 16). While not absent from depictions of psychedelic experiences, it has little relevance to the analysis undertaken in this thesis. Realistic motivation is culturally determined and draws upon two broad areas of knowledge: the first is that of everyday life, which the individual derives from their direct interactions with the world; the second is based upon the individual's awareness of how reality is aesthetically defined during specific historical periods. As a result of these two factors, realistic motivation may vary drastically within an individual work (Thompson, 1988, p. 17). While scholars invariably allude to the realism of represented psychedelic experiences (Benshoff, 2001, p. 33; Powell, 2007, p. 67; Weinel, 2018, p. 133), it is difficult to ascertain whether a depiction of the drug-state can be considered to be accurate. This line of inquiry, which sits beyond the scope of this thesis, is explored as an area of potential future research in the conclusion.

Artistic motivation, which is key in shaping an artwork's form, may be systematically foregrounded to produce parametric form (Thompson, 1988, p. 19). Devices that are repeated and vary across an entire work, including the use of colours, camera movements, and sonic motifs, are defined by Thompson as parameters (1988, p. 20).²⁶ A stylistic device is parametric if it is given sufficient independence from narrative function and motivation (Thompson, 1988, p. 247). It is possible to identify artistic motivation behind the use of every device in a film (Thompson, 1988, p. 19). In the context of the

²⁶ Thompson derives the term parameter from Burch, who uses it delineate the possibilities of the medium of film. Ibid.

study of psychedelic aesthetics, however, to do so would be to suggest that their depiction is independent from narrative function. That this is not the case is evidenced by the analysis undertaken in this thesis, which connects human behaviour and character development to the manifestation of specific drug-state phenomena.

Intertextuality

Thompson defines transtextual motivation as an artwork's appeal to the conventions of other artworks through its use of a device, which may or may not be recognised by an audience depending on their prior experience of it. In a film, this typically depends on the viewer's knowledge of genre, the actors involved, and the employment of similar conventions in other artworks. Such assumptions, which are often so pervasive as to be automatically accepted, may also be deliberately reversed or violated (Thompson, 1988, p. 18). Thus, transtextual motivation may be invoked in either a playfully or straightforward manner (Thompson, 1988, p. 19). While this definition of transtextual motivation is rather limited, significantly for this thesis, it connects neoformalism to transtextuality.

In *Palimpsests*, Gérard Genette defines transtextuality more broadly as everything that places a text into the context of its relationship, either explicitly or implicitly, with other texts (1997, p. 1). He also introduces the five categories of transtextual relationships, which are intertextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality, architextuality, and hypertextuality (1997, pp. 1-5). However, as they often relate to one another reciprocally, and their definitions overlap in various ways, he cautions against an interpretation of these categories as separate and absolute (1997, p. 7). Consequently, while the analysis undertaken in this thesis is predominantly neoformalist-intertextual, other forms of transtextuality are also employed where necessary.

Genette defines intertextuality as the "relationship of copresence between two texts or among several texts" (1997, p. 1). This relationship may be made explicit, in the form of

direct quotation, or it may manifest as implicit allusion, whereby the full meaning of an enunciation is revealed by the text's relationship with another text or other texts (1997, pp. 1-2). Mark Dunne expands this definition of intertextuality to include any instance in which an author or their text recognises, references, alludes to, imitates, parodies, or otherwise elicits the reader's familiarity with other texts (2001, p. 6). Significantly for this thesis, he explains how intertextuality is applicable to a variety of popular media, including films and television shows (2001, p. 2). Indeed, he also observes that audio-visual media exemplify the notion that all texts are, to some degree, intertextual (2001, p. 11). Further, as he also explains, different forms of media may also intertextually encounter one another, as demonstrated by the intertextual relationship that exists between films and the novels they adapt (2001, p. 71).

Dunne's definition of intertextuality also encompasses historical events and the sociological environment in which cultural phenomena take place (2001, p. 176). For example, documents of historical record comprise a form of textual history that may be intertextually deployed in fiction (2001, p. 59). However, Dunne also highlights the distinction between intertextual encounters and those texts he considers to be mimetic analogues or representations of real people, places and things (2001, p. 3). Consequently, despite acknowledging its increasing prevalence in contemporary American cultural discourse (2001, p. 2), he does not subscribe to "the postmodern sensibility that views every aspect of experience as a synchronous text" (2001, p. 16). Patrick Lundborg similarly dismisses "lingo-centric theories" of human existence which, he observes, "are not validated by the psychedelic experience" (2012, p. 435). Nonetheless, as the psychedelic drug-state can be described using human language (Lundborg, 2012, p. 434), it is possible to use literary sources in intertextual analysis. Indeed, this is the approach taken by this study.

This thesis traces intertextuality through the texts themselves and, to a lesser extent, their creators.²⁷ The latter, which places the artist's activity at the heart of analysis, considers the ways in which the creator of a text refers, explicitly or otherwise, to other existing works (Dunne, 2001, pp. 6-7). For example, the title attributed to a work by its author may direct the audience to a specific intertext (Dunne, 2001, p. 61). However, indicative of the overlap between the transtextual categories, titles and subtitles are also defined by Genette as paratexts (1997, pp. 3-4). According to Jonathan Gray, paratexts "manage" texts (2010, p. 6). They do so by encouraging the viewer or reader to interpret something specific about the text's meaning (Gray, 2010, p. 32). This study interrogates various paratexts, including the "bonus materials" found on DVD and Blu-ray discs, such as cast and crew commentaries and interviews with directors, and other external media such as podcasts and reviews. It also treats paratexts as intertexts, which are used to identify other relevant intertexts. That is, paratexts often contain significant information about a filmmaker's creative vision for the psychedelic experience, including literary and cinematic influences. It is also not uncommon for directors to describe their own psychedelic experiences, which are employed in intertextual analysis.

The use of paratexts as intertexts is indicative of the wider approach taken by this thesis, which traces the intertextual encounters between texts however they are defined. That is, the film and television representations of psychedelic experience are analysed as they relate to one another and to written and verbal accounts of the drug-state. Thus, the psychedelic experience is understood as a textual element that resides within an individual text or in the imaginary spaces where texts interact with one another.²⁸ This approach simultaneously develops knowledge about the audio-visual media representations of

²⁷ This thesis does not engage with intertextuality as a reception category, which posits that the rhetorical spectator of a text possesses sufficient "mediated experience" for intertextuality to be stimulated within their "aesthetic sensibilities". Dunne, M. (2001) *Intertextual Encounters in American Fiction, Film, and Popular Culture*. Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press.

²⁸ This accords with Dunne's definition of the study of intertextual properties that reside "within individual texts or in the imaginary spaces in which texts somehow interact with other texts". Ibid.

psychedelic phenomena and of the written accounts of the drug-state with which they interact. That is, texts are understood to encounter one another in a way that is productive and intertextually illuminating (Dunne, 2001, p. 7).

Linda Hutcheon's assertion that there are no texts without intertexts (Dunne, 2001, p. 11) is echoed by Robert Stam, who observes that almost every film is mediated by intertextuality (Stam and Raengo, 2005, p. 45). This is particularly pertinent to the intertextual study of representations of the psychedelic experience. As the approach taken by this thesis demonstrates, it is only possible to fully comprehend aesthetic depictions of the psychedelic experience with reference to other texts. These texts, which do not always refer to one another explicitly, are nonetheless connected to one another by their representations of the drug-state. Consequently, in much the same way that Masters and Houston discovered that the psychedelic drug-state consists of a "phenomenological pattern" (2000, p. 151), this thesis employs texts to intertextually identify psychedelic phenomena.

This approach is enabled by a definition of intertextuality that is based upon a work's "participation in the discursive space of a culture" (Culler qtd in Dunne, 2001, p. 180). Construed as such, intertextuality expands notions of artistic development to encompass various and diverse cultural phenomena (Iampolski, 1998, p. 246). This broader cultural approach, which does not rely upon an assumption that all of human experience is textual, is evident in Dunne's analysis of texts that intertextually encounter one another through the "narrative tradition" of the American Dream (2001, p. 13). The same logic is applied by this thesis to the psychedelic experience, which enables an intertextual analysis of what are, in some instances, rather disparate texts.

As previously mentioned, there is a tangible textual connection between a film adaptation and its literary source. Of the five types of transtextuality outlined by Genette, it is hypertextuality, Stam observes, that lends itself most readily to the study of adaptations (Stam and Raengo, 2005, p. 31). Genette's definition of hypertextuality as "the general

notion of a text in the second degree” is characterised by the grafting of a hypertext onto a hypotext in such a way that it does not function as commentary (1997, p. 5). Stam uses this model to establish the film adaptation as a form of hypertext derived from a hypotext through a process of selection, amplification, concretization, and actualization (Stam and Raengo, 2005, p. 31).²⁹ To demonstrate, he explains how films possess the capacity to amplify a passage of writing by transforming it into a spectacular cinematic shot (Stam and Raengo, 2005, p. 34).

The hypertextual model also applies to films that do not adapt a literary text but which, in most cases, do adapt a script (Stam and Raengo, 2005, p. 45). According to Jack Boozer, the script confirms the intertextual status of an adaptation by revealing the screenwriter’s creative development of a specific take on a work of existing literature. Further, he explains that the script emphasizes the writer’s collaboration with a director who translates a reading of this text to the screen (2012, p. 212). This thesis engages with scripts as intertexts in the same way it does the paratexts that were introduced earlier.

Stam does not, however, develop a hypertextual model for the study of adaptation and instead employs an intertextual approach to analysis (Stam and Raengo, 2005, p. 31). Tacitly acknowledging Hutcheon’s belief that there are no texts without intertexts (Dunne, 2001, p. 11), Stam notes that there is no single point of origin for the film adaptation, which contributes to an ever expanding network of intertextual references and transformations, which endlessly generate other texts via processes of recycling, transformation, and transmutation (Stam and Raengo, 2005, p. 31). This aligns with Geraghty’s perspective that the source text itself consists of a dense network of textual connections (2008, p. 2). While this thesis treats the study of adaptation as another form of intertextual analysis, it also acknowledges that the film and television representations of

²⁹ Genette refers to adaptation twice but in a context that is not relevant to this thesis. Genette, G. (1997) *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

psychedelic phenomena it analyses amplify written and verbal descriptions via processes of hypertextualization.

Character and Subjectivity

This thesis relies upon the premise that, in the films and television shows analysed, characters function as analogues of human beings (Smith, 1995, p. 21). Construed as such, a film or television show may confer access to a character's subjectively experienced (Smith, 1995, p. 74) perceptions, thoughts, motives, and emotions (Eder, 2010). In her analysis of *The Trip*, Lana Cook asserts that the film employs point of view (POV) shots treated with special effects and closeups of the protagonist's face to represent his altered state of consciousness (2014, p. 220). This summary, which is brief and nonspecific, is also not entirely accurate. That is, while frequent closeups of a character's face do encourage the spectator to identify with their subjective perspective (Chion, 2009, p. 295), it does not necessarily follow that the contents of their experience are also shared. In this section, the techniques used by filmmakers to convey a character's subjective perception are outlined in greater depth.

It should not be assumed, George Wilson observes, that veridical POV shots represent anything other than a visual perspective that coincides with that of the character's vantage point. Subjectively inflected POV shots, by contrast, employ specific camera techniques, special effects, and lighting, to signify their depiction of the contents of a character's visual perception (2006, pp. 84-85). This thesis is mostly concerned with a specific version of this type of shot, which is used to convey a character's psychedelic perception of the external world as they perceive it with open eyes. In Wilson's definition, this type of shot, which includes hallucinatory events or objects, is referred to as the partially hallucinated POV shot (2006, p. 85). Closed eye visual experience, meanwhile, is conveyed by shots in which the subjective inflection is total. These subjectively saturated

POV shots, Wilson explains, reveal the private visual content of a character's dreams, hallucinations, and other inner visualisations (2006, p. 85).

Filmmakers may also provide access to the content of a character's subjective perception without resorting to any form of POV shot. As Peter Verstraten explains in his discussion of *Fight Club* (Fincher, 1999), shots typically classified as "external focalisation" may contain explicitly subjective content. For example, the character Jack (Edward Norton) appears on screen throughout the film and is the object of the visual narrator's focalization. However, Jack frequently appears in shot with a second character, Tyler (Brad Pitt), who is a product of his imagination and can thus only be seen by him (2009, p. 114). As this example demonstrates, a character and the contents of their psychedelic hallucinatory subjective perception may appear together in the same objective shot.

Dissolves, which feature in multiple representations of the psychedelic experience, are a type of transition which, in their most basic form, signify the passage of time (Cutting, Brunick and DeLong, 2011, p. 158). While the temporal function of the dissolve is analysed in this thesis, its capacity to indicate a shift from diegetic reality to the representation of a character's psychological state is also significant (Verstraten, 2009, p. 227). Indeed, according to Verstraten, it is the cinematic convention most frequently used to indicate the transition to the depiction of a character's mental condition (2009, p. 119). Further, it is the dissolve's "thought-like weightlessness" (Carey, 1974, p. 46) that characterises its expression of a character's "interior world or consciousness" (Grodal, 2000, p. 271). This inner conscious realm is typically comprised of dreams, thoughts, and moods (Cutting, Brunick and DeLong, 2011, p. 158). Further, as this thesis demonstrates, the dissolve also marks the transition to the representation of a character's subjective experience of the psychedelic drug-state.

This thesis includes an analysis of psychedelic auditory phenomena. Point of audition (POA) refers to the character whose subjective experience of a sound is shared

with the viewer. POA is, Chion explains, distinct from POV due to the significant differences between cinematic sounds and images (2009, pp. 485-486). Indeed, a strongly defined subjective POA can overrule the camera's assumption of an objective perspective (Chion, 2009, p. 298). However, there is cinematic code or language to indicate that a sound is subjective and should be interpreted as being heard from the perspective of a specific character (Chion, 2009, p. 202). In film and television depictions of the psychedelic experience, a sound's aesthetic typically demarcates it as subjective. Consequently, in many examples, POA is established with the character whose drug-state experience is depicted. However, in some instances, it is necessary to identify which character's POA is represented through analysis of shot composition and the arrangement of shots in a sequence.

Chion's definition of several categories of sound inform and support the analysis undertaken in this thesis. Internal sounds, which are assumed to be heard by only one of the characters in a scene, may be either objective or subjective. The former, which includes the sound of a character's bodily functions (Chion, 2009, p. 479), is relevant to film and television representations of the heightened awareness of internal organs and bodily processes (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 5). Examples of subjective internal sounds include a character's mental voice and their aural memories (Chion, 2009, p. 479), both of which represent their "mental interior" (Chion, 1994, p. 76). The mental voice features in several of the case studies discussed in this thesis. In some instances, it contributes to the psychedelic aesthetic, while in others it helps to establish a strong POA.

Chion defines aural memories, which are somewhat analogous to the auditory hallucinations analysed in this thesis, as a type of subjective nondiegetic sound (2009, p. 251). However, as the sound is effectively a product of the character's mind, the nondiegetic aspect of this definition is debatable. That is, while the sound is not emitted by a traditional onscreen source, such as a radio, it does exist within the diegesis. However, Chion's definition of the aural hallucination as a form of subjective nondiegetic sound

draws an important distinction between it and subjective diegetic sounds, which can be heard by other characters that appear in a scene, but which are attributed to the POA of one person. Consequently, the terminology used by Chion is used throughout the remainder of this thesis.

Summary

This first section of this chapter reviewed academic studies of screened representations of the psychedelic experience. It was observed that, while this body of scholarly work is relatively small, it is methodologically diverse. Indeed, the most frequently used approach, which is a theory of affect influenced by Deleuze, is employed in just four studies, three of which were either co-written or solely authored by the same analyst. Further, this analytical framework was found to be heavily reliant on assumptions about the psychedelic experience, and to be predicated upon the scholar's construction of an "ideal" viewer. Significantly, these issues were also identified as a common feature of other screen studies approaches to psychedelic aesthetics. The analysis undertaken by Park and Wohn was identified as the most closely aligned to the approach employed by this thesis. However, like several of the studies reviewed in this chapter, their essay also contemplates whether screen depictions of the psychedelic experience have the capacity to alter a viewer's consciousness. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to address speculations that require an interdisciplinary approach to analysis.

In the second section, a neoformalist-intertextual theoretical framework was developed as a bespoke approach to film and television representations of the psychedelic experience. The use of this analytical approach contributes to the originality of this thesis, which is the first critical work to apply it to the study of psychedelic aesthetics. The neoformalist approach is known for its production of diverse and highly specific results, which makes it well suited to the analysis of a significant number of psychedelic phenomena depicted in 23 films and television shows. The use of intertextuality,

meanwhile, ensures the analysis of psychedelic phenomena identified in correspondence with the literature is meticulous and accurate.

3. Introduction to Case Studies

This chapter introduces the 23 films and television shows analysed in this thesis. It employs a framework derived from the concept of set and setting, which was outlined in the introduction, to contextualise the use of psychedelics in each case study. This is necessary because the phenomenology of each psychedelic experience is very individual and heavily influenced by factors of set and setting. The contextual data provided in this chapter frames the analysis of aesthetics that follows in subsequent chapters. In narrative films and television shows, set applies to character, while setting refers to the locations in which they experience the drug-state. This chapter introduces the characters that use psychedelics and others that play a role in defining the nature of the experience. The analysis of setting, meanwhile, focuses on both the environments in which characters' experiences unfold and the broader social, historical, and cultural contexts of each narrative's period setting. Production contexts are also interrogated to reveal the factors that influenced filmmakers' creative visions for the drug-state, and the cinematic techniques and technologies they employed to depict various psychedelic phenomena.

The first of this chapter's three sections introduces films made between 1959 and 1970. It is comprised of two subsections, one of which is dedicated to *The Trip* (Corman, 1967), the other of which focuses on a further five films released in the late 1960s. The subsequent section outlines the period between 1971 and 1999, and introduces three films released in the late 1990s. Two of these films, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (Gilliam, 1998) and *SLC Punk!* (Merendino, 1998), were released in 1998 but are set in the past; the other, *Conspiracy Theory* (Donner, 1997) was released in 1997 and is, like those produced in the 1960s, set at a time contemporaneous to the era of its production. However, the latter's depiction of LSD is contextualised by a set and setting associated with an earlier historical period. The third section focuses on case studies released since the year 2000. It is split into three parts that are defined by the period settings of the films and television

shows outlined. The final subsection, which focuses on the two films that feature use of psychedelics other than LSD, explains why they have been selected for analysis.

1959 - 1970

In 1966, several American states introduced legislation to criminalise possession of LSD. It was not until 1968, however, that it became a federal misdemeanour offence to possess the drug and a felony to sell it. Two years later, LSD was classified as a Schedule I substance with drugs of abuse deemed to have no medical benefit (Siff, 2015, pp. 176-177). In spite of prohibition, LSD reached the peak of its mainstream popularity in the autumn of 1967 (Lundborg, 2012, p. 201). One year later, filmmakers were liberated from restrictions previously imposed by the MPPC, which was abandoned in favour of a ratings system that showed greater leniency to cinematic depictions of drug use (Siff, 2015, p. 187).

In the introduction, *The Tinger* (Castle, 1959) was identified as the first film to depict both the use of LSD and its subjective effects. The film appeared in theatres almost a decade prior to a spate of LSD films that were released from the mid-1960s onwards (Lundborg, 2012, p. 386). The most prominent of the films produced during this period is Roger Corman's *The Trip*. While five and a half decades have passed since the film's theatrical release, its portrayal of the psychedelic experience remains the most comprehensive in cinema history. Indeed, the film's depiction of the drug-state is so thorough and wide ranging that aspects of it are analysed in each of the subsequent chapters. Further, it is the only case study to incorporate each stage of the psychedelic experience into its representation of the drug-state. Consequently, an entire section of this chapter is dedicated to its introduction. The second part of this section outlines the other five films released in the late 1960s, which are *The Love-Ins* (Dreifuss, 1967), *Psych-Out* (Rush, 1968), *Skidoo* (Preminger, 1968), *The Big Cube* (Davison, 1969), and *Easy Rider* (Hopper, 1969).

The Trip

The Trip narrates the maiden LSD experience of protagonist Paul Groves (Peter Fonda). Its 82-minute exploration of the psychedelic experience and 1960s psychedelia begins with an introduction to set and setting, which is provided by Paul's friend and trip guide, John (Bruce Dern). The film ends, as director Roger Corman intended it to, at the conclusion of Paul's trip (1990, p. 145). Its portrayal of Paul's psychedelic experience is so extensive that it could, the film's director also observes, be construed as "a user's manual for LSD" (2016b). Further, Corman's aesthetic depiction of the drug-state was inspired by his personal use of LSD (Carson, 2016b), the content of Jack Nicholson's screenplay, and his interpretation of the psychedelic literature (Corman, 2016b).

While Corman's LSD experience was entirely positive, he and Nicholson incorporated some negative aspects of the drug-state into the film to provide a balanced representation of its effects (Carson, 2016b). Their endeavours did not, however, satisfy American International Pictures (AIP), whose senior staff altered the film's ending without Corman's permission. The imposition of a jagged crack over the final shot, a freeze-frame closeup of Paul, was intended to suggest his life had been shattered by the experience (Corman, 1990, p. 152).³⁰ However, as Corman observes, viewers may not have interpreted the crack as the studio intended (Corman, 2016a)

Corman encouraged Nicholson to include anything in the screenplay that he felt would contribute to a successful cinematic depiction of the psychedelic experience. However, budgetary restrictions prevented the director from incorporating all aspects of Nicholson's script into the film which, upon its release in 1967, was praised by critics for its special effects (Corman, 2016b). The filmmakers employed various techniques and technologies to recreate the effects of LSD both on set and in postproduction (Corman, 1990, p. 151). For example, they borrowed equipment from lightshows, such as liquid light

³⁰ The crack is removed from the Signal One Entertainment 2016 Blu-ray release, which is the version of *The Trip* analysed in this thesis.

projectors, strobe lights, and special devices that enabled the camera operator to change colour gel filters mid-shot (Carson, 2016a),

In preparation for making *The Trip*, Corman read *The Psychedelic Experience* (Corman, 2016b). This highly influential text, which remains the best-selling psychedelic book of all time (Lundborg, 2012, p. 160), is referred to throughout this thesis. Its authors, Timothy Leary, Ralph Metzner, and Richard Alpert, intended it to be used as a psychedelic trip guide which, they believed, would help the subject attain self-understanding, liberation, illumination, and enlightenment (Leary, Metzner and Alpert, 2008, p. 3).³¹ The influence of the book on *The Trip* is implicit in Corman's identification of Paul's LSD experience as a journey towards fulfilment and enlightenment (Corman, 2016b). Lundborg also identifies the influence of the East Coast psychotherapeutic tradition, which is primarily associated with Leary and Alpert, upon the film's portrayal of psychedelia (2012, p. 386).³²

The aesthetic of Paul's psychedelic experience is directly influenced by factors of immediate and long-range set: his immediate set is defined by his intention to gain personal insight from the psychedelic experience; long-range set, which pertains to his personality, defines his attitude towards women and the extent to which he associates his identity with his job. In the film's opening scene, he is visited at work by his estranged wife, Sally (Susan Samberg), who bemoans his failure to appear at a meeting with their divorce lawyers. Their conversation suggests he has prioritised his job as a director of television commercials at the expense of their marriage. It also becomes apparent that he struggles to communicate honestly. The insight Paul hopes to gain from the LSD

³¹ It is worth noting that the book's usefulness as a guide since been questioned and that all three authors later distanced themselves from it. Lundborg, P. (2012) *Psychedelia: An Ancient Culture, A Modern Way of Life*. Stockholm: Lysergia.

³² Ironically, while John is presented as an expert on psychedelics, the actor Bruce Dern was one of a small number of people involved with making the film who did not participate in the drug culture and had never taken LSD. *The Trip: Audio commentary with director Roger Corman*, 2016b. Blu-ray. Directed by Corman, R.: Signal One Entertainment.

experience is connected to his personality traits and mindset, which emerge as the key themes of his drug-state experience.

Paul reveals his rationale for taking LSD to Glenn (Salli Sachse), who he meets at Max's (Dennis Hopper) Psychedelic Temple. This "hippie hangout" appears almost exactly as Corman and his film crew found it, and its Day-Glo psychedelic décor accurately reflects the burgeoning cultural setting of psychedelia that later became synonymous with the 1960s hippie movement. However, as the fashion adopted by the hippies did not become prevalent until a few years after the film was made, Corman restricted its portrayal to a small number of characters, the most notable of which is the outlandishly dressed Max (Corman, 2016b). Thus, while this communal residence is not the primary setting for Paul's psychedelic experience, it captures the essence of a broader sociocultural setting that had begun to emerge at the time.

In accordance with the role of the guide outlined by Masters and Houston, John prepares an appropriate setting for the psychedelic experience. The suitability of John's apartment as a trip setting is acknowledged by Paul, who compliments its Day-Glo painted walls which, like the Psychedelic Temple, appear as they were found by the film crew (Corman, 2016b). However, while the apartment serves as the primary setting for most of Paul's LSD experience, the external environment has no bearing on the film's aesthetic portrayal of the drug-state. Indeed, the one item Paul meaningfully interacts with is an eyeshade, which blocks his visual perception of the surroundings. In accordance with the literature, Paul puts the eyeshade on when prompted to do so by John during the early stages of the psychedelic experience.³³

Lundborg credits *The Trip* with introducing the figure of the trip guide to popular culture (2012, p. 165). He also describes John as a guide in the mould of Richard Alpert

³³ This accords with Michael Pollan's description of his use of an eyeshade during guided psychedelic experiences. Pollan, M. (2018) *How to Change Your Mind: The New Science of Psychedelics*. London: Allen Lane.

(2012, p. 386). Indeed, the 250 micrograms of LSD John administers to Paul is consistent with the dose Alpert and his co-authors recommend for inexperienced users in *The Psychedelic Experience* (2008, p. 82). 250 micrograms also corresponds to the dosage administered by Californian psychedelic therapist Leo Zeff to his patients throughout the 1960s and 1970s (Lundborg, 2012, p. 205). John implicitly cites *The Psychedelic Experience* when he informs the “starving” Paul that the onset duration of LSD is 20-30 minutes.³⁴ Further, as Corman observes, John paraphrases the book when he encourages Paul to turn off his mind, relax, and “float downstream” (Corman, 2016b).³⁵ In accordance with the role of the guide outlined by Masters and Houston, John also establishes himself as a figure of trust with significant knowledge and experience of psychedelics.³⁶

John’s explanation of the effects of Thorazine correspond to its description in *The Psychedelic Experience*, in which it is referred to as an antipsychotic drug that can be used to immediately terminate the psychedelic experience (Leary, Metzner and Alpert, 2008, p. 83). Subsequently, Paul becomes convinced he is going to die and, recalling this information, demands John administer the Thorazine. However, as per *The Psychedelic Experience*, which states the drug should only be used in the event of an external emergency and not because the subject is afraid (2008, p. 83), John denies his request and employs other techniques to assuage his fear and paranoia.

The Love-Ins, Psych-Out, Skidoo, The Big Cube, and Easy Rider

The Love-Ins and *Psych-Out* are both set in Haight-Ashbury, an area of San Francisco which, in the 1960s, became known as the “home of the hippies” (Stevens, 1987,

³⁴ As noted in the introduction, this is the onset duration cited by Leary et al for subjects who take LSD on an empty stomach. Leary, T., Metzner, R. and Alpert, R. (2008) *The Psychedelic Experience*. London, UK: Penguin Classics.

³⁵ For a reference to this instruction, see page 33 of *Ibid*.

³⁶ This aspect of the of the guide’s role is outlined on page 129 of Masters, R. and Houston, J. (2000) *The Varieties of Psychedelic Experience*. Rochester, Vermont: Park Street Press.

p. vii). The residents of Haight-Ashbury lived together in tribal groups that rejected common sexual conventions, and frequently used the streets as a space of personal expression (Lee and Shlain, 2001, p. 145). The area also played host to a cultural revival, which coalesced around the musical happenings that formed a cornerstone of an evolving community consciousness (Lee and Shlain, 2001, p. 142). Haight-Ashbury was a fertile marketplace for LSD, which was sold in massive quantities (Lee and Shlain, 2001, p. 146). Indeed, on any given day, approximately half of the area's population could be found either tripping, preparing to get high, or coming down from a drug experience (Stevens, 1987, p. 304). In the summer of 1967, 100,000 people descended upon Haight-Ashbury to partake in the Summer of Love (Stevens, 1987, p. 319). This deluge of visitors subsequently returned home with the counterculture's message of spirituality, love, hedonism, freedom, and experimentation, which they spread throughout the United States (Lundborg, 2012, p. 303).

The Love-Ins is one of several relatively obscure films released in the 1960s that were almost impossible to see until as recently as the early 2000s.³⁷ In a summary of critical responses to the film, Benshoff cites one review written at the time of the film's theatrical release, which praises its portrayal of LSD use while simultaneously lamenting its failure to fully capture the essence of the psychedelic drug-state (2001, p. 40). The film engages with the 1960s zeitgeist via its portrayal of a psychedelic cult led by a self-styled LSD guru, Dr Jonathan Barnett (Richard Todd), whose character is based on Timothy Leary.³⁸ The film also incorporates a Haight-Ashbury commune and a musical happening into its narrative. The hedonistic atmosphere of the latter recalls the Acid Tests that were

³⁷ Benshoff was unable to obtain a copy of the film for his study. Benshoff, H. M. (2001) 'The short-lived life of the Hollywood LSD film.(lysergic acid diethylamide)', *Velvet Light Trap*, (47)..

³⁸ Barnett's message to "be more, sense more, love more" evokes Leary's infamous "turn on, tune in, drop out" catchphrase. Interestingly, and contrary to popular belief, it was the media scholar Marshall McLuhan who invented this slogan, which is nonetheless synonymous with Leary and the counterculture. Siff, S. (2015) *Acid Hype*. University of Illinois Press.

curated by Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters in the mid-1960s (Lundborg, 2012, p. 278).³⁹ One of Barnett's followers, Patricia Cross, aka Pat (Susan Oliver), takes an unusually high dose of LSD at the happening. Set and setting play a significant role in shaping the aesthetic depiction of her psychedelic experience, which is heavily influenced by the lyrics of a song played by one of the bands. Subsequently, she is rescued from the dancefloor by her boyfriend, Larry Osbourne (James MacArthur), after she begins removing her clothes, and the representation of her psychedelic trip concludes at their communal home.

Psych-Out features several actors who worked together on *The Trip*, including Jack Nicholson, Susan Strasberg, and Bruce Dern. Nicholson, who performs the role of Stoney, also wrote the film's original script under the working title *The Love Children*. However, AIP hired two other writers, E. Hunter Willett and Betty Ullis, to transform Nicholson's lengthy, experimental screenplay into something more accessible, and it is their revised version of the narrative that became *Psych-Out* (Divine, 2008). The film explores Haight-Ashbury and its hippie community from the perspective of a new arrival named Jenny (Susan Strasberg). She is introduced to Haight-Ashbury's hippie residents and their nonconformist social conventions by a group of friends she meets in a café. The polygamist, Stoney, who also lives in a commune, exemplifies the alternative lifestyles that flourished in this part of San Francisco. Indicative of the community's liberal attitude towards psychedelics, LSD is discussed frequently throughout the film and openly taken by Elwood (Max Julien) at Warren's (Henry Jaglom) art gallery.

Psych-Out also highlights the negative effects of psychedelics through its portrayal of a drug-state "freak-out" experienced by Warren.⁴⁰ This thesis contends that the drug

³⁹ Tom Wolfe describes several Acid Tests in Wolfe, T. (1968) *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*. New York: Picador.

⁴⁰ The term freak-out describes a particularly adverse reaction to LSD that usually occurs in a public space. Roberts, A. (2008) *Albion Dreaming: A Popular History of LSD in Britain*. London: Marshall Cavendish Editions.

responsible for Warren's bad trip, which is not explicitly identified in the film, is LSD. In the immediate aftermath of the incident, there is nothing about Stoney's philosophical response that indicates Warren has taken anything other than LSD. Further, in a later scene, Stoney, Elwood, and Ben (Adam Roarke) discuss the negative effects of the more potent STP. However, while their descriptions of the STP drug-state align with Warren's freak-out experience, they do not refer it during their conversation. This emphasises the suggestion that he endured an adverse reaction to the more commonly used LSD.

Otto Preminger intended his 1968 movie, *Skidoo*, to be the most pro-LSD film ever made in Hollywood. He received significant financial backing from one of the major studios, Paramount, and recruited a stellar cast of "old Hollywood" stars and several counterculture icons, including Timothy Leary, Harry Nilsson, and Rudi Gernreich, to work on the film (Benshoff, 2001, p. 40). Preminger took LSD prior to making *Skidoo* and his depiction of the drug-state is heavily influenced by his own psychedelic experience (Benshoff, 2001, p. 40). Consequently, while the film was a box office failure (Benshoff, 2001, p. 40), which alienated younger viewers with its poorly written jokes about hippies and LSD (Lundborg, 2012, p. 386), its aesthetic portrayal of the LSD experience is phenomenologically diverse.

In the film, Tony Banks (Jack Gleason) is brought out of retirement by mob boss, God (Groucho Marx), to assassinate his former associate, George "Blue Chips" Packard (Mickey Rooney). Incarcerated in the same prison as Blue Chips, Tony unwittingly takes LSD in his jailcell when he licks an envelope seal laced with the drug. Tony's acid guru cellmate Fred, aka The Professor (Austin Pendleton), helps him overcome his lack of preparation and the less-than-ideal trip setting by offering guidance throughout the experience. Fred's input stimulates a psychedelic experience characterised by self-reflection and a meaningful consideration of personal relationships.

The Big Cube is another largely "forgotten" film that Benshoff found difficult to obtain in the early 2000s. In his analysis of it, Benshoff notes that the film's psychedelic

effects, which were produced by the highly regarded cinematographer Gabriel Figueroa, received critical praise at the time of its release (2001, p. 40). In the film, Johnny (George Chakiris) is expelled from university after he is caught using its laboratories to illicitly manufacture LSD. Subsequently, he meets and marries Lisa (Karin Mossberg) with the intention of stealing her money. To his dismay, Lisa is unable to access her inheritance, which is controlled by her stepmother, Adriana (Lana Turner). Subsequently, Johnny convinces Lisa to assist him with a plan to have Adriana declared mentally incompetent, and the couple lace her sedatives with LSD before subjecting her to tape-recorded messages designed to disturb her psychological stability. Following the success of their scheme, Lisa gains control of her inheritance, learns the truth about Johnny, and finally divorces him. Towards the end of the film, Johnny takes up residence in a squalid basement apartment with a new girlfriend and, in the penultimate scene, starts taking his own supply of LSD.

Towards the end of the 1960s, Hollywood's psychedelic aficionados, Dennis Hopper, Peter Fonda, and Jack Nicholson, joined forces to make the New Hollywood classic, *Easy Rider*. The film's narrative, which is based on real events, is described by Hopper as a fable of America in the late 1960s which, he explains, was filled with drug-using outlaws.⁴¹ The film is also described by Hopper as a Western that replaces horses with motorcycles (Hopper, 2016a). In its opening scene, Wyatt (Peter Fonda) and Billy (Dennis Hopper) conclude a drug deal in Mexico and are immediately established as outlaws. Subsequently, they embark on a motorcycle journey across America, during which they visit various locations, including a commune that is typical of the rural communities that became popular at the time.⁴² Further, the mime group they encounter at

⁴¹ Hopper explains that it was Fonda who came up with the original idea for the story, which he based on a real incident involving two motorcyclists who completed a drug deal before being shot by duck hunters in Florida. *Easy Rider: commentary track with Dennis Hopper*, 2016a. Blu-ray. Directed by Hopper, D. USA: Criterion Collection; Columbia Pictures..

⁴² The filmmakers reconstructed the New Buffalo commune, which was located in Tao, New Mexico, for the movie. Ibid.

the commune is based on the Diggers, an anarchist group whose activities were primarily based in San Francisco (Hopper, 2016a). Interestingly, the Diggers were also known for their use of LSD within an activist-oriented social context (Lee and Shlain, 2001, p. 173).

Towards the end of their stay at the commune, an unnamed hitchhiker (Luke Askew) supplies Billy and Wyatt with LSD. Invoking the importance of set and setting, he advises Wyatt to take the drug with the right people at the right location. In a subsequent scene, Wyatt quarters the tab of acid before consuming it in a New Orleans graveyard with Billy and two prostitutes named Mary (Toni Basil) and Karen (Karen Black). The film's depiction of the psychedelic experience eschews the use of special effects and is rendered by novel editing techniques. The film captures the characters' emotional, cognitive, and physical responses to the drug-state, which are partially stimulated by the graveyard setting. Karen Black, who had never taken any psychedelic drugs, is praised by Fonda for her "incredible" portrayal of the drug-state (Hopper, 2016b). Hopper, meanwhile, played a significant role in provoking an emotionally intense performance from Fonda, who he encouraged to engage in imaginary conversation with his dead mother during filming (Hopper, 2016a).

1971 - 1999

Prohibition, which continued into the 1970s, did little to curb the recreational use of psychedelics. Indeed, the decade was marked by a sustained growth in the number of people using them (Lundborg, 2012, p. 212). Further, Lundborg identifies the 1970s as the historical peak of "Western Psychedelia" (2012, p. 46). However, from a cultural perspective, there was a steady decline in the number of LSD films produced between 1970 and 1977, which marks the end of Benschhoff's LSD filmography (2001, p. 42).⁴³

The communes were a popular refuge for "acid veterans" who abandoned the paranoid atmosphere of the cities in pursuit of a more relaxed existence in the countryside. Lee, M. A. and Shlain, B. (2001) *Acid Dreams: The Complete Social History of LSD, the CIA, the Sixties and Beyond*. London: Pan.

⁴³ The last film listed is *Blue Sunshine* (Lieberman, 1977).

Apocalypse Now (Coppola, 1979), which brought Hollywood's decade long "thematic acid gap" to a close upon its release in 1979 (Lundborg, 2012, p. 392), is conspicuous by its absence from Benschoff's list. Lundborg credits the use of LSD by one of the film's characters, Lance (Sam Bottoms), with enhancing its overarching "psychedelic nature" (2012, pp. 92-93). However, as Lance's subjective experience of the drug-state is not depicted, *Apocalypse Now* is not analysed in this study.

In the 1980s, the use of LSD spread among Americans of increasingly diverse sociocultural, racial, and sexual backgrounds (Lee and Shlain, 2001, pp. 290-291). However, the disintegration of the counterculture at the end of the 1970s diminished the social impact of psychedelia on wider society (Lundborg, 2012, p. 217). Accordingly, very few films released during this period incorporate the use of psychedelics into their narratives. Of those that do, the most notable is Ken Russell's *Altered States* (1980), which makes frequent reference to various psychedelic drugs and depicts a mushroom induced psychedelic experience. However, typical of the era's cinematic output, the film does not feature the use of LSD and it is not analysed in this thesis.

The use of psychedelics continued to rise in the 1990s (Lundborg, 2012, p. 257). The decade was marked by the emergence of a new "psychedelic wave" that had less societal impact than its 1960s predecessor, but which nonetheless represented a significant evolutionary step for psychedelia into the realms of techno-hedonism and neo-shamanism (Lundborg, 2012, p. 397). Further, these psychedelic cultural developments dovetailed with a growing interest in ethnobotanical and environmental concerns (Lundborg, 2012, p. 415). However, the decade's cinematic output fails to capture the increased use of psychedelics by ravers, cyber-punks, and neo-shamans that typified these cultural shifts. Nonetheless, the impact of psychedelics on multiple generations of artists ensured drug-state aesthetics became integrated with the cinema artform and many films released during the period are notable for their incorporation of these aesthetics and other psychedelic thematic content (Lundborg, 2012, p. 395).

LSD is incorporated into the narratives of several films released in the 1990s; *Jacob's Ladder* (Lyne, 1990) addresses the weaponization of psychedelics in the context of the Vietnam war, while Oliver Stone's biopic of *The Doors* (Stone, 1991) features the recreational use of LSD. However, neither film represents the sensory effects of the drug-state, and it was not until the latter part of the decade that films combined their portrayal of the use of LSD by characters with a concomitant depiction of psychedelic effects. This section introduces three of the films, *Conspiracy Theory*, *SLC Punk!*, and *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, that aesthetically depict psychedelic phenomena.⁴⁴

Conspiracy Theory, SLC Punk! and Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas

In *Conspiracy Theory*, the CIA psychologist, Dr Jonas (Patrick Stewart), discusses his involvement with the MK-ULTRA programme which, as he accurately observes, was terminated in 1973.⁴⁵ MK-ULTRA, which was the CIA's primary drug and mind control program during the Cold War, began in 1953 after being authorised by Agency director Alan Dulles (Lee and Shlain, 2001, p. 27). In the 1950s, CIA personnel conducted various experiments with LSD to test its viability as a truth serum and an espionage weapon (Lee and Shlain, 2001, p. 16). MK-ULTRA operatives frequently administered the drug to colleagues who had no prior experience of the psychedelic drug-state (Lee and Shlain, 2001, p. 29). It should come as no surprise, then, that they came to be define LSD as an anxiety-inducing agent (Lee and Shlain, 2001, p. 57).

In the alternative historical timeline presented by *Conspiracy Theory*, MK-ULTRA experiments with LSD continued beyond the programme's official end date. It was during the period after 1973 that Dr Jonas conducted experiments with LSD, which he used to

⁴⁴ The verbal narration of *SLC Punk!* and *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* by their protagonists is characteristic of a return to popularity of "textual speech" in films of the 1990s. Chion, M. (2009) *Film, a Sound Art*. Translated by: Gorbman, C. New York: Columbia University Press.

⁴⁵ For further information on the history of MK-ULTRA, see Editors, History.com. (2017) *MK-Ultra*. History. history.com: A&E Television Networks. Available at: <https://www.history.com/topics/us-government/history-of-mk-ultra> (Accessed: 18 Sep 2022).

transform ordinary men into assassins. One of his former subjects is the taxi driver and conspiracy theorist Jerry Fletcher (Mel Gibson). Dr Jonas, who perceives Jerry's conspiracy theory literature as a potential threat to his clandestine activities, injects him with LSD, and subjects him to torture. Consequently, while the film is set in the 1990s, his use of LSD as a truth serum is consistent with a 1950s set and setting.

SLC Punk!, which is set in the 1980s, is based on the lives of director James Merendino's friends and acquaintances (Hicks, 2003). The film is narrated by the self-identified punk, Stevo (Matthew Lillard), who lives with his friend Bob (Michael A. Goorjian) in a dilapidated Salt Lake City apartment. The effects of LSD are represented in two scenes, the first of which employs various editing techniques, makeup, and props to depict Shaun's (Devon Sawa) psychedelic experience. However, as this sequence is narrated by a third party, Bob, it does not directly represent Shaun's drug-state experience. Indeed, the outlandish details of Bob's story raise doubts about his reliability as a narrator. For example, he makes the improbable assertion that Shaun absorbed 100 hits of acid through his leg after they dissolved in his pocket. Consequently, this sequence is not analysed in this thesis.

In the second scene, Stevo takes LSD to "ignore the truth" of his situation. The film's depiction of his nihilistically hedonistic psychedelic experience is heavily influenced by *Easy Rider*. Stevo takes LSD in a park which, while not identical to a graveyard, is nonetheless described by him as being "dead". Further, the columnar structure that he and Sandy (Jennifer Lien) have sex in front of is reminiscent of the mausoleums located in the New Orleans graveyard, which serves as the trip setting for the *Easy Rider* LSD scene. Sandy also quotes Karen by declaring herself to be "dying" immediately before she has sex. Most significantly, *SLC Punk!* depicts the effects of LSD using editing techniques that recall its predecessor's representation of the drug-state. Indeed, this forms an intertextual connection between the films that is analysed in chapter six.

Terry Gilliam's adaptation of Hunter S Thompson's 1971 counterculture classic, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, has been described as a belated sequel to *Easy Rider* (Hoberman, 2011). The film follows protagonist, Raoul Duke (Johnny Depp), and his attorney, Dr Gonzo (Benicio del Toro), as they embark on a drug fuelled search for the American Dream in Las Vegas. The characters are, like the protagonists of *Easy Rider*, identified as outlaws by their use of various illegal substances, including LSD. Thompson describes his film adaptation as a "pro freedom" movie (Gilliam, 2003b), while producer Laila Nabulsi refers to it as a treatise on the end of the 1960s (Drenner, 2020). Nabulsi also observes that the film's incorporation of archival footage into its narrative emphasises the political context of its period setting (Gilliam, 2003c). Gilliam believed the 1990s was ripe for a renaissance of ideas that had flourished in the 1960s. Consequently, he felt the timing was perfect for a screen adaptation of Thompson's book (Gilliam, 2003a).

Gilliam and screenwriter Tony Grisoni drew inspiration from Thompson's "Gonzo" writing method to produce a screenplay for their film adaptation (Gilliam, 2020). That is, they employed a cut up technique to deconstruct Thompson's text, which they subsequently collaged into a script (Gilliam, Grisoni and Nabulsi, 2003). They also used textual speech in the form of Raoul's narrative voice to ensure they maintained as many of the book's words as possible (Gilliam, 2003a). Thompson's story was inspired by a trip he and his friend Oscar Zeta Acosta took to Las Vegas (Gilliam, 2003b). Indeed, the two main characters, Raoul Duke and Dr Gonzo, are based on Thompson and Acosta respectively. In preparation for their roles, Johnny Depp and Benicio Del Toro read *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* and various other books written by Thompson and Acosta. The actors also studied archival footage of the two men, while Depp went a step further and lived with Thompson for three months to gain further insight into his persona and mannerisms (Gilliam, 2003c).

LSD is one of the many drugs consumed in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* and, true to Thompson's beliefs about psychedelics, it is taken without regard for set and

setting. On the contrary, Gonzo perverts the role of trip guide by feeding Raoul LSD at gunpoint as they drive through the desert between Los Angeles and Las Vegas. Ironically, Gilliam compares Gonzo to Virgil, the pagan guide of Dante's *The Divine Comedy* (Gilliam, 2003a; Gilliam, 2020), which is the same character Masters and Houston identify as an antecedent of the psychedelic trip guide (2000, p. 130). Gilliam's vision for the psychedelic experience was inspired by Thompson's written descriptions, Ralph Steadman's illustrations and, despite never having taken LSD himself, his own imagination (Gilliam, 2020). The film is also the first discussed in this thesis to render the sensory effects of the drug-state using CGI (Benshoff, 2001, p. 33).

2000 – 2020

In 1999, for the first time in several decades, researchers were granted FDA approval to administer a psychedelic to healthy study participants (Pollan, 2018, p. 60). The contemporary psychedelic renaissance did not, however, begin in earnest until 2006 (Pollan, 2018, p. 21; Dourron, 2022). Six years later, in 2012, the use of psychedelics reached historically high levels (Lundborg, 2012, p. 17). More recently, Yockey et al noted that the use of LSD among Americans increased by 50% between 2015 and 2018 (2020). The flourishing of interest in psychedelics since the turn of the century is also evident in cultural developments, such as the global "digital-era" resurgence of psychedelic aesthetics in films and music videos (Church, 2018). There has also been a proliferation in the number of films and television shows depicting characters' subjective experience of the psychedelic drug-state.

This section is divided into four parts, the first three of which introduce case studies arranged by the historical periods in which they are set. The final part focuses on the two films that feature use of psychedelics other than LSD. The first subsection addresses two films, *Taking Woodstock* (Lee, 2009) and *Mad to Be Normal* (Mullan, 2017), and two television shows, *Mad Men* (AMC, 2007-2015), and *Aquarius* (NBC, 2015-2016), which

are all set in the 1960s. Subsequently, two films set in the 1990s, a feature called *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (Chbosky, 2012), and a short, titled *Acid Test* (Waldo, 2017), are introduced. The third subsection addresses three television shows, *House* (Fox Network, 2004-2012), *Ray Donovan* (Showtime, 2013-2020), and *You* (Netflix, 2018-), and a short musical film, *Trip* (Oliver, 2017). The narratives of these case studies are all set at a time contemporaneous to that in which they were made. *The Bad Batch* (Amirpour, 2016), which presents a dystopian vision of the near future, is also discussed in this section. The final part introduces two films analysed in this thesis that feature psychedelics other than LSD, which are *Tenacious D in The Pick of Destiny* (Lynch, 2006) and *Enter the Void* (Noé, 2009).

Mad Men, Mad to Be Normal, Aquarius, and Taking Woodstock

In the *Mad Men* episode “Far Away Places” (S5 E6), LSD is administered in a therapeutic context. The show engages with the past via its portrayal of a fictional advertising agency, Sterling Cooper Draper Pryce, which is co-owned by one of the main characters, Roger Sterling (John Slattery). Roger takes LSD with his wife, Jane (Peyton List), in a Manhattan apartment at some point after June 24th, 1966.⁴⁶ This indicates that, contrary to Matthew Weiner’s claim that the couple take LSD while it remained legal (Hornbacher, 2012), the scene takes place at least one month after it became a criminal offence to possess the drug in New York State.⁴⁷

Nevertheless, the set and setting of Roger’s psychedelic experience corresponds to the East Coast psychotherapeutic tradition instigated by Leary and Alpert, which was noted as an influence on *The Trip* in a previous section. Indeed, like Roger Corman, Matthew Weiner acknowledges the significant impact of *The Psychedelic Experience* on 1960s LSD

⁴⁶ The timing of the episode is indicated by a copy of *Life Magazine*, dated June 24th, 1966, which appears in the apartment.

⁴⁷ Possession of LSD in New York was legally prohibited in May 1966. Siff, S. (2015) *Acid Hype*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

culture (Hornbacher, 2012). The episode makes several references, both implicit and explicit, to Leary and the book; Roger mentions Leary by name when referring to LSD as his “product” and one of the guides, Sandy (Tony Pasqualini), paraphrases a quote from *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, aka *Bardo Thödol*, which is the text *The Psychedelic Experience* is based upon.⁴⁸

Leary and his co-authors shared the belief that guides should possess considerable first-hand experience of the psychedelic drug-state. They also recommend that group sessions be limited to a maximum of six participants and overseen by two guides, preferably one male and one female. The authors also suggest that one guide takes LSD with the group while the other remains sober (2008, pp. 89-92). In accordance with these instructions, one male guide, Sandy, and one female, Catherine (Bess Armstrong), curate a group a session in *Mad Men* that is initially comprised of six persons. Of the two guides, it is Catherine who takes LSD with the group, while Sandy remains sober. Catherine, who is also identified by Jane as her therapist, establishes her prior experience of the psychedelic drug-state by noting she has taken LSD four times previously. The Manhattan apartment in which they take the drug is also typical of the types of setting Leary employed in his research.⁴⁹

Roger’s psychedelic experience consists of an amalgamation of phenomena described to Weiner and his colleagues by various people. For example, Roger’s immersion in a baseball game that took place in 1919, which is analysed in chapter seven, corresponds to the details of a psychedelic drug-state recounted to Weiner by the person who experienced it. Having never taken psychedelics himself, Weiner deferred to the

⁴⁸ *The Psychedelic Experience* is subtitled *A Manual Based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead*. The authors refer specifically to the Evans-Wentz Oxford University Press version of the book: *The Tibetan Book of the Dead: Or The After-Death Experiences on the Bardo Plane, According to Lama Kazi Dawa-Samdup's English Rendering*. (2000) Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁴⁹ Hartogsohn lists Manhattan apartments as one of the settings used by Leary, along with the living rooms of Harvard faculty members, churches, and prisons. Hartogsohn, I. (2020) *American Trip: Set, Setting, and the Psychedelic Experience in the Twentieth Century*. London: MIT Press.

knowledge and expertise of others with experience of the drug-state, who advised him on the use of practical special effects and editing techniques to capture the essence of an LSD trip (Hornbacher, 2012). Further, in subsequent episodes, Roger refers to his ongoing use of LSD and acknowledges the longer-term impact of his psychedelic experiences.

Mad to Be Normal is a biopic of the radical psychiatrist and countercultural “hero” R.D. Laing (David Tennant). The film explores the brand of anti-psychiatry he pioneered at a London-based treatment centre, Kingsley Hall, which he managed between 1965 and 1970 (O’Hagan, 2012). Laing defined LSD as a psychological tool, which he administered as an experimental treatment for psychosis and schizophrenia (O’Hagan, 2012). Indeed, his use of unorthodox psychiatric methods and administration of psychedelics in a therapeutic context earned him the moniker, “the British Timothy Leary” (Brown, 2008). However, while Leary is mentioned by name in *Mad to Be Normal*, Laing is the only analogue of a historical figure to appear in a film that is otherwise populated with a cast of fictional characters (Anon, 2017).

Laing believed that psychiatrists should communicate empathetically with their patients (Day and Keeley, 2008). His theories inspired him to develop a variety of humane alternatives to the electroshock and drug therapies that were widely used in the 1960s (Brown, 2008). In *Mad to Be Normal*, Laing describes the profound and therapeutic effects of LSD to his 73-year-old patient, Sydney (Michael Gambon). He explains that the drug has the capacity to help people cope with, and ultimately overcome, the unprompted manifestation of intrusive memories. Laing administers LSD to Sydney in liquid form once he has established his patient’s trust and obtained his consent. Sydney is emotionally supported by Laing and a second patient, Jim (Gabriel Byrne), throughout his psychedelic experience. Jim’s impromptu participation in the session as a second guide is indicative of the egalitarian ethos of equality and freedom that he fostered at Kingsley Hall.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ The notion of psychiatrist and patient were reversed at Kingsley Hall, which became a haven for psychotics and schizophrenics. There were no locks on the doors at the centre, and patients were at liberty

Aquarius is described by its creator, John McNamara, as a “work of historical fiction” (de Moraes, 2015). As the intertitle of each episode attests, its narrative combines historical events with fictional characters, locations, and circumstances. The most prominent historical figure to feature in the show is Charles Manson (Gethin Anthony), the cult leader who infamously orchestrated the murders of actress Sharon Tate and four of her friends (Lee and Shlain, 2001, p. 257). In reality, Manson migrated to Southern California after spending the Summer of Love in Haight-Ashbury (Lee and Shlain, 2001, p. 186). However, in the show’s fictionalised version of events, Manson has already relocated to the Los Angeles based “Spiral Staircase” commune in 1967.⁵¹ This ranch setting is, like its counterpart in *Easy Rider*, indicative of the type of rural commune that flourished in California and other parts of the American Southwest during the late 1960s.

According to Lundborg, Manson was the inevitable conclusion of the individualist attitude towards LSD that blossomed in the late 1960s (2012, p. 351). He claimed to have experienced Christ’s crucifixion during a psychedelic experience and declared himself “the almighty God of Fuck” (Lee and Shlain, 2001, pp. 185-186). His sole interest in the “acid circle” was power and control, which he assumed by administering LSD to his disciples as part of a coordinated attempt to reprogramme their minds (Lundborg, 2012, pp. 351-352). He also subjugated his female followers with a daily regime of acid-fuelled sex (Lee and Shlain, 2001, p. 186). However, attempts made by his lawyers to blame psychedelic drugs for the brutal killings were summarily dismissed (Lee and Shlain, 2001, p. 257).

Manson’s use of LSD as a tool of mental manipulation is portrayed in multiple episodes of *Aquarius*. In “Home is Where You’re Happy” (S1 E4), Manson administers the drug to teenage runaway, Emma Karn, aka Cherry (Emma Dumont), before delivering a pseudo-spiritual sermon of self-empowerment intended to increase her sense of attachment

to come and go as they pleased. O’Hagan, S. (2012) *Kingsley Hall: RD Laing's experiment in anti-psychiatry*. The Guardian. guardian.com: Guardian News & Media Limited. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/sep/02/rd-laing-mental-health-sanity> (Accessed: 28 June 2022).

⁵¹ The Spiral Staircase is a fictional commune that was invented for the show.

to the cult and ostracise her from her family. The success of his ulterior motive is demonstrated by Emma's distorted perception of her mother, Grace (Michaela McManus), as a demonic entity. In "Sick City" (S1 E8), Emma is among the Family members Manson demands take an exceptionally high dose of LSD as part of an excessively large group session. Realising the perilous nature of the situation, Emma leaves the commune rather than follows his orders. Subsequently, Manson abuses his position as guide to provoke negative reactions from the cult members who remain. In a third scene set at the Spiral Staircase, he forces his mother to take LSD before inviting a motorcycle gang to rape her (S1 E11).

The ninth episode of the first season concludes with the dosing of Detective Sam Hodiak (David Duchovny) by one of Manson's followers in a downtown Los Angeles bar. In the following episode, "It's Alright Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)" (S1 E10), Manson verbally manipulates Sam's psychedelic experience. However, his attempt to exploit Sam's suggestible psychological state as part of a plan to orchestrate his death is ultimately unsuccessful. Sam is rescued from imminent danger by his colleague, Joe Moran (Alex Quijano), and his LSD trip subsequently continues outside of Grace's home before concluding at the home of his friend, Brian Shafe (Grey Damon).⁵²

In August 1969, approximately half a million people arrived at Max Yasgur's farm in Bethel, New York State, to attend the Woodstock music and arts festival (Lee and Shlain, 2001, p. 251). If it were not for the late intervention of Elliot Tiber, however, Woodstock may never have taken place. On July 15th, 1969, the festival's permit was revoked by the town that had originally agreed to host it, which left producer Michael Lang with just 48 hours to find an alternative venue. In possession of a permit of his own, Tiber offered Lang use of the land surrounding his parents' El Monaco motel. However, after the

⁵² The scene set in Brian Shafe's home was cut from the original NBC broadcast but is included in the version of *Aquarius* that is analysed in this thesis, which was available to view on Netflix at the time of writing.

festival organisers found this land to be unsuitable, Elliot introduced Lang to Yasgur, who agreed to host Woodstock on his farm. This is the story told in Ang Lee's adaptation of Tiber's memoir, *Taking Woodstock* (Tiber and Monte, 2007).

In the film, Elliot (Demetri Martin) encounters VW Girl (Kelli Garner) and VW Guy (Paul Dano) while exploring the festival grounds. The couple, who are distinguished as hippies by their manner of speech and outlandish clothing, offer him a tab of LSD which, after a moment's hesitation, he accepts and consumes. Inside the campervan, the couple assume the role of informal guides for Elliot's ensuing psychedelic experience. The décor of the van's interior, which includes various painted yin-yang symbols, forms a trip setting that reflects the growing interest in Eastern spiritual thought that flourished in mid-to-late 1960s America.⁵³

Patrick Lundborg praises *Taking Woodstock* for its "very convincing recreation" of the undulation of colourful shapes that are characteristic of the psychedelic experience (2012, p. 129). However, director Ang Lee professes to have never taken LSD, and his vision for the drug-state was influenced by the findings of extensive research and his interpretation of Tiber's memoir (Lee, 2010). Indeed, the undulation of colourful shapes is very briefly described by Tiber in his written account of the psychedelic experience (Tiber and Monte, 2007, p. 193). Finally, the film's aesthetic depiction of the drug-state was rendered using digital techniques that required months of painstaking craftsmanship to complete (Lee, 2010).⁵⁴

⁵³ Hartogsohn observes that the influx of Eastern spirituality in late 1960s America played a significant role in shaping the psychedelic experience for many drug users Hartogsohn, I. (2020) *American Trip: Set, Setting, and the Psychedelic Experience in the Twentieth Century*. London: MIT Press.

⁵⁴ In the screenplay, Schamus proposed an optical style for the representation of the psychedelic experience, which was inspired by 1960s films such as Bob Rafelson's *Head*. However, Lee opted to use digital effects instead. Schamus, J. and Lee, A. (2009) *Taking Woodstock: The Shooting Script*. New York, USA: Newmarket Press.

The Perks of Being a Wallflower and Acid Test

The Perks of Being a Wallflower and *Acid Test* are both set in the early 1990s. The former is Stephen Chbosky's film adaptation of his own semi-autobiographical novel of the same name. It is with reference to the book that the film's period setting specifically dated to the school year 1991-92.⁵⁵ That Jenny Waldo's feature length film, *Acid Test* (Waldo, 2021), is based upon her short of the same name, suggests that both films are set in the same year, 1992.⁵⁶ The feature film's depiction of the LSD experience is not analysed in this thesis because, at the time of writing, it had not been released in the UK. Further, according to one reviewer, its rendition of the psychedelic experience is less impressive than its shorter length predecessor (Talbot-Haynes, 2021).

It was noted in a previous section that films made and released in the 1990s do not engage with psychedelia's cultural evolution, which was characterised by increased use of psychedelics among ravers, cyber-punks, and neo-shamans (Lundborg, 2012, p. 395). Similarly, neither *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* or *Acid Test* focus on these nascent psychedelic cultures. Instead, both films associate the use of LSD with punk rock music scenes: in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, LSD is given to protagonist Charlie (Logan Lerman) by the editor of a fanzine dedicated to punk and *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (Sharman, 1975); the main character of *Acid Test*, meanwhile, is a self-identified punk named Jenny (Juliana DeStefano), who takes LSD at a live music concert.

⁵⁵ See Chbosky, S. (2009) *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. London: Pocket Books.

Critics have also noted that the film is set in either 1991 or the school year 1991-92. See:

- Means, S. P. (2012) 'Wallflower' director and star take a 'Time Warp' to the '90s. The Salt Lake Tribune. <https://archive.sltrib.com/>: The Salt Lake Tribune. Available at: <https://archive.sltrib.com/article.php?id=55004440&itype=cmsid> (Accessed: 29 June 2022).
- Sharkey, B. (2012) *Movie review: 'The Perks of Being a Wallflower' is a smart standout*. Los Angeles Times. [latimes.com](https://www.latimes.com/): Los Angeles Times. Available at: <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/movies/la-xpm-2012-sep-20-la-et-mn-perks-of-being-a-wallflower-movie-review-20120921-story.html> (Accessed: June 29 2022).

⁵⁶ The year of the feature film's setting is mentioned on the *Acid Test* website. See Anon (2021) *Acid Test Productions*. [acidtestfilm.com](https://www.acidtestfilm.com/): Acid Test Productions. Available at: <https://www.acidtestfilm.com/> (Accessed: 29 June 2022)..

The two films also share a thematic interest in teenage angst, alienation, and rebellion. Indeed, as one critic notes, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* addresses universal themes of adolescent loneliness and high school stress that are not specific to its early 1990s setting (Merry, 2012). The film is narrated by Charlie, a clinically depressed teenager who begins his high school career after being discharged from a mental health institution. A lonely outsider, he struggles to make friends until he meets a pair of older students, stepsiblings Sam (Emma Watson) and Patrick (Ezra Miller), who welcome him into their friendship group. It is with these friends that Charlie takes LSD at a New Year's Eve party. The film's depiction of his LSD experience begins with a shot of him shovelling snow from a friend's driveway.⁵⁷ That his trip becomes increasingly introspective after he returns indoors to the party is signified by the punctuation of the scene with flashbacks to the death of his aunt Helen (Melanie Lynskey).

Riot Grrrl is a feminist brand of punk-rock that emerged in the early 1990s (Hunt, 2019; Hopper, 2011). The genre had a profound influence on the young life of *Acid Test* writer and director, Jenny Waldo, after she first encountered it as a teenager living in Washington, DC. It was during this period of her life that she took the LSD trip that inspired her depiction of the drug-state in both versions of *Acid Test* (Waldo, 2021). In the short film, Jenny attends a Giant Kitty concert with her friend Drea (Jasmine Balais).⁵⁸ Reflecting the historical developments observed in the introduction, Jenny asks Drea to "sit" for her during the LSD experience. However, her role is brought to a premature end, when Jenny's mother, Camelia (Mia Ruiz), arrives at the concert venue to take her daughter home.

⁵⁷ This sequence recalls the iconic conclusion to Richard Alpert's maiden psychedelic trip, which ended with him clearing snow from the path in front of his parents' house. Fadiman, J. (2011) *The Psychedelic Explorer's Guide: Safe, Therapeutic, and Sacred Journeys*. Rochester, Vermont: Park Street Press.

⁵⁸ In the feature film, Waldo eschewed historical accuracy by including the live performances of three contemporary artists rather than the music of early 1990s Riot Grrrl artists. Her reason for doing so was to capture the raw energy of the genre. Waldo, J. (2021) *Jenny Grrrl*. acidtestfilm.com: Acid Test Productions. Available at: <https://www.acidtestfilm.com/directors-story> (Accessed: June 30 2022).

The film also alludes to 1960s media hysteria concerning the deleterious effects of LSD; the spurious claims made by Jenny’s father, Jack (Patrick Sane), that LSD causes “birth defects” and “brain damage” recalls the findings of a 1967 study which, despite being discredited, caused widespread hysteria after being widely reported in the media.⁵⁹ Further, the film’s extensive depiction of the psychedelic experience belies the brevity of its sub-15-minute runtime. Indeed, one critic refers to its visual representation of the drug-state as one of the best in cinema history (Talbot-Haynes, 2021). It took Waldo and her team 12 months of painstaking work to recreate the effects of LSD using a combination of combine visual effects and a “dynamic editing” style (Waldo, 2021).

House, Ray Donovan, You, The Bad Batch, and Trip

The period setting of four case studies introduced in this section is contemporaneous to the year in which they made. The dystopian near-future setting of *The Bad Batch*, meanwhile, is described by its director Ana Lily Amirpour as an amplified vision of present day reality (Amirpour, 2017). The first of the case studies to be released since the turn of the millennium is the *House* episode “Distractions” (S2 E12), which was originally broadcast at a significant period in psychedelic history on February 14th, 2006. It was at around this time that two of the events that triggered the contemporary psychedelic renaissance occurred (Pollan, 2018, p. 21): the first was a three-day symposium held in January to mark Albert Hoffmann’s 100th birthday (Pollan, 2018, p. 22); and the second was a US Supreme Court ruling made five weeks later, which granted a small religious sect legal permission to import ayahuasca for sacramental use (Pollan, 2018, p. 27). It is notable, then, that an immensely popular show with significant global reach incorporated

⁵⁹ This study and the hysteria it caused is cited by Siff. Siff, S. (2015) *Acid Hype*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

the use of LSD into one of its episodes at a momentous period in recent psychedelic history.⁶⁰

The show's eponymous protagonist, Dr Gregory House (Hugh Laurie), justifies his use of LSD to cure a migraine with an evidence-based explanation of the drug's impact upon the brain's serotonin receptors. His reasoning is consistent with the scientific literature, which indicates that, while psychedelics are classified as Schedule I substances, they may nonetheless be effective in the treatment of migraines and cluster headaches (Andersson, Persson and Kjellgren, 2017; Davenport, 2016; Sewell, Halpern and Pope, 2006). The doctor's use of an effective but illegal treatment is characteristic of his maverick persona and unorthodox approach to medicine, as well as his disregard for hospital rules and procedures. Significantly, by admitting to using LSD as a remedy for migraine, House implicitly identifies it as the cause of hallucinations he experiences at an earlier point in the episode.

In the *Ray Donovan* episode "Homecoming" (S1 E6), FBI agent Van Miller (Frank Whaley) is dosed with LSD by an associate of show's eponymous antihero, the professional "fixer", Ray Donovan (Liev Schreiber). The dosing of a federal agent with a psychedelic substance is an ironic reversal of the CIA's administration of LSD to unwitting members of the public in the 1950s and 1960s, which was discussed in the introduction to *Conspiracy Theory*. The onset of the drug-state disrupts Van's perception of the familiar surroundings of his workplace. In a state of panic, he leaves the FBI offices and returns home where he is found hiding under a desk in his basement by Ray and Avi (Steven Bauer). The scene ends with the criminals exploiting his suggestible psychological state to coerce him into dropping his investigation into their activities.

⁶⁰ In 2008, *House* became the most watched television programme in the world, reaching 81.8 million viewers in 66 different countries. Thomson, K. (2009) '*House*' Becomes World's Most Popular TV Show. HuffPost. [huffingtonpost.co.uk: BuzzFeed, Inc. Available at: https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/house-becomes-worlds-most_n_214704](https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/house-becomes-worlds-most_n_214704) (Accessed: 01 July 2022)..

The television show *You* is an adaptation of a series of books authored by Caroline Kepnes. However, the LSD trip experienced by protagonist Joe (Penn Badgley) in the episode “Fear and Loathing in Beverly Hills” (S2 E8) was written exclusively for the show and does not feature in any of the novels (Soen, 2019). The title of the episode refers to another of the key psychedelic films analysed in this thesis, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, which was introduced in the previous section. The intertextual relationship between the case studies is also evident in the show’s visual reference to the film’s carpet crawling sequence, which is analysed in the next chapter. The LSD experience depicted in “Fear and Loathing in Beverly Hills” is lengthy, phenomenologically diverse and, significantly, connected to various elements of the show’s convoluted plot, the most relevant aspects of which are outlined below.

Joe is a serial killer who flees New York after murdering his girlfriend Beck (Elizabeth Lail) in the season one finale (S1 E10). He attempts to escape his past by fleeing to Los Angeles, where he starts a new life under the pseudonym, Will (S2 E1). His freedom is jeopardised by the arrival of another former girlfriend, Candace (Ambyr Childers), who is intent on exposing his crimes. However, despite becoming intimately involved with Forty (James Scully), the twin brother of Joe’s latest romantic interest, Love (Victoria Pedretti), Candace is unable to convince people that Joe is a murderer (S2 E5). In a subsequent episode, his risk of exposure intensifies when the manager of his apartment building, Delilah (Carmela Zumbado), discovers the truth about him (S2 E8).

Typically, Joe eliminates any threat to his liberty by committing murder. On this occasion, however, Joe decides not to kill Delilah and instead imprisons her in a plexiglass prison cell using a timed locking device set to release after he has escaped the country. His plans are inadvertently scuppered by Forty, who arranges for them both to be kidnapped and locked in a hotel room where he intends to complete his work on a film adaptation of Beck’s posthumously released memoir. Subsequently, Forty escapes to a local bar where he takes LSD himself and spikes Joe’s seltzer water with four tabs of it. His rationale for

taking acid, and dosing Joe with it, is an assumption that it will enhance their powers of creativity. Consequently, while the show primarily focuses on Joe's psychedelic experience, which is analysed in various chapters of this thesis, Forty's creative endeavours comprise a notable sub-narrative that is interrogated in chapter seven.

The Bad Batch is set in a fictional penal colony located in the West Texas desert. The prison is populated by the "bad batch" of the film's title, the majority of whom live in either one of two settlements. In the film's opening stanza, protagonist Arlen (Suki Waterhouse) is captured by two cannibal inmates who belong to a community known as The Bridge People. Despite having a leg amputated by her kidnappers, she escapes captivity and is taken to the safety of a ramshackle town called Comfort. While this society more closely resembles civilisation, its leader, The Dream (Keanu Reeves), is an acid fascist who administers LSD to the town's citizens at a bi-monthly rave. As Amirpour observes, The Dream uses LSD as tool of hedonic control to ensure Comfort's residents remain in a "psychedelic headspace" that diminishes their awareness of his authoritarianism (Amirpour, 2017). It is at one of these gatherings that Arlen takes LSD and loses contact with Honey (Jayda Fink), a child she has taken into her care. In the initial stages of the trip, Arlen searches the town for the missing girl. However, she subsequently begins to question the nature of the town itself and decides to leave. The remainder of her trip unfolds in the desert and concludes at dawn when she encounters another of The Bridge People, a cannibal named Miami Man (Jason Momoa).

Burning Man is a weeklong festival of live music, performances, art installations, and a host of other activities, which is held annually in the Nevada desert (Kuta, 2018). Ana Lily Amirpour attended Burning Man in 2012 and cites the festival as the main inspiration for the Comfort rave scene. She also discovered the giant boombox DJ booth, which features prominently in the rave scene, during her visit to the festival (Amirpour, 2017). Significantly, her vision for Arlen's psychedelic experience was heavily influenced by an LSD trip she took at Burning Man (Kohn, 2017). The director aimed to represent

LSD as a powerful and valuable psychological tool. To do so, she employed various cinematic and digital techniques to recreate the auditory, visual, and haptic effects of the drug-state (Amirpour, 2017).

In 2017, the singer Jhené Aiko Efuru Chilombo released the short film *Trip* as an accompaniment to her music album of the same name.⁶¹ Both the movie and the record are meditations on the grief and loss she experienced in the wake of the death of her brother, Miyagi, in 2012. Aiko has been extremely forthcoming about her use of psychedelics and their influence on her creative process. Indeed, the title of her work, *Trip*, refers to the various journeys through grief she embarked on, including those she took with psychedelics (Spanos, 2017; Carmichael, 2017). In the film, she both performs, and is represented by, the character Penny. In two consecutive scenes, she takes two different psychedelics with her companion, Dante (Ben Whalen). In the first, they consume psilocybin mushrooms while driving through the desert, and in the second, she takes LSD while attending a party. It is amidst the hedonistic set and setting of the latter that she has powerful psychedelic encounter with her dead brother, who is represented in the film by the character Ayo (Alex Benjamin). This drug-state experience, which is discussed in chapter seven, expedites her grieving process.

Tenacious D in The Pick of Destiny, and Enter the Void

Tenacious D in The Pick of Destiny and *Enter the Void* incorporate the use of psilocybin mushrooms and DMT into their respective narratives. These films represent phenomena commonly reported by LSD users, but which could not be identified in any of the films and television shows that portray the LSD drug-state. The inclusion of analysis of these two films in this thesis ensures it is as comprehensive in its coverage of psychedelic aesthetics as possible. As noted in the introduction, Gaspar Noé is one of the directors who

⁶¹ For the music album, see Aiko, J. 2017. *Trip*. Def Jam.

took a psychedelic, ayahuasca, as inspiration for a cinematic rendition of the drug-state in his film, *Enter the Void* (Noé, 2019). In the film's opening scene, protagonist Oscar (Nathaniel Brown) smokes DMT while at home in his Tokyo apartment. The digitally rendered representation of the psychedelic experience that follows includes a unique depiction of synaesthesia. In chapter five, this unique sensory phenomenon, which is often associated with the LSD drug-state (Cytowic, 1994, p. 128), is defined in tandem with an analysis of its depiction in *Enter the Void*.

Tenacious D in The Pick of Destiny is a 2006 comedy vehicle for the American rock duo, Tenacious D. The film, which is set in the early 1990s, stars the band's two members, Jack Black and Kyle Gass, in the roles of Jables, aka JB, and Kage, aka KG, respectively. In the film, the friends embark on a quest to find the mythical Pick of Destiny, which reputedly endows its owner with an otherworldly ability to play guitar. Following a dispute, the friends briefly part ways, and it is during this period of separation that a hungry JB eats a handful of mushrooms he finds growing by the side of the road. His consumption of the fungi triggers a psychedelic experience, which is notable for its unique combination of cartoon animation and live action footage.

Summary

This chapter has employed a framework informed by set and setting to place the 23 case studies analysed in this thesis into context. The main purpose of the chapter was to outline the narrative details and production contexts most relevant to the analysis of characters' psychedelic experiences, which is conducted in subsequent chapters. Set was used as a framework to introduce characters as human analogues, whose personalities, life histories and, in some instances, motives for taking psychedelics were outlined. The other characters that play a defining role in shaping the psychedelic experience were also introduced. Discussion of setting, meanwhile, focused on the various environments in which characters' psychedelic experiences unfold and the broader social, historical, and

cultural contexts that pertain to each narrative's period setting. Setting also framed the interrogation of film and television production contexts, which focused on the cinematic technologies and techniques employed by filmmakers to depict drug-state phenomena. However, the results of this analysis were limited by the inconsistent availability of data pertaining to each case study. Significantly, while this has not negatively impacted the findings of this thesis, it indicates a potentially interesting line of future inquiry, which is more thoroughly outlined in the concluding chapter.

The first section of this chapter, which addressed films made in the 1960s, began with an extensive introduction to *The Trip*. It was noted in analysis that this film, which was first released in 1967, features the most extensive depiction of the LSD drug-state in screen history. Further, it engages with the principles of set and setting more thoroughly than any other film or television show. It was also noted that the films released in the 1960s are all set at a time contemporaneous to the decade in which they were produced. This contrasts with two of the three films made in the 1990s, which are set during decades past. Moreover, while *Conspiracy Theory* is set in the 1990s, its portrayal of the weaponization of LSD by a CIA agent has more in common with a 1950s set and setting. The films and television shows released since the turn of the millennium, meanwhile, were found to have less consistent period settings. Further, it was during this period that the first television shows analysed in this thesis were produced. However, while this thesis acknowledges these nascent trends, it is beyond its scope to explore them further. Indeed, approaches to this potentially significant area of future study are outlined further in the conclusion.

4. The Sensory Realm: Visual Perception

While the psychedelic experience affects all five senses to varying degrees, few would debate that its main representational mode is visual.

- Patrick Lundborg (2012, p. 437)

This chapter interrogates the altered states of visual perception experienced on the sensory level of the psychedelic drug-state. An emphasis on vision is, Masters and Houston observe, particularly applicable to the discussion of sensory level phenomena (2000, p. 152). Indeed, while the psychedelic drug-state may affect each of the five senses, Lundborg argues that the experience is primarily visual (2012, p. 437). The structure of this chapter, which is divided into three sections, acknowledges the significant distinction between closed eye visual (CEV) and open eye visual (OEV) perception. That is, the first part focuses exclusively on phenomena perceived with eyes closed, while the second addresses various forms of OEV experience. The third section, meanwhile, addresses visually perceived distortions of spatial awareness.

Each section is subdivided into categories that are defined by their focus on specific drug-state phenomena, which have been identified in the psychedelic literature. The first subsection addresses three types of CEV phenomena, which are primitive abstract visuals, aesthetic images, and an experience referred to as the “acid flash”. This is followed by an examination of six categories of OEV phenomena, which are heightened perception, environmental distortions, the manifestation of auras, halos, and visual trails, the visual perception of other people, the visual perception of the self, and true hallucinations. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the altered dimensions of spatial perception. These phenomena, which take various forms, are thoroughly defined in tandem with an analysis of their depictions in films and television shows.

Closed Eye Visuals

On the sensory level of the psychedelic experience the [eidetic] images are almost always meaningless, or mean nothing more than what they most obviously are.

- Robert Masters and Jean Houston (2000, pp. 156-157)

Inner visions, which are typically perceived with eyes closed, are comprised of their own unique spatiotemporal environments (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 160). These autonomous subjective spaces and microworlds are, Grof states, unrelated to the time-space continuum of everyday reality (2021, p. 11). Consequently, in contrast to the perception of a hallucinated object, which the subject might mistakenly believe to be real, the content of a CEV experience is never mistaken for objective reality (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 160).⁶² CEV images are often compared to technicolour movies and photographs (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 156). It is for this reason that, in the 1960s, both psychedelic researchers and recreational users referred to such experiences as the “liddies” (Benshoff, 2001, p. 33). However, in many instances, the subject does not merely observe the images, but becomes an active participant in the unfolding events (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 156). The aesthetic of CEV images, meanwhile, are characterised by the brilliance of their colour and the intricacy of their detail (Masters and Houston, 2000, pp. 142-143).

Primitive Abstract Visuals

In the early stages of a psychedelic experience, the aesthetic of visuals perceived with eyes closed is significantly enhanced (Grof, 2021, p. 37). This form of inner visual perception is dominated by “primitive” abstract images (Sinke *et al.*, 2012, p. 1424), the form and content of which are unrelated to either thought or experience (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 158). Initially, faintly multicoloured streaks and lines appear, which

⁶² It is for this reason that Weinel’s identification of the sound accompanying Paul’s “hallucinations of fire” in *The Trip* as an auditory hallucination is incorrect. Neither the auditory nor the visual element of this experience is hallucinatory, but instead forms part of an eidetic image sequence. Weinel, J. (2018) 'Synaesthetic Overdrive'. New York: New York: Oxford University Press.

become gradually more discernible as the experience unfolds (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 158). Typically, vibrant spots of constantly changing colours and shapes appear (Grof, 2021, p. 37) in tandem with geometric patterns, and displays of extraordinarily rich colour, detail, and motion (Lundborg, 2012, p. 129). Subsequently, as the visual field becomes dominated by vivid coherent mosaics, vague colourful shapes transform into clearly distinguishable objects (Lundborg, 2012, p. 129). Further, the appearance of abstract geometric designs and architectural patterns underpins additional dynamic colour transformations (Grof, 2021, p. 38). These visuals also change automatically at regular short intervals as if controlled by a slide projector (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 158).

In *The Trip* (Corman, 1967), Paul's CEV experience of abstract visuals begins when he puts on an eyeshade. This sequence commences with a closeup of his face as he prepares to pull the eyeshade down from his forehead over his eyes. This is immediately followed by a cut to a POV shot of the eye mask descending over the camera lens to block both his and the audience's view of John's apartment. The eye mask functions as a wipe to demarcate the transition from a subjectively inflected POV shot of the external environment to a subjectively saturated POV shot of Paul's inner visual perception. This stimulates an experience of the "liddies" rendered by what Benschhoff refers to as a sequence of "refracted and kaleidoscopic light" (2001, p. 37).

Initially, faint patches of pulsing coloured light appear sporadically across different parts of the screen. As the scene progresses, more patches of colour manifest as amorphous shapes that overlap one another and glow with various degrees of intensity and brightness. As one set of soft pulsing colours gives way to another, they fragment kaleidoscopically (figure 4.1). This "slide" is then replaced by another, which is filled with a pattern of coloured circles that is repeatedly and rapidly changed by a series of flashing cuts. Subsequently, a second kaleidoscope appears, which pulses with greater intensity than the first. This is succeeded by various patterns of green, orange, and yellow that are replaced by flashing dots and paisley designs (figure 4.2). Occasionally, "slides" are simultaneously

placed on the “stage glass” of the “projector” so that their patterns overlay one another to create new visual forms.

The metaphor of the slide projector is particularly apt when discussing the representation of primitive visuals in *The Trip*. In the 1960s, projectors were used in lightshows to reflect light through coloured gels and layers of vibrant swirling images to recreate psychedelic effects (Leary, 1995, p. xxvii). Bob Beck drew upon his experience working on lightshows to develop special effects for *The Trip* in postproduction. He used equipment borrowed from the lightshows, including liquid light projectors, strobe lights, and various devices that changed coloured gels mid-shot, to recreate psychedelic phenomena (Carson, 2016a). Further, as Roger Corman explains, CEV visual effects were created using various filters, lights, and lenses, both on set and in postproduction (Corman, 2016b).



Figures 4.1-4.2: *The Trip* (Corman, 1967)

Aesthetic Images

Typically, primitive visuals transform into more complex images that assume the form of coherent scenes (Sinke *et al.*, 2012, p. 1424). The subject often appears as the protagonist of these aesthetic and eidetic images, which unfold in a continuous stream that resemble the scenes of a dramatic motion picture. These cinematic visions consist of diverse landscapes and architecture, which are populated by people, animals, and various legendary, mythical, folkloric, and fairy tale creatures (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 156). Masters and Houston distinguish between the “meaningless” aesthetic images encountered on the sensory level and their more “purposive” eidetic counterparts that are

characteristic of the deeper states of the drug-state. The aesthetic images, which are sometimes entertaining, may also provoke an array of emotional responses, including pleasure, mild euphoria, sexual excitement, fear, and revulsion (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 157).

Films and television shows rarely recreate the vivid luminosity and rich brilliance of colour that typify the visual aesthetic of eidetic images (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 156).⁶³ In *The Trip*, the transition from primitive to complex images is marked by a series of direct cuts, which flash back and forth between the sequence of abstract patterns described in the previous subsection, and the emerging vision of a beach scene. This pattern of cutting not only produces a sense of continuity between the primitive and complex images, which demarcates the beach scene as a component of Paul's inner visual experience, they also enhance the psychedelic quality of the incoming vision in lieu of colour enhanced images.⁶⁴

This pattern of direct cutting is employed again twice during this scene to reintroduce the abstract visuals. However, it is not repeated during any of the film's other CEV image sequences. Consequently, the editing technique not only emphasises the psychedelic quality of the scene but, as it is incorporated into the early stages of the experience, it also reflects Paul's psychological adjustment to the drug-state. Further, the cutting distinguishes this complex aesthetic image sequence from the purposive eidetic images that are depicted in subsequent scenes. This is significant as the characters that appear in this scene, which include two versions of Paul and Glenn, and a pair of horse riders whose identities remain concealed until the end of the film, assume symbolic

⁶³ Other examples are noted in chapter seven, which focuses on the eidetic images of post-sensory level trip stages.

⁶⁴ It is, perhaps, for this reason that Lundborg considers the aesthetic of *The Trip* to be like "an opium movie more than an acid movie." Lundborg, P. (2012) *Psychedelia: An Ancient Culture, A Modern Way of Life*. Stockholm: Lysergia.

meaning throughout later eidetic image sequences. During this onset period, their presence either holds no meaning for Paul, or he fails to acknowledge their symbolic relevance.

The “Acid Flash”

The term “acid flash” does not have an exact or fixed definition. It is sometimes used to describe a psychedelic brand of epiphany, which may catalyse various forms of realisation. For example, the subject might suddenly believe they possess extraordinary powers of extrasensory perception (Gaskin, 1999, p. 42), or they may instantly recognise a damaging pattern of behaviour, the identification of which stimulates a process of personal transformation (Alexander, 2015). However, the term “bad flash” has also been used to describe the sudden and intrusive manifestation of a negative thought or idea (Alexander, 2015). Benschhoff introduces a visual component to the definition of the term by describing “flashing” as “the quick imaging on the mind’s eye of another scene” (2001, p. 33).⁶⁵

Benschhoff identifies an acid flash in *The Trip* which, he states, is approximated by a jump cut and a subliminal insert (2001, p. 33). This flash marks an abrupt but brief shift from external to internal spatiotemporal orientation. In the middle of a conversation with John, Paul stops abruptly and reflexively raises his arms out in front of him as he exclaims, “Oooh!” This is immediately followed by shot of Glenn stood on the rotunda balcony of Max’s Psychedelic Temple, which flashes on screen for less than a second. While this shot resembles, rather than replicates, any of those that appeared in the previous scene, it is nonetheless intended to represent Paul’s memory of his initial meeting with Glenn.⁶⁶ The image of Glenn is succeeded by a sudden cut back to John’s apartment, where Paul excitedly declares that he has just experienced an acid flash.

⁶⁵ The acid flash is not to be confused with the LSD flashback, also referred to as an acid flashback, which refers to the recurrence of psychedelic phenomena after the effects of the drug have subsided. Shick, J. F. E. and Smith, D. E. (1970) 'Analysis of the LSD Flashback', *Journal of psychedelic drugs*, 3(1), pp. 13-19.

⁶⁶ It is of little consequence that this shot of Glenn could not, in its original context, have been viewed from Paul’s POV. Its position in this sequence ensures that its representation of his subjective memory is unequivocally represented.

Open Eye Visuals

“All at once” colors are bright and glowing, the outlines of objects are defined as they never have been before.

- Robert Masters and Jean Houston (2000, p. 152)

Visual hallucinations are perceived with eyes open and thus manifest in the real world (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 160). Hallucinatory phenomena, which may be positive or negative, can also be categorised as either true hallucinations, pseudo-hallucinations, or illusions. The perception of something that does not exist in objective reality is known as a positive hallucination. Its negative counterpart, by contrast, is defined by the absence from perception of something that does exist in the real world. True hallucinations are characterised by the delusion that what is perceived truly exists, while the subject who experiences a pseudo-hallucination is aware that the content of their perception is not real (Siegel, 1985, p. 250). While true hallucinations are very rarely experienced on LSD (Siegel, 1985, p. 254), some subjects have been known to confuse hallucinatory phenomena for objective reality (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 160). Finally, illusions are defined by the misidentification of the percept as something other than that what it actually is (Cohen, 1964, p. 12).

Distorted and heightened perception are two distinct categories of OEV experience, of which the former consists of more numerous and diverse phenomena than the latter (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 155). The heightening of visual perception experienced at the outset of a psychedelic experience is characterised by the eruption of a “hypersensate fanfare” of bright and glowing colours and enhanced visual acuity (Masters and Houston, 2000, pp. 152-153). Distortions, meanwhile, may transform the subject’s perception of their own body and its image (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 143), the appearance of other people (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 92), and various aspects of the external environment (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 176).

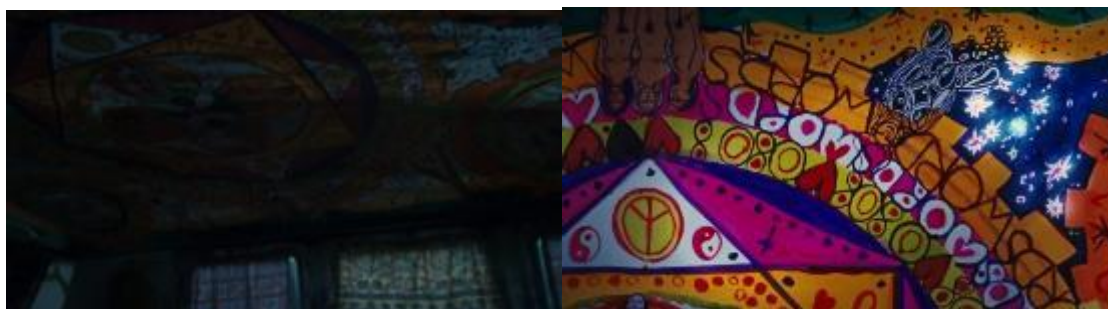
Heightened Perception

Enhanced visual acuity is characterised by the heightened perception of colours, which appear to be more vivid (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 153), bright, penetrative, and explosive (Grof, 2021, p. 38). They may also appear to be “alive and clear” (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 206) such that their appearance is “raised to a higher power” (Huxley, 2004, pp. 13-14). The perception of colour may also be sharpened (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 158) as the contrast between it and light is “enhanced and deepened” (Grof, 2021, p. 38). The range and intensity of the appearance of both light and colour is also increased, while objects may appear to glow luminously (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 225) with a living light that seems to emanate from within the percept (Huxley, 2004, p. 7).

In *Taking Woodstock* (Lee, 2009), Elliot’s psychedelic experience begins inside a dimly lit campervan. Initial shots of the van’s interior include closeups of Elliot’s face, which encourage the audience to identify with his subjective perspective. The lighting of these closeups also contrasts sharply with subjectively inflected POV shots that share the content of his psychedelic visual perception. In the first of these POV shots, a pair of candles glow with an effervescent light that emanates as much from their wax bodies as it does their burning wicks. The manifestation of a living light that radiates from within is yet more evident in his perception of VW Girl, whose skin glows with an unnatural intensity that is characteristic of drug-state visual perception.

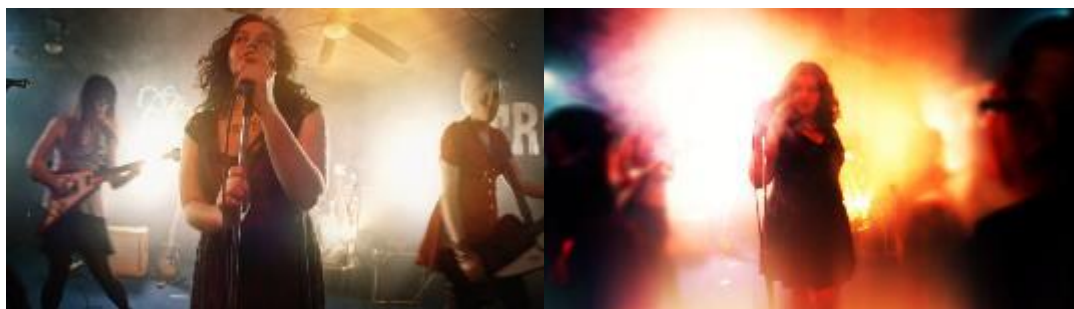
The interior of the van is introduced with a shot of its most striking feature, which is the mural adorning its ceiling. Initially, its appearance is muted by the gloomy lighting (figure 4.3). Viewed from Elliot’s perspective, its colours become explosively vibrant, their richness and depth revealing the full extent of the fresco’s intricate design. His enhanced visual acuity is apparent in the contrast between light and colour, which is particularly evident in top right corner of figure 4.4. Here, the painted stars begin to twinkle with a bright white light that is set against a background of dark blue, the hue of

which deepens to enhance the contrast between the colours. This aesthetic captures a sense of the enhanced visual acuity experienced by Elliot.



Figures 4.3-4.4: *Taking Woodstock* (Lee, 2009)

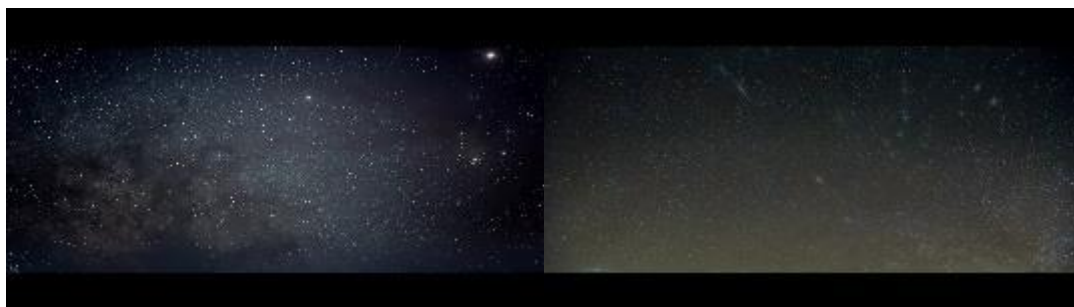
In *Acid Test* (Waldo, 2017), the increased range and intensity of Jenny's perception of colour and light is evident in subjectively inflected POV shots of a band performing at a concert. Prior to the onset of the drug-state, the singer, guitarist, and bassist of Giant Kitty are all discernible within her visual field, backed by a noticeable but undistorted stage light. That the LSD drug-state increases the range of her colour perception is evident in the manifestation of blue, violet, orange, and red, which emanate from the light's bright white centre. Indeed, the light intensifies to such a degree that it engulfs the guitarist and bassist and obfuscates their appearance (figures 4.5-4.6).



Figures 4.5-4.6: *Acid Test* (Waldo, 2017)

In an outdoor setting, the subject is able to more fully appreciate the “magnificence” of the universe, which is marked by the enhanced perception of pure white stars that seem to stream through the night sky (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 137). In *The Bad Batch* (Amirpour, 2016), Arlen leaves Comfort during an LSD experience and wanders aimlessly through the vast expanse of the West Texas desert. In the absence of light pollution and other distractions, she becomes fascinated by the beauty and scale of the

night sky. The film’s director, Ana Lily Amirpour, shot this scene using time-lapse to capture a sense of how the psychedelic drug-state transforms the individual’s visual perception of the universe (Amirpour, 2017). The accelerated playback of each shot speeds up the motion of meteors, which appear to pinball through space at high velocity, and causes the stars to rapidly flicker (figures 4.7-4.8). In *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* novel, narrator Charlie describes his drug-state perception of the stars as “amazing” and “white” (Chbosky, 2009, p. 101). In the film adaptation (Chbosky, 2012), an objective shot traces Charlie’s gaze as he looks up at the sky where stars sparkle with bright intensity at the edge of the frame (figure 4.9).⁶⁷



Figures 4.7-4.8: *The Bad Batch* (Amirpour, 2017)

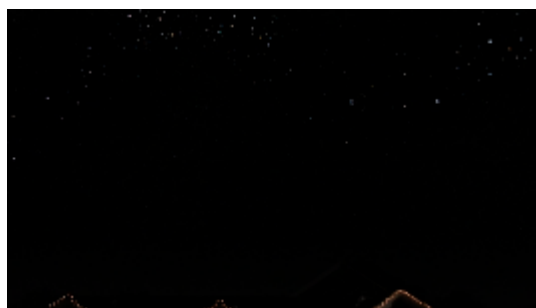


Figure 4.9: *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (Chbosky, 2012)

Environmental Distortions

The subject’s perception of the external environment may be distorted by an undulating movement that flows across the field of vision (Grof, 2021, p. 38). This creates a rippling effect that is somewhat akin to the perception of a person or object whose

⁶⁷ This experience is also verbally described by Sam in the *Aquarius* (NBC, 2015-2016) episode “It’s Alright, Ma (I’m Only Bleeding)” (S1 E10) after he is rescued from onrushing traffic by Joe. Lying against the trunk of a car, Sam looks toward the sky and tells Joe to look at the “raining light” of the stars.

reflection is viewed in the choppy surface of water (Cohen, 1964, p. 29). The undulation of visual perception transforms the appearance of various objects and surfaces (Cohen, 1964, p. 50; Masters and Houston, 2000, pp. 153-154). Further, one of the most frequently reported drug-state phenomena are undulating colourful shapes, which may be perceived with eyes either open or closed (Lundborg, 2012, p. 129).⁶⁸

In *Skidoo* (Preminger, 1968), a partially hallucinated POV shot reveals Tony's perception of the interior of his jailcell, which is distorted by a pattern of undulating colours that fluidly disrupt its proportions (figure 4.10). The layer of translucent colours evokes the primitive visuals depicted in *The Trip*, which suggests that similar lightshow technologies may have been used to create it. In *Taking Woodstock*, meanwhile, the undulating of colourful shapes was recreated using computer graphics (Lundborg, 2012, p. 129). The transformation of Elliot's perception of colour and light, which was previously discussed as a feature of enhanced visual acuity, also produces a subtle wave-like undulation that sweeps across the image as different aspects of it simultaneously lighten and darken. The image undulates with greater intensity when the camera stops moving and lingers on a simplistically painted human form surrounded by an orange border that ebbs and flows in tandem with the pulse of light emanating from the painting (figure 4.11). In a subsequent shot, the fresco becomes increasingly animated as waves of undulation destabilise its surface (figure 4.12).

In *Acid Test*, Jenny's visual perception also begins to undulate in tandem with the transformation of her perception of colour and light. The manifestation of colours emanating from the white stage light positioned behind the band's singer is marked by a simultaneous pulsing and reverberation of her visual field that emanates concentrically from its centre. This wave-like pulse, which is most palpable at the periphery of the shot, is

⁶⁸ This effect was recreated in cartoon form in *Yellow Submarine*. However, as it is not explicitly attributed to the subjective experience of a drug using character, the sequence is not analysed in this thesis. (Dunning, 1968) Lundborg, P. (2012) *Psychedelia: An Ancient Culture, A Modern Way of Life*. Stockholm: Lysergia.

relatively taut in comparison to the softer liquid-like rippling of surfaces in *Taking Woodstock*. These examples illustrate the different ways a single phenomenon might be experienced by different people and rendered in aesthetically distinct ways using various filmic techniques.



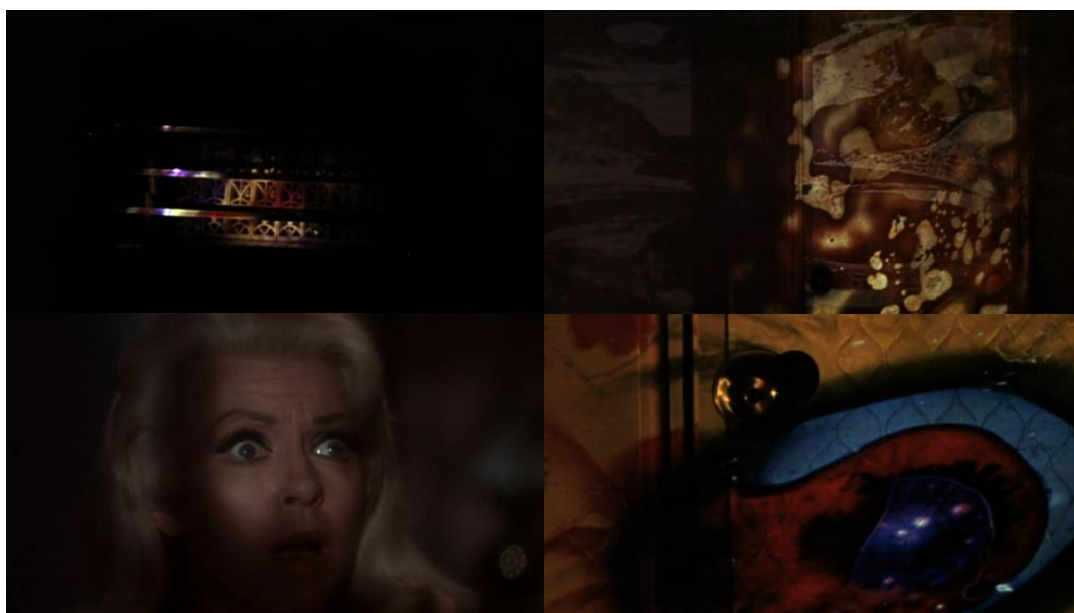
Figure 4.10: *Skidoo* (Preminger, 1968)



Figures 4.11-4.12: *Taking Woodstock* (2009)

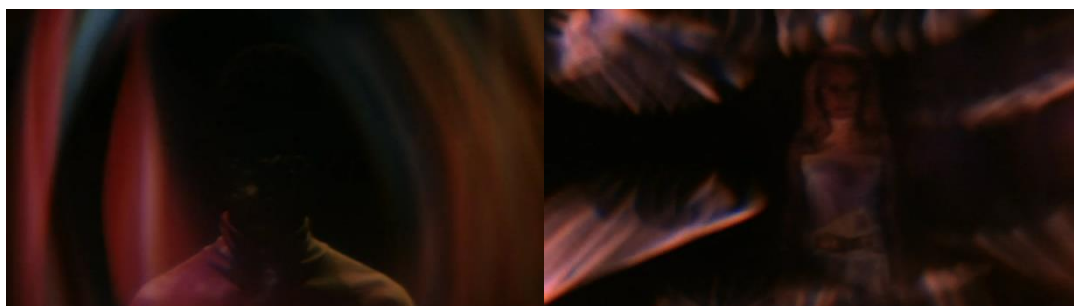
The subject's emotional state plays a significant role in determining the nature of their distorted perception of the external environment. Further, the emotion that stimulates the perceptual distortion may be heightened in a feedback loop that intensifies their experience (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 176). In *The Big Cube* (Davison, 1969), Lisa and Johnny dose Adriana with LSD before subjecting her to tape-recorded messages that trigger various visual distortions. The first recording begins with Lisa repeatedly stating that the gas is on and that it is going to kill Adriana. This causes Adriana to hallucinate gas as a pattern of coloured light emitted from a vent (figure 4.13). Her fear and paranoia are exacerbated by further recordings in which Lisa repeatedly blames her for the death of her father and tells her she is going to die. This stimulates further hallucinations of coloured patterns, which appear on the surfaces of the bedroom walls and door (figures 4.14 and 4.16). Rapid cuts back and forth between partially hallucinated POV shots and closeups of

Adriana's terrified facial expression capture a sense of her panicked mental state (figure 4.15).



Figures 4.13-4.16: *The Big Cube* (Davison, 1969)

In a subsequent scene, the couple employ the same technique to further destabilise Adriana's psychological condition and trigger further episodes of anxiety and paranoia. Environmental distortions rendered by patterns of colour and the kaleidoscopic fracturing of her visual perception are accompanied by hallucinations of both Johnny and Lisa (figures 4.17-4.19). The disturbance of Adriana's emotional and mental stability peaks when Johnny encourages her to commit suicide. His instructions cause her to hallucinate a vision of him beckoning her towards the bedroom balcony (figure 4.19). Indeed, it is only Lisa's timely intervention that saves Adriana from imminent death.





Figures 4.17-4.19: *The Big Cube* (Davison, 1969)

Illusions, which are commonly experienced on LSD, involve the misperception of an aspect of the external environment. This results from “an error in seeing” that is triggered by a sensory cue (Cohen, 1964, p. 12). The apparent “coming to life” of inanimate objects is indicative of this phenomenon (Grof, 2021, p. 38). For example, one subject witnessed the lips of a mannequin curve into a smile, while another observed the people present in a still photographic image begin to move (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 16). Examples of illusory misperception, meanwhile, include the distorted appearance of cracks in a wall as snakes (Cohen, 1964, p. 12) and the crawling movement of patterned surfaces (Benshoff, 2001, p. 33). The distinct aesthetic of the latter is evident in Sidney Katz’s description of a “gaily patterned carpet” that became “a fabulous heaving mass of living matter, part vegetable, part animal” (1995).

There is a striking resemblance between Katz’s account of this phenomenon and its depiction in *Fear in Loathing in Las Vegas* (Gilliam, 1998). However, as the film’s director Terry Gilliam explains, despite having never taken psychedelics, he conceived the idea for this sequence himself during a visit to a Las Vegas hotel (Gilliam, 2003a). Further, it is this iconic scene, which takes place in a Las Vegas hotel lobby, that both Lundborg and Benshoff credit with being a particularly convincing portrayal of a psychedelic phenomenon (2001, p. 33; 2012, p. 395). The distortion, which was created using computer animation (Benshoff, 2001, p. 33), occurs while Raoul is waiting in a queue to check in at the hotel. Looking in the direction of a man speaking on the lobby payphone, the auditory distortion of which is examined in the next chapter, a subjectively inflected POV shot

reveals his distorted perception of the carpet's gaudy botanical design, which comes to life and begins crawling menacingly up the walls and the hotel patron's leg (figure 4.20).



Figure 4.20: *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (Gilliam, 1998)

The title of the *You* (Netflix, 2018-) episode “Fear and Loathing in Beverly Hills” (S2 E8) is an explicit reference to *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. Their intertextual relationship is also evident in the visual reference the former makes to the latter in its depiction of the LSD drug-state. That is, *You* pays homage to the carpet crawling sequence with a subtle distortion of a hotel carpet pattern. This perceptual distortion occurs at the climax of a scene in which Forty and Joe enact an emotionally intense roleplay scenario. Lying on the floor, Forty declares himself to be peaking as the carpet pattern appears to melt. That the scene takes place in a hotel room enhances the intertextual connection between it and *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*.

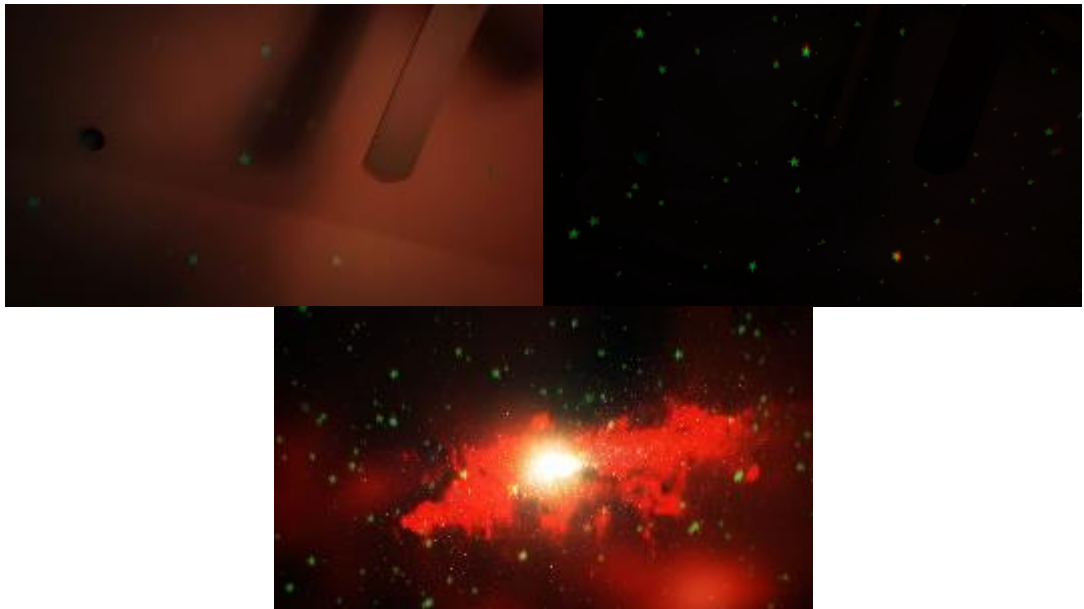
In *Taking Woodstock*, closeups of various elements of the campervan mural, which are shot from Elliot's POV, reveal his illusory perception of it. Elliot's enhanced visual acuity reveals to him the finer details of the fresco's design. The painting incorporates several basic illustrations of people and animals which, when viewed from Elliot's hallucinatory POV, become visually animated. For example, the painted outline of a human face bleeds inwards as if it were being manipulated by an invisible paintbrush. Similarly, its hair is brought to life in a flow of liquid motion, while the line of its mouth extends inwards and upwards, curving into a smile that evokes the previously noted perception of grinning mannequins experienced by one person (figure 4.21).



Figure 4.21: *Taking Woodstock* (Lee, 2009)

In *Acid Test*, Jenny observes a set of ornamental birds come to life during the second part of her LSD trip. Her illusory perception of these three-dimensional inanimate objects is distinct from the previously discussed distortions of two-dimensional surfaces. The birds spring to life while Jenny's father aggressively reprimands her for taking LSD. In the first of two closeups shot from her POV, one of the birds rapidly opens and shuts its beak in tandem with a distorted metallic chirp. In a second closeup, she observes another bird pecking frantically at an ornamental tree stump, which is accompanied by the distinctive sound of a woodpecker's beak repeatedly striking the bark of a tree trunk.

Towards the end of her LSD experience, Jenny experiences an "error in seeing" that is triggered by an altered perception of the glow-in-the-dark stars affixed to her bedroom ceiling. The first of two POV shots establishes her undistorted perspective of a smattering of these decorative stars (figure 4.22). Subsequently, darkness engulfs her field of vision as the ceiling transforms into a vision of the night-sky that is filled with a greater number of stars (figure 4.23). The intensification of this illusion is represented by a second subjectively inflected POV shot, which is marked by a further multiplication of the number of stars visible. The sequence culminates with a burst of red light that signifies the complete transformation of the room into a vision of the universe (figure 4.24).



Figures 4.22-4.24: *Acid Test* (Waldo, 2017)

Auras, Halos, and Visual Trailing

The appearance of halos and auras, which may manifest around either people or objects, is a notable psychedelic phenomenon. Similarly, aesthetic experience is enriched by the appearance of afterimages and visual trails, which enable the subject to perceive various stages of movement simultaneously. The aesthetic of this phenomenon resembles that produced by time-lapsed images and strobe light photography (Grof, 2021, p. 39).⁶⁹ The inability to fixate the eye, meanwhile, can result in the outline of objects becoming blurred (Grof, 2021, p. 38). This creates the effect of streaming and mingling at the edges of things (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 153). While none of these effects are visually recreated in *The Trip*, Paul verbally describes the experience of a hallucinatory aura emanating from an orange. However, it is left to the viewer to imagine the aesthetic of the cloud of light he observes emanating from its seams.⁷⁰ In *Taking Woodstock*, by contrast,

⁶⁹ The comparison Powell draws between lens flare in *Easy Rider* (Hopper, 1969) and the image-trailing produced by moving objects is a dubious interpretation of this effect and a misidentification of the phenomenon. Powell, A. (2007) *Deleuze, Altered States and Film*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press.

⁷⁰ This scene is also notable for Paul's excitement at seeing the world anew which, despite being an inherently visual experience, Benschhoff determines to be a representation of one of the "less visual and more cognitive aspects of an acid trip". Benschhoff, H. M. (2001) 'The short-lived life of the Hollywood LSD film.(lysergic acid diethylamide)', *Velvet Light Trap*, (47)..

the effect is captured by a subjectively inflected POV shot of the mural in which a painted orange circle ebbs and flows in manner consistent with the streaming and mingling of colours (figure 4.11).

Elliot's perception of visual trailing, auras, and halos is depicted in *Taking Woodstock* after he and VW Girl leave the campervan and begin wandering around a festival campsite. First, he pauses to observe a group of women dancing around a campfire. The transition to his POV is marked by a dissolve, which demarcates the shift of perspective from objective reality to his subjective psychedelic perception. In the foreground of this partially hallucinated POV shot, a fiery orange visual trail emanates from a woman's waist length brown hair as she flips it through the air in a high arc above her head (figure 4.25). Elliot's perception of a second group of people is distorted by the appearance of a vague shimmering aura of translucent grey around their bodies, which is somewhat reminiscent of heat haze, and the presence of faint purple halos above their heads (figure 4.26). Bodily motion, meanwhile, transforms these luminous auras into a subtle brand of blurred visual trailing.



Figures 4.25-4.26: *Taking Woodstock* (Lee, 2009)

That the aesthetic depiction of visual trails and auras in *Aquarius* (NBC, 2015-2016) and *You* are distinct from one another, and their representation in *Taking Woodstock*, is indicative of the various ways these phenomena are experienced. In the *Aquarius* episode "Home is Where You're Happy" (S1 E4), Emma perceives a rainbow of colours emanate from the body of Charles Manson while he delivers a pseudo-spiritual sermon. This multicoloured aura is reminiscent of light refracted through a prism, which flows in waves from the outline of Manson's body (figure 4.27). In "It's Alright Ma (I'm Only

Bleeding)” (S1 E10), Sam Hodiak perceives visual trails of multicoloured neon light radiate from Sadie’s (Ambyr Childers) arms as she waves them up and down while trying to attract his attention (figure 4.28). The rendering of visual trailing in *You* (S2 E8), meanwhile, takes the form of a subtle blur perceived by Joe as Dottie (Saffron Burrows) and Love walk away from him down a hotel corridor during the initial stages of his LSD trip (figure 4.29).⁷¹



Figures 4.27-4.28: *Aquarius* (S1 E4) and (S1 E10)



Figure 4.29: *You* (S2 E8)

Charlie’s experience of afterimage trailing in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* is characterised by the visual perception of different stages of movement. He observes the revellers at a party from his position on a sofa and, as they move around the living room and upstairs hallway, the stages of motion appear as a spectral form of afterimage trailing (figures 4.30-4.31).⁷² The presence of Charlie’s head in the foreground of the shot, which indicates that the camera’s perspective is objective, does not preclude its depiction of his

⁷¹ A second example of visual trailing in this episode of *You* is not analysed in this thesis as it is applied to a hallucinated entity, Little Joe, rather than the movement of a being or object that exists in the real-world.

⁷² It was not possible to identify the specific method used by the makers of *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* to create this effect. However, it is plausible that they employed a similar postproduction technique to that used by Ana Lily Amirpour in *The Bad Batch*, which involved the adjustment of shot transparency, and the overlapping and layering of shots, to produce a “doubling effect”. *The Bad Batch: Director’s Commentary* (With Ana Lily Amirpour), 2017. DVD. Directed by Amirpour, A. L. USA: Neon; Virgil Films.

subjective experience.⁷³ Indeed, the position of the camera ensures the audience's perspective is directly aligned with Charlie's. His stable, undistorted presence in the foreground heightens the distinction between him as psychedelic subject and the partygoers whose movement is visually distorted by the effects of LSD.



Figures 4.30-4.31: *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (Chbosky, 2012)

Visual Perception of Other People

The psychedelic subject's altered visual perception of another person is determined by what they think, feel, and unconsciously assume about them. That is, distortions are usually positively inclined if the subject possesses a favourable attitude towards the other person (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 92). For example, strong feelings of love and friendship may infuse their appearance with an extraordinary degree of beauty (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 98). Similarly, a broader sense of "universal love" can transform the perception of entire groups of people so that they appear "very beautiful, loving, friendly, and good" (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 100). Notably, in contrast to previously discussed phenomena, these distortions are characteristically subjective. That is, while an aesthetic such as visual trailing may take various forms, it can be objectively defined. The meaning of words such as beauty and goodness, meanwhile, often differ significantly between individuals, cultures, and societies. It has nonetheless been possible to identify

⁷³ Representations of this effect in *Aquarius* and *The Bad Batch* are not analysed in this thesis because, in both instances, afterimage trailing is applied to the body of the psychedelic subject but not viewed from their subjective POV. While this does not necessarily preclude a depiction of a character's subjective perception, the effect is employed in these examples to, as Amirpour observes of her film, to generically enhance the psychedelic quality of the scene. Ibid.

examples in films and television shows that represent these subjectively perceived qualities, which are outlined in this section.

The subject's response to other people is just as likely to be negative as it is positive. If another person inspires feelings of anxiety or hostility then the subject's visual perception of them will usually be distorted negatively (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 92). For example, a stranger who provokes anxiety typically assumes a menacing countenance, while an individual who inspires a hostile response will usually be infused with a bizarre, ridiculous, or pathetic appearance (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 96). One subject's perception of the waiters and patrons he encountered at a restaurant was altered by combined feelings of apprehension and resentment, which transformed their appearance so that they resembled pimps, thieves, cutthroats, and, in one instance, a gargoyle. The caricaturing of another person's features is another commonly reported distortion which, while typically considered to have negative connotations, can also be positively inflected (Masters and Houston, 2000, pp. 97-98).

The luminous glow of VW Girl's skin in *Taking Woodstock* was discussed in a previous section for its depiction of enhanced visual acuity. The manifestation of this inner light also represents Elliot's perception of enhanced beauty, which visually captures the sense of companionship and love he feels towards her. These feelings are inspired by the supportive role VW Girl plays during Elliot's LSD experience. She repeatedly quells his fear and anxiety with a combination of touch and the gently repeated instruction to "just breathe." Indeed, the luminosity of her skin reaches the peak of its intensity when she delivers this mantra while standing in front of the undulating mural (figure 4.12). The radiance of light from within represents an outward manifestation of her inner beauty as Elliot perceives it. In a subsequent sequence, his perception of purple halos surrounding the heads of a group of strangers can be interpreted as a visual expression of feelings of universal love (figure 4.26). That is, as halos are commonly associated with angelic entities, their manifestation suggests he perceives these people as inherently good.

The subject's visual perception of the guide is rarely distorted to a significant degree. However, if their appearance is drastically altered, it is usually positively inclined. Typically, the guide is perceived as a personification of wisdom, truth, and beauty, or assumes the appearance of an archetypal figure, such as a deity or religious authority (Masters and Houston, 2000, pp. 92-93). In the *Mad Men* (AMC, 2007-2015) episode "Far Away Places" (S5 E6), Roger perceives Sandy as his friend and business associate, Don Draper (Jon Hamm). Initially, Roger experiences the hallucination auditorily, as he hears Don instruct him to not look in the mirror (figure 4.32). Roger looks over shoulder to find Sandy, who repeats the instruction, is standing behind him (figure 4.33). This establishes that Roger's initial auditory hallucination represents a distortion of Sandy's voice. The hallucination becomes auditory-visual when Don physically appears in Sandy's place (figure 4.34). That Roger perceives the guide as Don is likely influenced by a subconscious belief that his friend is an authority on romantic relationships. Consequently, while Don is not a traditional archetypal figure, it is significant that Roger receives an instruction to be with his wife Jane from him.



Figures 4.32-4.34: *Mad Men* (S5 E6)

In *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* and *Aquarius*, the distorted perceptions of other people experienced by Raoul and Sam respectively are negatively influenced by the words

and actions of other characters. In the former, Dr Gonzo fuels Raoul's anxiety by feeding him LSD at gunpoint as they travel through the desert between Los Angeles and Las Vegas. Subsequently, he continues to stimulate the conditions for a bad trip experience by asking Raoul if he is prepared to commit the various crimes they plan to undertake in Las Vegas. Upon their arrival at the hotel in the next scene, an already paranoid Raoul misinterprets the intentions of a well-meaning parking valet. Perceiving him as a threat, Raoul watches with horror as the valet's face twists into a menacing caricature (figure 4.35). Similarly, in *Aquarius* (S1 E10), Charles Manson manipulates Sam's LSD experience with the intention of orchestrating his death. Manson disrupts the tone of Sam's experience by referring to him as a killer. This alters Sam's perception of a passer-by whose countenance twists into a demonic caricature (figure 4.36).



Figure 4.35: *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (Gilliam, 1998)



Figure 4.36: *Aquarius* (S1 E10)

Joe's altered perception of Dimitri (Adi Spektor) in *You* (S2 E8) is determined by the dynamic of their relationship. That is, Dimitri threatens Joe's safety and freedom by first kidnapping him and subsequently holding him captive. Joe's former girlfriend, Candace, also poses a risk to his liberty when she attempts to expose his crimes. Joe hallucinates one hostile figure in place of another when he perceives Dimitri as Candace

standing at the end of a hotel corridor. Despite being aware that Candace is a hallucination, he watches her menacingly approach him in two POV shots before Dimitri appears in the third and punches him in the face (figures 4.37-4.38). In a subsequent scene, Joe opens the hotel room door to find Dimitri in the corridor dressed as a butcher mincing a severed arm (figure 4.39). Joe lets out a startled scream, slams the door shut, composes himself, and reopens it to find Dimitri sat at a table eating dinner. The vision of Dimitri as a butcher is clearly defined as a distorted visual perception that is shaped by Joe's fear of him.



Figures 4.37-4.39: *You* (S2 E8)

In *The Big Cube* (Davison, 1969), Johnny's altered perception of his new girlfriend as former wife Lisa is shaped by his lingering romantic feelings for her (figures 4.40-4.42). In contrast to *You*, which cuts back and forth between close-ups of Joe and his POV as Candace walks towards him, Johnny's girlfriend transforms into Lisa without the camera changing position. Nonetheless, it is a subtle cut between shots that enables the filmmakers to rapidly replace one person with another. That the transformation is accompanied by a flash of red light indicates to the audience that the sequence should be interpreted as a hallucination (figures 4.40-4.41). Lisa's declaration of love for Johnny, meanwhile, emphasises that his romantic feelings for her have not diminished since their divorce.

Finally, the hallucination ends when he attempts to kiss her and, to his disgust, his new girlfriend reappears (figures 4.42-4.43).



Figures 4.40-4.43: *The Big Cube* (Davison, 1969)

In *Psych-Out* (Rush, 1968), Elwood's perception of a gang as medieval knights and a dragon (figures 4.44-4.45) is stimulated by the threat they pose to Jenny's safety. Initially, the lingering effects of LSD, taken at an earlier point in the film's narrative, reduce his desire to engage in combat with the gang. However, the scrapyard transforms into a medieval battlefield in which the gang members appear to him as a band of crusaders. Further, he picks up a plank of wood, which he perceives as a longsword, that provides him with the impetus to engage in battle and fend off the threat posed by the thugs.

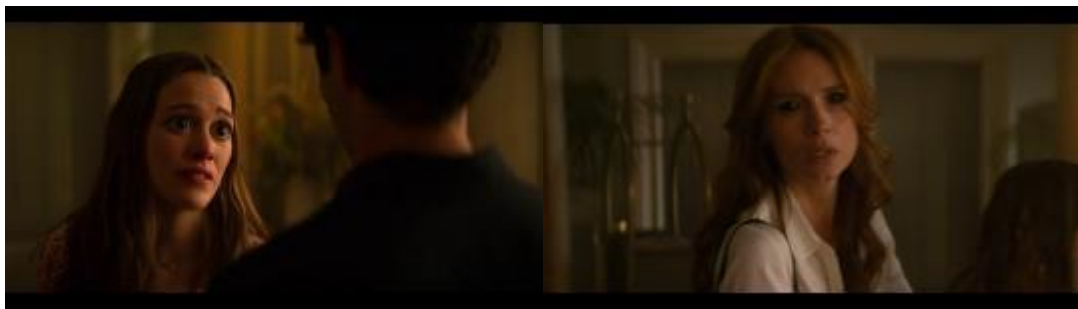


Figures 4.44-4.45: *Psych-Out* (Rush, 1968)

Psychedelic drug users often interpret their distorted perception of other people as revealing some inner truth about them (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 92).⁷⁴ In *You* (S2 E8) and *Aquarius* (S1 E4), Joe and Emma observe the transformation of other people's faces into caricatures of the puppy-dog eye expression. In accordance with the notion that the eyes are the window to the soul, the characters believe that these distortions reveal an inner truth about the person's intentions. During the onset of his psychedelic experience in *You*, Joe encounters Love in a hotel corridor, where she begs him to meet her for a final lunch date before he permanently leaves Los Angeles. In *Aquarius*, meanwhile, Grace locates her daughter at the Spiral Staircase commune and pleads with her to return home. In both instances, the subject's perception of the speaker's pleading tone is accompanied by an expansion of the eyes to exaggerated proportions (figures 4.46 and 4.48).

In the two examples outlined above, the caricaturing of other people is positively inflected. In both *You* and *Aquarius*, the two characters also perceive negative distortions of other people's eyes. In the former, Love's mother, Dottie, arrives to assist her drunken daughter. However, Joe infers from his altered perception of Dottie's eyeballs that she is a demon from whom Love must be rescued (figure 4.47). One of the reasons Masters and Houston warn against interpreting truth from these distortions is that the positively inclined perception of another person may suddenly become negative (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 92). This occurs in *Aquarius* when Emma also observes demonic darkening of her mother's eyes, which instantly alters her attitude and emotional response (figure 4.49). That Emma believes this vision of her mother to be true is indicated by her desperate attempt to fend off her advances with a firearm.

⁷⁴ That Masters and Houston warn subjects and guides alike not to make these assumptions suggests that many are wont to do so.



Figures 4.46-4.47: *You* (S2 E8)

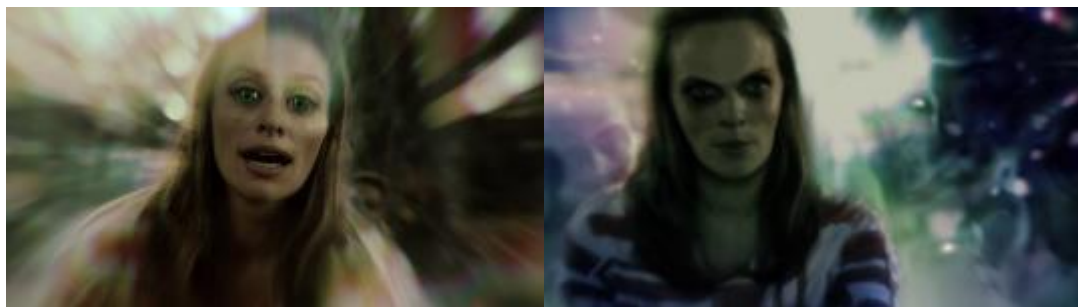


Figure 4.48-4.49: *Aquarius* (S1 E4)

The negative perception of other people as animals may elicit a variety of responses ranging from amusement to fear (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 96). In Hunter S Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, narrator and protagonist Raoul Duke twice perceives other people as animals. First, he witnesses a hotel clerk's face transform into a moray eel, and second, he observes a barroom full of hotel patrons morph into lizards (Thompson, 1998, pp. 24-25).⁷⁵ In Terry Gilliam's film adaptation, Raoul's distorted perception of the desk clerk is depicted by three partially hallucinated POV shots. In the first, her throat and neck swell like that of a frog or toad, while in the second her facial features are stretched outwards so that the gap between her eyes widens. Raoul's disgust transforms into fear following the transition of the woman's head into a moray eel, which slithers menacingly towards him in the third and final POV shot (figure 4.50). This final

⁷⁵ In Thompson's account of the real version of events, he encouraged his friend Oscar Zeta Acosta to hallucinate the lizards. The author claims that, while he also perceived them, he knew that their presence was not real. Consequently, he did not panic in the same way that he claims Acosta did. This is reversed in the book and the film, in which Raoul, who represents Thompson, experiences the terror caused by the reptile zoo hallucination. *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: audio commentary track with producer Laila Nabulsi and author Hunter S. Thompson*, 2003b. DVD. Directed by Gilliam, T. USA: Universal Pictures, Criterion Collection.

transformation is triggered when she begins speaking and, cowering in fear, Raoul yelps defensively that he and Gonzo have not yet done anything wrong.⁷⁶

Raoul's interaction with the hotel clerk concludes with Gonzo guiding him to the hotel bar, which transforms into the "reptile zoo" described by Thompson in his novel (1998, p. 24). In the book, this scene is accompanied by Ralph Steadman's illustration of the events described (Thompson, 1998, pp. 30-31). Gilliam, a self-professed admirer of Steadman's artwork, had a relatively small budget with which to recreate these "wild" and unrealistic drawings (Gilliam, 2020). Inspired by Francis Bacon, he initially considered an abstract design for the reptiles. However, this plan was jettisoned in favour of a more realistic, but nonetheless grotesque, style of lizard (Gilliam, 2003a). To create the illusion that more reptiles were present in the barroom than the limited number of prosthetic heads he had access to would allow, Gilliam filled the space with mirrors and used unspecified postproduction techniques to multiply their number (Gilliam, 2020).

The reptile zoo hallucination begins with a POV shot of a bowl filled with bar snacks that begin moving around as they transform into insects. Immediately, a long fleshy nonhuman tongue extends into the withering mass and retracts with a mouthful of bugs attached. This shot is followed by a closeup of Raoul whose perception of the first lizard, its mouth covered with maggots, is revealed not by a POV shot but an eyeline match. Subsequently, an objective shot pulls away from Raoul's position beside the bar to reveal the full extent of the carnage unfolding in the rest of the room, which is now filled with lizards (figure 4.51). Gilliam's use of objective shots enables him to simultaneously capture Raoul's perception of these hallucinations and his terrified reaction to them. Further, the thoughts expressed by his mental voice, which contemplate the distinct possibility that he will soon be destroyed by the lizards, emphasise his fear.

⁷⁶ Weinel refers to a drop in the "pitch transposition" of the clerk's voice as it becomes "a demonic low-frequency rumble, layered with a hissing sound". However, as noted in the literature review, while the hissing sound is audible, there is no evidence of a drop in her vocal pitch. Weinel, J. (2018) 'Synaesthetic Overdrive'. New York: New York: Oxford University Press.



Figures 4.50-4.51: *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (Gilliam, 1998)

Visual Perception of the Self

The subject's perception of their own body and its image is often distorted during the psychedelic experience (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 143). Typically, the body's size, configuration, substance, weight, and various other aspects of its definition are either subtly or drastically transformed (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 68). The factors that determine the nature of the perception of the self are akin to those which shape the distorted appearance of other people; they include the subject's mood and ideation, perception of external stimuli, and other unconscious inferences (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 69). Similarly, while negative emotions and thoughts, such as anxiety, usually trigger a visual perception of the self as ugly, positive ideation and feelings like euphoria infuse the self-image with beauty (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 70). Depending on whether the body is regarded as a source of pleasure and wonder or pain and contempt (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 69), the subject may find that their corporeal perception becomes either entertaining or frightening (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 68).

The appearance of a limb or another appendage, such as a hand, is often distorted when the psychedelic subject directs their attention towards it (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 69). In *Psych-Out*, Warren's perception of both his own hand and other people are negatively distorted during an LSD freak out. In a state of fear and paranoia, he becomes confused by the intentions of his friends and, perceiving their movement towards him as a threat, they transform into zombies (figure 4.52). This experience exacerbates his terror, which peaks when he perceives his own hand as a piece of rotting flesh (figure 4.53).



Figures 4.52-4.53 *Psych-Out* (Rush, 1968)

Subjects who look in the mirror are likely to witness some distortion of their self-image (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 83). One of the perceptual phenomena often encountered in the drug-state, meanwhile, is the geometrization of objects, animals, and human faces (Grof, 2021, p. 38). In *The Trip*, a shot of Paul looking at himself in the mirror dissolves to a closeup of his face. This transition demarcates the shift from an objective perspective of his reflection to a subjectively inflected POV shot of his mirror image. Paul's perception of the geometrization of his own face is depicted by the projection of a grid of red light onto it (figure 4.54).



Figure 4.54: *The Trip* (Corman, 1967)

Autoscopic vision, also known as an out of body experience, is a commonly reported psychedelic phenomenon. It is typically experienced as a projection of consciousness away from the body, which is perceived by the subject as if they were positioned at some distance away from it (Masters and Houston, 2000, pp. 86-87). *Mad Men* (S5 E6) employs standard conventions of continuity editing to create the impression that Roger (R1) observes a second version of himself (R2) dancing with Jane. Identification with R1's subjective perspective is established by a sequence of POV shots structured in a shot reverse-shot pattern before R2 appears.

From his position beside the mirror in the guides' apartment, R1 looks to the right, screen left, in the direction of a record player and a reel-to-reel tape machine (figure 4.55). This is followed by a cut to an eyeline match POV shot of Catherine putting a record on the turntable (figure 4.56). In turn, this is succeeded by a second objective shot of R1 standing in front of the mirror as he continues to look in the same direction (figure 4.57). The significance of this sequence, and its sharing of R1's visual perception with the viewer, is made apparent in the next eyeline match POV shot, which features R2 dancing with Jane in close proximity to the record player (figure 4.58). This is followed by another shot of R1 standing in front of the mirror, which undermines the initial implication that he has moved across the room to be with Jane (figure 4.59). The arrangement of these shots suggests R1 is a projection of Roger's consciousness, which has assumed a position at some distance from his physical body (R2). This indicates that the former perceives the latter in an experience of autoscopic vision.



Figures 4.55-4.59: *Mad Men* (S5 E6)

The inability to perceive something that exists in the real world is referred to as a negative hallucination (Siegel, 1985, p. 250). Jenny experiences a negative hallucination in *Acid Test* when her mother, Camelia (Mia Ruiz), gradually disappears from her field of vision. In the concert venue foyer, Jenny looks to her right where she sees Camelia talking to a staff member working at the entrance desk. However, Camelia immediately begins to fade from view and eventually disappears completely (figure 4.60). This prompts Jenny to redirect her gaze to the left and, as she does so, Camelia gradually re-emerges at the periphery of her visual field. Subsequently, Camelia confronts Jenny for her tardiness, which establishes her presence at the concert venue. This confirms that the preceding sequence depicts a negative hallucination of her disappearance rather than a positive hallucination of her manifestation at the desk.



Figure 4.60: *Acid Test* (Waldo, 2017)

True Hallucinations

True hallucinations are experienced by the psychedelic subject who confuses hallucinatory phenomena for reality (Siegel, 1985, p. 250). In the previous section, Warren's hallucination of his own hand as a piece of rotting flesh in *Psych-Out* was discussed as an example of distorted self-perception. However, his experience is also characteristic of a true hallucination. That is, he becomes so convinced that what he sees is real, he believes the only solution is to amputate his hand. Indeed, he is only prevented from doing so by the timely intervention of his friends. Other examples discussed in previous sections, such as Raoul's perception of a barroom full of lizards in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, could also be construed as true hallucinations.

Paul experiences a true hallucination in *The Trip* when he discovers what he believes to be John's dead body. The contents of Paul's visual perception are captured not by a subjectively inflected POV shot, but an objective panning shot that first reveals his reaction to the hallucination. The camera traces his line of sight with a dizzying pan from screen right to left where John's "corpse" is slumped in a chair on the opposite side of the living room (figure 4.61). This is followed by a cut back to another objective shot of Paul, who quickly photographs the scene before fleeing the apartment through a door located behind him. His reaction to the situation suggests he believes what he sees to be real.

Immediately after Paul leaves the apartment it is established that what he has just witnessed is a hallucination. Following his exit, the camera retraces its pan to the left, this time bringing an empty chair into shot as John, who is very much alive and well, re-enters the room (figure 4.62). In contrast to the previous shot, there is no hallucinating subject to whose subjective experience the content of this shot can be attributed. Consequently, it is this shot, rather than the one that preceded it, that represents objective reality. Nonetheless, while this makes the audience aware that John is alive, Paul remains convinced of his friend's death until the end of the film when the truth is revealed to him by Max. Indeed, Paul explicitly states his belief that John is dead, which emphasises that his prior experience consists of a true hallucination.



Figures 4.61-4.62: *The Trip* (Corman, 1967)

Van Miller (Frank Whaley) experiences multiple true hallucinations in the *Ray Donovan* (Showtime, 2013-2020) episode "Homecoming" (S1 E6). One of the reasons Van believes the hallucinatory phenomena he perceives to be real is that he has been unwittingly dosed with LSD. The most prominent of his hallucinations is a monkey

wearing a suit, which he first sees in an FBI office bathroom (figure 4.63). That he believes the monkey to be real is emphasised during a second encounter with it in an office corridor, where he jumps out of its way and returns its wave goodbye (figure 4.64). In a later scene, Van is attacked by a collection of ordinarily inanimate action figures that seemingly come to life (figure 4.65). His perception of this hallucination as real is indicated by the physical pain he suffers when one of the figurines stabs him (figure 4.66). Indeed, he is so fearful for his safety that he flees to the other side of the room and hides underneath a desk. The use of both subjectively inflected POV shots and objective shots to reveal the content of Van's visual perception emphasises his inability to discern between hallucinatory phenomena and objective reality.



Figures 4.63-4.66: *Ray Donovan* (S1 E6)

Joe twice hallucinates blood on his hands in *You* (S2 E8) and, on both occasions, expresses concern that what he sees is real (figure 4.67). He first discovers the blood while in the hotel suite bathroom and, believing it to be genuine, immediately tries to wash it off. The blood is visible on his hands and on the bathroom sink in three subjectively inflected POV shots. However, in the fourth, it has completely disappeared. While this causes Joe to question the veracity of what he has seen, he remains uncertain whether the blood was hallucinated. Indeed, his uncertainty persists even after other characters inform him that

they have not seen blood on his hands. In a subsequent scene, the blood reappears on Joe's hands while he is lying in a bathtub (figure 4.68). On this occasion, the use of objective shots implicates the audience in Joe's confusion between hallucination and reality. Indeed, while his hands are clean when he exits the bathroom, his ongoing inability to distinguish hallucinatory phenomena from objective reality marks the persistence of this true hallucination.



Figures 4.67-4.68: *You* (S2 E8)

Spatial Perception

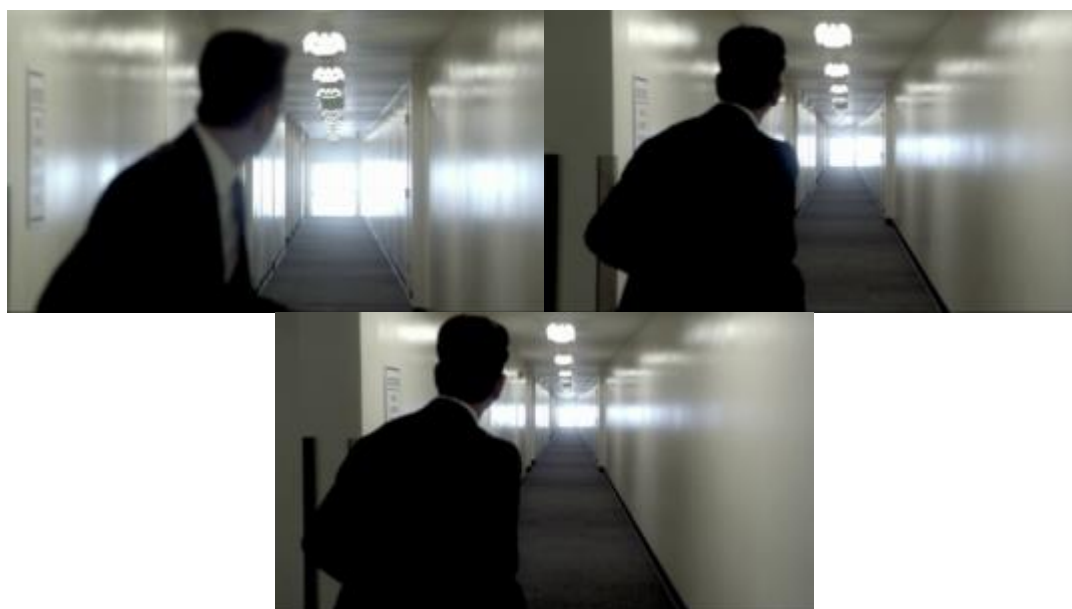
Altered awareness of body and body image, spatial distortions, and a wide range of perceptual changes ordinarily occur.

- Robert Masters and Jean Houston (2000, p. 143)

Drastic changes to spatial perception are characteristic of the sensory level of the psychedelic experience (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 152). Spatial dimensions, particularly of depth, may be significantly altered (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 206). It is not, however, only the environment in which the psychedelic experience unfolds that is transformed but the size and shape of both the objects (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 152) and persons present within it (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 86). The related but distinct phenomenon of acoustic distortions to spatial perception is analysed in the next chapter (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 7).

The subject's perception of depth may compress or elongate along either the vertical or horizontal axis (Grof, 2021, p. 11). In a previous section focused on perceptual distortions of the external environment, it was noted that the subject's emotional state typically determines the nature of hallucinations which, in turn, exacerbates their emotions

in a feedback loop (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 176). The dolly zoom is a camera technique that not only transforms the depth of a shot, but also signifies a character's loss of psychological control and their experience of extreme states of emotional distress (LeBlanc, 2011, p. 4). Van's LSD experience in *Ray Donovan* (S1 E6) is marked from the outset by anxiety and paranoia. His emotional state triggers a distortion of his depth perception, which is rendered by a dolly zoom that elongates a corridor so that the light at its end shrinks into the distance (figures 4.69-4.71). That Van remains in shot during this perceptual distortion indicates that he believes what he sees to be real. It also captures his reaction to the experience, which emphasises a heightening of the emotions that triggered it.



Figures 4.69-4.71: *Ray Donovan* (S1 E6)

The distance between various elements of a landscape may be compressed in such a way that its appearance is rendered two-dimensional. This creates the illusion that the layers and structures of which a scene is comprised appear to be positioned directly behind one another in flattened layers (Heimann, 1994, pp. 62-63). The flattening of spatial perception is also typically accompanied by a wave-like flexibility between objects that makes it difficult to distinguish between them. This phenomenon infuses a scene, viewed in its totality, with a mysterious unfamiliarity, the appearance of which has been likened to the aesthetic of van Gogh's landscape paintings (Lundborg, 2012, p. 435). Relatedly, the

individual's perception of distance may also be altered (Grof, 2021, p. 11). This distorts the awareness of the subject's own movement through an environment (Heimann, 1994, p. 64).

In *Taking Woodstock*, Elliot observes VW Guy as he lies against the inner wall of the campervan next to a cylindrical outdent decorated with a mandala style pattern (figure 4.72). This subjectively inflected POV shot is essentially comprised of two distinct halves that compete for Elliot's and the audience's attention; the left of the frame is occupied by VW Guy, while the right is dominated by the pulsing liquid dance of the mandala.

However, the entire visual field also gently undulates in tandem with VW Guy's breathing to infuse the image with a homogenising wave-like quality. This flattens the spatial dimensions of the image so that it resembles a two-dimensional abstract painting. This effect is enhanced by the flattening of the cylindrical outdent, the depth of which is significantly reduced in comparison to its appearance in an earlier objective shot.

Paradoxically, and further enhancing the depiction of compressed spatial perspective, VW Guy's body appears to be positioned alongside the mandala rather than in front of it.



Figure 4.72: *Taking Woodstock* (Lee, 2009)

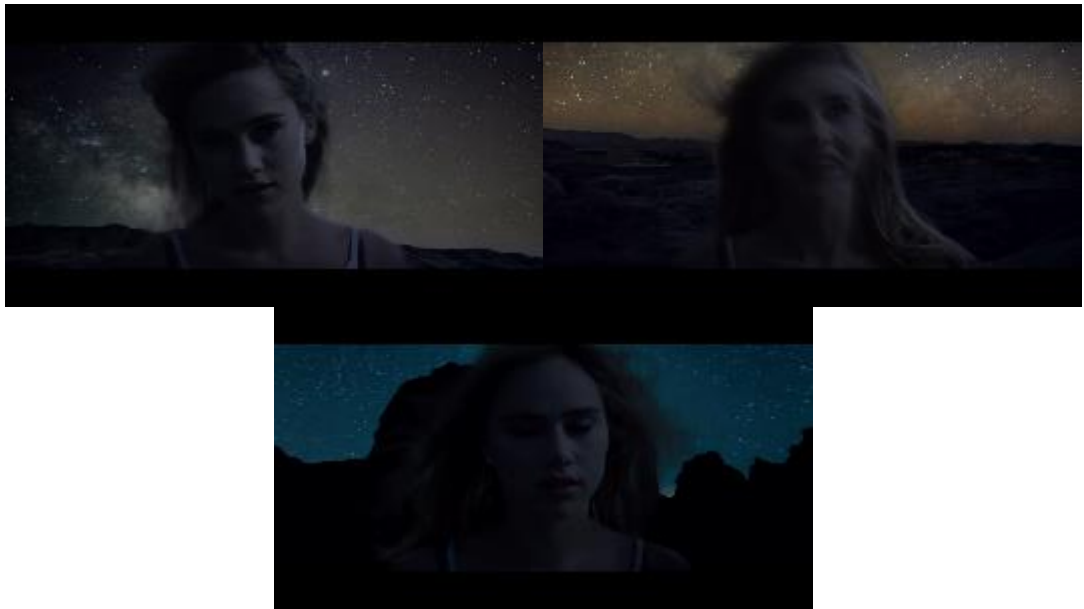
Time-lapse footage is used in combination with a telephoto lens to depict the flattening of Arlen's spatial perception in *The Bad Batch*. Telephoto lenses flatten space along the camera's axis to generate solid spatial masses that appear to be layered on top of one another. Time-lapse, meanwhile, accelerates the playback of recorded images to a rate that exceeds that at which they were recorded. Typically, human beings cannot visually perceive the long temporal processes of the natural environment, sometimes referred to as glacial time, unless they are accelerated by time-lapse (Cameron and Misek, 2014, p. 3). In *The Bad Batch*, subjectively inflected POV shots captured with a telephoto lens are time-

lapsed to enhance the distinction between the flattened planes of the environment. That is, the acceleration of the Earth's movement through space, which is made visible in the rotation of the night sky in the background, enhances the acuity of flattened planes in the foreground and, in some shots, the middle ground (figures 4.73-4.74).



Figures 4.73-4.74: *The Bad Batch* (Amirpour, 2017)

The subject's awareness of their movement through an environment may be distorted in such a way that their capacity to judge the distance between themselves and a destination marker is impaired. That is, despite moving towards a destination, the individual's proximity to it does not adjust accordingly (Heimann, 1994, p. 64). This phenomenon is represented in *The Bad Batch* by the sequence of time-lapsed images shot with a telephoto lens. The scene cuts between the subjectively inflected POV shots discussed above and closeups of Arlen in which she appears to move towards the camera (figures 4.75-4.77). However, despite the accelerated playback of these shots, her movement towards the camera is rendered imperceptible by the telephoto lens. Thus, Arlen's movement through space towards a de facto destination, which is represented by the position of the camera, is distorted in tandem with her altered perception of depth.



Figures 4.75-4.77: *The Bad Batch* (Amirpour, 2017)

The destabilisation of spatial perception often results in fluctuations of perspective (Grof, 2021, p. 11). This is experienced by some subjects as a rapid oscillation of spatial perception that causes an object to appear close to the face at one moment, and then on the other side of the room at another. Tom Wolfe refers to this phenomenon as “the zooms” (1968, p. 95). Adriana experiences the zooms in *The Big Cube* during a physical struggle with Jonny and Lisa. The camera assumes her POV as she peers over a cliff edge and rapidly zooms in to focus on the rock-strewn ocean below before immediately zooming back out to its original perspective. The speed at which the camera zooms in and out recreates the lurching effect described by Wolfe to reflect Adriana’s fluctuating perception of distance.

The narrowing of the subject’s visual field, which is caused by focusing on a specific section of the environment, disrupts the fixed relations between a percept and its surroundings so that it is perceived as a separate microcosmos (Grof, 2021, p. 39). Further, the consistency of space itself can fluctuate between rarefaction and condensation (Grof, 2021, p. 11). In *Aquarius* (S1 E4), Charles Manson’s presence in the foreground of four subjectively inflected POV shots identifies him as the focus of Emma’s attention. The backdrop to each shot is distorted in a manner that reflects her inability to perceive the

fixed relations between Manson and the environment. It also suggests her perception of the fluctuating consistency of space.

In the first shot, Emma's perception of Manson as an entity that exists separately from the environment that surrounds him is indicated by her perspective of the sunlight and trees, which seem to bend around his body (figure 4.78). This effect is more dramatically rendered by the concentric undulation of light and trees around his head in the next POV shot (figure 4.79). The narrowing of Emma's visual field is then signified by the transition from medium shots to medium closeups of Manson. This shift of perspective implies that the pair are in closer proximity to one another despite neither having changed position. The background of these two POV shots also blurs out of focus to further convey her perception of the fluctuation in consistency of space and the absence of fixed relations between Manson and his surroundings (figures 4.80-4.81).



Figures 4.78-4.81: *Aquarius* (S1 E4)

Distortions of spatial perception are also imposed on the size and dimensions of people and inanimate objects. For example, subjects often perceive the elongation or foreshortening of human bodies (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 86), and the contraction or expansion of objects (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 153). The technical terms used to describe these phenomena are two types of metamorphopsia known as micropsia and

macropsia; the former describes a percept that shrinks, while the latter refers to its opposite (Midena and Vujosevic, 2015). They are both associated with Alice in Wonderland Syndrome (AIWS) and may occur while the subject is observing an object, person, or animal, that is either in motion or statically positioned (Lerner and Lev-Ran, 2015).

In an account of an LSD trip taken prior to making *Skidoo*, Otto Preminger describes a psychedelic experience of micropsia, which he incorporated into his filmic depiction of the drug-state (Benshoff, 2001, p. 40). In the film, micropsia is represented in a series of subjectively inflected POV shots, which reveal Tony's distorted spatial perception of two characters. In the first shot, Fred contracts to a fraction of his normal size; in the second, Leech (Michael Constantine) is similarly transformed (figures 4.82-4.83). Subsequently, Fred shrinks again, this time surrounded by a neon pink pyramid that enhances the psychedelic quality of Tony's visual perception (figure 4.84).



Figures 4.82-4.84 *Skidoo* (Preminger, 1968)

Macropsia may be experienced as a magnification of visual perception that occurs either gradually, as a form of zoom vision, or abruptly (Blom, 2010, p. 312). In *Taking Woodstock*, the contrast between the framing of two subjectively inflected POV shots depicts Elliot's experience of macropsia. First, Elliot's position on the van's floor is established by an objective shot. This is followed by a POV shot of VW Girl, who appears in medium closeup with a large section of the van's ceiling fresco visible behind her (figure 4.12). Significantly, in the shot that follows, Elliot's position on the van's floor remains unchanged. This implies that the subjectively inflected POV shot that follows, which is an extreme closeup of one section of the mural, represents the magnification of vision that is characteristic of macropsia (figure 4.21).

The subject's magnified visual perception of a surface or object may reveal the growth and flow of the microcosmic particles that comprise its structure (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 154). Further, if attention is focused on one aspect of a surface, more of its colour, detail, and form may be perceived (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 12). This transforms the appearance of materials that are, under conditions of everyday consciousness, considered to be prosaic (Huxley, 2004, p. 16). Further, the subject may become captivated by miniscule phenomena, such as a dewdrop on a blade of grass (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 154).

Jenny's perception of the surfaces of a carpet and sofa cushion in *Acid Test* exemplify this type of magnified vision. In the first of a series of subjectively inflected POV shots, she observes the carpet from her position on the sofa. Despite the distance between her eyes and the floor, she observes a layer of dirt and dust that would ordinarily only be visible to someone holding a magnifying glass close to the carpet (figures 4.85-4.86). Subsequently, while crawling around the floor, her magnified perception of the carpet's surface is amplified in accordance with her closer proximity to it (figures 4.87-4.88). The most drastic example of magnified vision occurs when she buries her head into a cushion and perceives the minute details of its individual threads. Indeed, the camera

continues its progress forward as if she were drawn into the microscopic particles of its structure, which appear to her as broken chains of red light (figures 4.89-4.90).



Figures 4.85-4.90: *Acid Test* (Waldo, 2017)

The eponymous protagonist of *House* (Fox Network, 2004-2012) experiences an extreme form of magnified vision in a hospital shower room during “Distractions” (S2 E12). House becomes fascinated by a droplet of water that falls to the floor from his brow. The distance between his face and the floor is indicated by a low angle shot of him peering at the waterdrop, where the camera is initially positioned, and the following POV shot, which reveals his perception of it (figures 4.91-4.92). The magnification of his vision is indicated by a second POV shot, which captures the droplet in closeup (figure 4.93). The camera subsequently moves rapidly towards the water, and then directly into it, to reveal a molecular structure consisting of pulsing blue bubbles (figure 4.94). Another closeup of House’s face emphasises his captivation by the experience, while also indicating that his position on the bench remains unchanged.



Figures 4.91-4.94: *House* (S2 E12)

Summary

In this chapter, three categories of sensory level psychedelic visual perception were identified and analysed. The structure of the chapter, and the analysis undertaken, reflects the significant distinction between CEV and OEV perception. The first section addressed three types of CEV phenomena, which are primitive abstract visuals, aesthetic images, and the so-called acid flash. Section two, meanwhile, focused on six categories of OEV experience, which are heightened perception, environmental distortions, the manifestation of auras, halos, and visual trails, the visual perception of other people, the visual perception of the self, and true hallucinations. In the final section, distortions to the perception of distance, the flattening of dimensional perspectives, the altered perception of movement through space, a lurching effect sometimes referred to as the zooms, and examples of micropsia and macropsia were discussed.

It is significant that only one of the 21 case studies that feature LSD use incorporates sensory level CEV experience into its depiction of the psychedelic drug-state. This small sample size makes it difficult to draw broad conclusions about film and television representations of these phenomena. In its extensive depictions of CEV

experience, *The Trip* captures a 1960s psychedelic aesthetic through its use of analogue technologies borrowed from the lightshows to portray abstract primitive visuals. The digitally rendered aesthetic depiction of this phenomenon in *Enter the Void* (Noé, 2009), meanwhile, was not examined in this thesis, as its analysis requires the development and application of an analytical framework informed by the phenomenology of the DMT experience. Consequently, further analysis of cinematic representations of other psychedelics, such as DMT, would enhance the findings made by this chapter.

The Trip is not unique in its failure to capture the vivid colour aesthetic of CEV experience. It does, however, employ a pattern of direct cutting that distinguishes its representation of aesthetic images from their more meaningful eidetic counterparts. That this editing technique is not inherently psychedelic is exemplified by its use in other films, such as *Easy Rider* (Hopper, 1969), to transition between scenes that are not associated with the drug-state.⁷⁷ This highlights the context specific nature of psychedelic aesthetics, a notion which is explored further in the summary of OEV phenomena that follows. The depiction of an acid flash in *The Trip*, meanwhile, offers an intriguing take on a phenomenon that does not have a fixed definition. It is also worth noting that while the flash is a form of inner visual experience, its representation is not preceded by a shot of Paul closing his eyes. However, as discussed further in chapter seven, this is typical of film and television representations of CEV experiences.

In the second section of this chapter, a substantially larger number of OEV phenomena were identified in various films and television shows. The analysis of heightened perception revealed the various and often distinct ways a single aesthetic may be portrayed by different filmmakers. For example, *Taking Woodstock* and *Acid Test* both depict characters' altered perception of colour in tandem with the undulation of the visual

⁷⁷ Hopper refers to the influence of European cinema on this editing style, which he employed instead of dissolves to transition between scenes. *Easy Rider: commentary track with Dennis Hopper*, 2016a. Blu-ray. Directed by Hopper, D. USA: Criterion Collection; Columbia Pictures.

field. While it was not possible to establish exactly which digital techniques and lighting methods were used to render these effects, the distinction between the two films' aesthetic depiction of these phenomena was identified. Further, as these examples demonstrate, films and television shows often combine multiple aesthetics in a single shot or sequence. This highlights the complexity of drug-state aesthetics and the need for a meticulous approach to their analysis.

In *The Bad Batch*, time-lapse contributes to the depiction of Arlen's visual perception of the night sky and her distorted spatial awareness. This demonstrates how a single cinematic technique may be used to simultaneously portray multiple psychedelic phenomena depending on which aspect of a shot or sequence is addressed. Further, that a single aesthetic technique may represent two distinct phenomena is evidenced by analysis of the luminous glow of VW Girl's skin in *Taking Woodstock*. The identification of autoscopic vision in *Mad Men* (S5 E6) also highlights the importance of a meticulous approach to an analysis of screen representations of the psychedelic experience. Discussing this sequence, the actor John Hamm refers to "time jumps" created by the arrangement of shots (Hornbacher, 2012). This description, while not wholly inaccurate, is somewhat misleading. That is, it suggests that the sequence represents a temporal phenomenon rather than an out of body experience. It is only with reference to the psychedelic literature that the specific phenomenon depicted can be accurately identified through intertextual analysis.

It was not possible to identify the specific techniques or technologies used to render environmental distortions in *Skidoo* and *The Big Cube*. However, as their aesthetic recalls the depiction of abstract visuals in *The Trip*, it seems likely that the makers of both films employed similar lightshow technologies. Significantly, as this creates an aesthetic resemblance between disparate cinematic depictions of OEV and CEV phenomena, it emphasises the usefulness of focusing on representations of the psychedelic drug-state attributed to the subjective experience of characters. Indeed, the only way to distinguish

between OEV and CEV phenomena is to analyse the content of subjectively saturated and partially hallucinated POV shots respectively. It should also be noted that, while there is an aesthetic similarity between the three sequences, they also possess various distinctive features.

The significance of this study's analysis of character is also emphasised by the influence of the subject's cognitive and emotional states on their altered perceptions of the self, other people, and the external environment. Indeed, the subjective nature of these experiences is indicated by the variety of their aesthetic depictions in films and television shows. For example, the digital technologies used to distort facial features in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, *Aquarius* (S1 E4 and S1 E10), and *You* (S2 E8), produce distinct results that relate specifically to the subject's psychological state and emotional condition. The hallucinatory perception of one person in place of another, which is depicted using nondigital editing techniques in *The Big Cube*, *Mad Men* (S5 E6), and *You* (S2 E8), is also highly subjective. That is, in each of these examples, the person perceived by the hallucinating character is personally meaningful to them.

The intertextuality of psychedelic experience is emphasised by Terry Gilliam's adaptation of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. The film features one of the most iconic psychedelic sequences in cinema history. However, as previously noted, the director developed the idea for the film's famous carpet crawling sequence without having ever taken psychedelics himself. This supports the suggestion made by some scholars that an appreciation and understanding of the drug-state is informed as much by cultural representations of the drug-state as it is the psychedelic experience itself. Ironically, this sequence is more often credited for its "realistic" portrayal of a psychedelic phenomenon than others that were inspired by a director's use of LSD. The intertextual relationship between film and television depictions of the LSD experience is also foregrounded by the title of the *You* episode "Fear and Loathing in Beverly Hills" (S2 E8), which refers explicitly to Gilliam's film and visually quotes the carpet crawling sequence.

The intertextual connection between film adaptations and their literary sources was outlined in the literature review. That *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is an adaptation of Hunter S Thompson's book of the same name emphasises the intertextuality of its depiction of an LSD experience. In this chapter, the relationship between Gilliam's film and Thompson's literary text were explored through an interrogation of Raoul's visual perception of a hotel clerk as a moray eel, and his subsequent hallucination of a barroom filled with reptiles. These examples demonstrate the capacity for film adaptations to audio-visually amplify the written passages of text they translate to the screen.

It was also noted in the literature review that some scholars and filmmakers believe cinematic depictions of the drug-state can trigger psychedelic states of consciousness. The findings of analysis undertaken in this chapter highlight further issues with these perspectives. That is, it should not be assumed that the filmmaker intends an audience to share a character's experience of the drug-state. For example, the fear and confusion experienced by Van in *Ray Donovan* (S1 E6) is designed to amuse the viewer. In *The Trip*, meanwhile, the withholding of information from Paul until the end of the film that is immediately provided to the audience creates a disjuncture between their experiences for a significant portion of the film's narrative. In both examples, the use of objective shots enables the filmmaker to capture the character's emotional response to the hallucination while also emphasising the distinction between viewer and character perception.

The final section of this chapter identified some of the most complex portrayals of psychedelic phenomena in its interrogation of distorted spatial perception. For example, time-lapse footage shot with a telephoto lens in *The Bad Batch* was interrogated for its representation of both flattened spatial perspectives and Arlen's distorted perception of her movement through the environment. The findings of analysis were determined by the shift of focus between individual shots and their arrangement in the sequence. In *House* (S2 E12) and *Acid Test*, meanwhile, a combination of digital effects and camera techniques were identified for their complex depictions of magnified vision. This contrasts with the

use of analogue techniques employed in *Skidoo* to shrink the appearance of characters perceived by Tony. It was also noted that the film also superimposes a triangular cloud of coloured light around the shrunken Fred, which evokes the lightshow aesthetic identified in *The Trip*.

5. The Varieties of Sensory Perception

[S]everal or all of the senses are enormously heightened
- Robert Masters and Jean Houston (2000, p. 152)

[T]he psychedelic experience affects all five senses to varying degrees
- Patrick Lundborg (2012, p. 437)

This chapter interrogates film and television representations of a diverse array of sensory level drug-state phenomena. It is comprised of five sections, each of which addresses a distinct category of psychedelic perception. The first focuses on auditory perception and consists of an analysis of sound distortions, aural hallucinations, and acoustic spatial awareness. Novel forms of tactile experience and bodily feeling are discussed in the second part, which also encompasses an analysis of empathic experiences and psychedelic sexual encounters. Section three focuses on synaesthesia, which is a novel form of sensory experience characterised by the response of one sense to a stimulus typically responded to by another sense (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 178). The penultimate section outlines and investigates the emotional and cognitive effects of psychedelics. Finally, characteristic forms of psychedelic communication, such as telepathy, and the drug-state enhancement of the individual's linguistic skills are discussed in section five.

Auditory Phenomena

The whole thing of experiencing an acid trip, I wanted you to kind of feel it, it's not just how you see different, it changes the texture of light, the music, the sound, it's extremely auditory.
- Ana Lily Amirpour (2017)

In an article investigating the musical representations of altered states of consciousness, Jonathan Weinel identifies two distinct categories of sound as real-world acoustic distortions and hallucinated noises. He defines the former as the altered perception of sounds that have a source within the real-world external environment. For example, in a forest, the sound of birdcalls and rustling leaves may be distorted. The subject may also

experience auditory distortions of spatial perception, which alters their ability to accurately estimate the distance between their position and the source of a sound. He classifies the hallucination of noises, voices, tones, and music, as sounds that manifest internally and have no clear point of origin within the external environment (2016).

The phenomenology of auditory experience is less meticulously analysed in the psychedelic literature than its visual counterpart. While Masters and Houston are precise about the emotional and cognitive stimuli that catalyse the subject's distorted visual perception of the body, other people, and the environment, references to acoustic phenomena are often vague and discussed less specifically among various other nonvisual sensory responses (2000, p. 152). For example, in a discussion of heightened auditory perception, they note that an individual may experience an improvement to the quality of sound without specifying exactly what constitutes this phenomenon (2000, p. 154). In this chapter, it has been necessary to supplement the relatively scant information in academic and popular literature with insight derived from various online trip reports.

This chapter employs a different set of analytical tools and theoretical terminology to those utilised in the previous chapter to interrogate the sound elements of films and television shows. The three types of acoustic phenomena identified in this chapter pertain to two categories of film and television sound: auditory distortions and aurally experienced spatial perception are subjective diegetic sounds, which are heard as if filtered through the perception of a single character (Chion, 2009, p. 202); auditory hallucinations, meanwhile, are subjective nondiegetic sounds that manifest in the mind of an individual character (Chion, 2009, p. 251). Points of synchronisation, also known as synch points, and synchresis, are also pertinent to analysis. A synch point between sound and image may form within a shot when the visual reinforcement produced by, for example, a closeup, is combined with the audio emphasis generated by a sound of high volume (Chion, 2009, p. 486). Similarly, synchresis refers to the viewer's perception of discrete sound and visual events as a single phenomenon (Chion, 2009, p. 492).

Six subjects of a clinical LSD study experienced hyperacusis, while another heard sounds reverberate (Anderson and Rawnsley, 1954, p. 41). The perception of echoing sounds, meanwhile, is reported by multiple LSD users (Tevryr, 2008; HippiеGirl, 2016; Gnomexplorer, 2007). The onset of Tony’s LSD experience in *Skidoo* (Preminger, 1968) is marked by the metallic reverberation of Fred’s voice, which also increases in volume as it distorts. Similarly, as Weinel observes in his analysis of *Fear in Loathing in Las Vegas* (Gilliam, 1998), the carpet crawling sequence discussed in the previous chapter is also marked by the distortion of a man’s voice, which is treated with a “reverb effect” that causes it to briefly fill the “sound stage” as he speaks on a hotel lobby payphone (Weinel, 2018, p. 125). This acoustic distortion, which is heard from Raoul’s POA as he observes the carpet begin to move, represents his perception of sound reverberation and hyperacusis. This effect is also evident in the final throes of Arlen’s LSD trip in *The Bad Batch* (Amirpour, 2016) when she speaks to Miami Man in the desert and her voice echoes with a subtle form of reverberation. In the *House* (Fox Network, 2004-2012) episode “Distractions” (S2 E12), Dr Gregory House experiences a more intense version of this phenomenon. During a conversation with Dr Allison Cameron (Jennifer Morrison), individual words, heard from his POA, echo multiple times at different pitches and speeds.

In the psychedelic drug-state, the subject may hear a familiar song as if they were listening to it for the first time (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 60). The altered perception of sound also distorts the pitch and speed of music to render its sound unrecognisable (nervewing, 2017). The melody of a song is also liable to disintegrate into a series of single tones (Heimann, 1994, p. 62). Music accompanies the psychedelic scenes of multiple films and television shows. However, only two case studies, *Acid Test* (Waldo, 2017) and *Mad Men* (AMC, 2007-2015), depict characters’ subjective perception of diegetic songs in their representations of the drug-state.

The onset of LSD drug-state in *Acid Test* is marked by Jenny’s distorted auditory perception of the live music played by Giant Kitty. Heard from Jenny’s POA, the fast

tempo of the band's Riot Girl music begins to slow down such that each note is drawn out and stretched until the melody descends into a pulsating wall of reverberating noise. Following a short silence, Jenny hears two instruments in isolation, one immediately following the other; an initial period of silence is broken by a solitary burst of guitar squall, which is suddenly replaced by the cacophonous clash of drum cymbals. In each instance, the audible instrument is shot in closeup from Jenny's POV to emphasise that it is her subjective perception of the sounds that is depicted.

Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters developed an audio system that enabled the listener to simultaneously experience two unique sounds emitted by completely separate sources (Wolfe, 1968, p. 68). In Tom Wolfe's account of this activity, Sandy Lehmann-Haupt takes LSD before donning a pair of padded headphones, which he uses to listen to piano music in one ear and the crackling sound of barbecuing meat in the other. However, the sounds fail to synchronise and instead compete for perceptual dominance in his mind (Wolfe, 1968, p. 94). Multiple psychedelic users also described the effect of listening to two songs simultaneously to Matthew Weiner, who incorporated a portrayal of this drug-state practice into the *Mad Men* LSD scene (Hornbacher, 2012).

In "Far Away Places" (S5 E6), it is one of the guides, Catherine, who assumes responsibility for the immediate set and setting of the LSD experience by playing two pieces of recorded music simultaneously. First, she plays the Beach Boys song "I Just Wasn't Made For These Times" (1966) on a reel-to-reel tape machine. This song plays undistorted until she adds a vinyl recording of Connie Conway's "I Should Not Be Seeing You" (1954) to the diegetic sound mix. The songs, which are heard from Roger's POA, fluctuate in volume despite the proximity of their sources to one another and his unchanged position relative to them. This suggests that he initially perceives the sounds as independent phenomena that fail to synchronise. However, as the apartment scene draws to a close, the songs reach an equilibrium, which conveys a sense of Roger's adjustment to this novel psychedelic phenomenon.

Ken Kesey's first psychedelic experience began with the distortion of his acoustic spatial awareness. That is, the sound made by an acorn dropped from a tree branch by a squirrel outside of his room at the Menlo Park Veterans hospital was so loud that it seemed to him to have landed on the floor beside him (Stevens, 1987, p. 226; Wolfe, 1968, p. 41). Similar phenomena are reported by two of Masters and Houston's subjects; one was able to hear frogs croaking at a distance of more than one block away (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 7), while the other could hear the words spoken by his whispering companions, despite them being positioned at a substantial distance from him (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 153).

Raoul's experience of acoustic spatial distortion in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is conveyed by fluctuations of audio volume. In the hotel lobby, he observes his friend Dr Gonzo argue with other guests at one of the check-in desks. However, while their body language and angry gesticulations indicate that they are engaged in a loud confrontation, Gonzo's voice is barely audible, and the content of his words is indiscernible. Raoul's perception of Gonzo's muted tone contrasts starkly with the growing volume of the man speaking on the lobby payphone. Significantly, this person stands at a greater distance from Raoul than Gonzo. The contrast between the volume of the speakers' voices and their relative distances from Raoul emphasise the scene's representation of distorted spatial perception.

Matthew Weiner identifies the traffic noise heard at the outset of Roger's LSD experience in *Mad Men* (S5 E6) as distinct from other versions of this ambient sound, which is audible in several episodes of the show's seven seasons.⁷⁸ He observes that, in this instance, the noise was included to indicate the passage of time (Hornbacher, 2012). However, its unique deployment in this scene also functions as a representation of acoustic spatial distortion. A synch point is created between a closeup of the psychedelic subject,

⁷⁸ Indeed, traffic noise is audible in other non-psychedelic scenes of this episode.

Roger, and the traffic noise, which serve as visual reinforcement and audio emphasis respectively. However, the traffic noise is, as the DVD subtitle track aptly describes it, “muffled”.⁷⁹ The synch point between sound and image creates the illusion that the source of this sound is improbably close to Roger, while the muffling effect indicates the true extent of his distance from it. This conveys a sense of Roger’s altered sense of spatial awareness by suggesting he can hear a distant sound as if its source were much closer to him.

Hallucinations of music, while rarely experienced on LSD, have been reported by some psychedelic subjects (Anderson and Rawnsley, 1954, p. 41). In *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, Sandy discovers he can control an auditory hallucination of flute music, which is emitted by a shower head, by turning the flow of water on and off like a radio (Wolfe, 1968, p. 95). This effect is recreated in *Mad Men* (S5 E6) when Roger discovers that he can control a musical hallucination of “The Song of the Volga Boatmen” by opening and closing a bottle of vodka (figures 5.1-5.3).⁸⁰ The illusion that music emanates from the bottle, and that Roger can control its flow by removing and replacing its lid, is generated by synchresis. That the sound is subjective nondiegetic, heard only by Roger, is emphasised by Jane’s lack of response in the foreground of the shot. Further, his hallucination of a Russian song while opening a bottle of vodka suggests that he experiences a form of psychedelic mental association.⁸¹ However, characteristic of the sensory level, Roger does not derive meaning from the hallucination, which he finds amusing.

⁷⁹ This subtitle appears in the Lionsgate Home Entertainment UK DVD boxset version of the episode.

⁸⁰ It is not clear which version of this traditional Russian folksong is used in *Mad Men*.

⁸¹ While vodka’s country of origin is the subject of an unresolved debate, the drink is commonly associated with Russia. For further information on the history of vodka, see Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopædia. ‘Vodka’. Britannica.com: Encyclopædia Britannica, inc. Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/vodka> (Accessed: 18 December 2022).

Subsequently, Roger experiences an audio-visual hallucination when he begins smoking a cigarette and it instantly collapses like an accordion while emitting a distinctive honk (figure 5.4). Synchresis creates the illusion that the cigarette produces this accordion sound but, in contrast to the auditory hallucination of the musical vodka bottle, Roger's experience is characterised by simultaneously experienced visual and acoustic hallucinatory phenomena. The collapsing cigarette is an example of the small practical special effects employed by the filmmakers to depict Roger's LSD experience (Hornbacher, 2012). Further, the shot exemplifies how a strong POA can override the objective perspective of the camera by depicting Roger's subjective experience of the hallucination with a closeup.



Figures 5.1-5.4: *Mad Men* (S5 E6)

Tactile Experience and Body Feeling

Some of the most important and interesting experiences on the sensory level are those involving tactile phenomena and unusual kinds of body feeling.
 - Robert Masters and Jean Houston (2000, p. 166)

Chion describes cinema as a trans-sensory artform that has the capacity to translate not just audio-visual phenomena but a variety of other sensations to the screen (2009, p. xi). Powell contends that viewers not only encounter cinematic images conceptually, but

also corporeally, via the stimulation of haptic responses among each of the human senses. This theory of affect, which is derived from Deleuze and Guattari, asserts that the viewer's tactile senses are stimulated via their visual perception of characters touching things. This theoretical perspective is based upon the assumption that the very act of viewing triggers personal memories of the represented corporeal effect, which stimulates a concomitant haptic experience. This leads Powell to the conclusion that the haptic response is not a mere "fantasy projection" (2007, p. 100). However, as noted in the literature review, the Deleuze-Guattarian theory of affect is not supported by empirical evidence. Powell's assertions about haptic cinema rely on a constructed ideal viewer and do not specify exactly how such responses are induced or experienced. Consequently, this chapter interrogates film and representations of a variety of drug-state sensory phenomena without utilising unsubstantiated theories of affect.

The subject's tactile perception is transformed in novel and exciting ways during the psychedelic experience (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 152). Indeed, the altered perception of touch is considered by Masters and Houston to be among the most interesting and significant of sensory level phenomena (2000, p. 166). The increased sensitivity to texture that characterises enhanced tactile experience (Cohen, 1964, p. 51) is often extremely pleasurable (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 10). Subjects also derive a high degree of comfort from their heightened perception of touch (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 61). In *Mad Men*, one of the supporting characters, Olive Frank (Kristen Miller), moves her hands deliberately and slowly across the surface of a decorative throw positioned on the arm of a sofa and, while her expression remains inscrutably neutral, her behaviour suggests the experience is both novel and enjoyable. The pleasure Catherine derives from caressing her husband's face, meanwhile, is more overtly portrayed by her delighted facial expression.

The subject's visual and tactile perception of the definition and solidity of an object may be simultaneously altered. For example, the softening of a sharp object may be

accompanied by a visual blunting of its sharp edges (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 169). Detective Sam Hodiak experiences versions of this phenomenon twice in the *Aquarius* (NBC, 2015-2016) episode “It’s Alright Ma (I’m Only Bleeding)” (S1 E10). In both instances, Sam visually and tactilely perceives the liquification of solid surfaces. First, he notices the words painted on the side of a taxi begin to drip. Running his fingers through the lettering, he discovers he can physically manipulate the surface of the car door (figure 5.5). Subsequently, he traces lines on a car window, the surface of which assumes a liquid consistency as he moves his finger across it (figure 5.6). That these phenomena are not shot from Sam’s POV emphasises that he experiences them both visually and tactilely.



Figures 5.5-5.6: *Aquarius* (S1 E10)

The psychedelic subject may feel waves of ecstatic energy transmitted to their body through the act of touch (Leary, 1966, p. 5). The inherent energy possessed by an object may be revealed to the individual who purposefully touches its surface. For example, one subject experienced the pulsing life of an orange by touching it (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 181). Paul also experiences these phenomena in *The Trip* (Corman, 1967) while holding an orange. He demonstrates the “life” that flows from the fruit “like energy” by motioning his left hand up and down his right forearm. He also acknowledges that he can both see and feel its energy flowing down his arms and over his hands.

Non-connective tactile awareness is characterised by a capacity to feel what is visually perceived without the need for physical contact (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 16). The subject’s experience of this phenomenon is marked by a sense that they are surrounded by, and connected to, a charged field of electrical energy (Leary, Metzner and Alpert, 2008, p. 28). Sitting on the chaise lounge in John’s apartment, Paul smiles as looks

around the room and tells John that he feels “everything is alive” and that he can sense the flow of “energy levels and fields” around him. The manner with which Paul observes the environment, his hands, and the patterned surface of the chaise lounge, establishes a connection between what he says he can feel and the content of his visual perception. It is also evident from his behaviour that this energy is palpable regardless of any physical contact he makes with his surroundings.

The heightened awareness of internal organs and bodily processes (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 69) is characterised by an increased awareness of the throbbing beat of the heart and the capacity to feel blood being pumped through the veins (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 10). In *The Trip*, Paul’s use of an eyeshade stimulates his inner visual perception and directs his attention inward. In the previous chapter, analysis focused on the manifestation of abstract primitive visuals. However, these visual phenomena are also accompanied by the rhythmic sound of his heartbeat. As Weinel observes, this objective internal sound represents Paul’s heightened physiological state and a shift of his focus towards “internal sensory inputs” (2018, p. 124).

In *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (Chbosky, 2012), Sam encourages Charlie to stop shovelling snow and return inside to the party by giving him a pair of glasses that will, she comfortingly asserts, offer him protection. In the psychedelic drug-state, this provides Charlie with an illusory sense of safety that enables him to focus his attention inward. This is represented by the sound of his heartbeat, which becomes audible as he walks through a hallway towards the living room. This brief sequence illustrates the distinction between POV and POA. That is, the objective perspective assumed by the camera is undermined by the manifestation of a sound with a strong POA. The significant role played by the glasses in allowing Charlie to focus his attention inward, which stimulates his heightened perception of internal bodily functions, is emphasised when he removes them and his heartbeat is rendered inaudible.

The cultural conditions of 1960s America enabled the belief that psychedelics and sex are compatible to flourish (Hartogsohn, 2020, p. 244). That is, the widespread use of LSD proliferated during a decade that was marked by a sexual revolution and increased levels of promiscuity. These simultaneous developments infused the psychedelic experience with a sense of “utopian eroticism” (Hartogsohn, 2020, pp. 245-246). Further, drug-state sexual encounters were often accompanied by a strong sense of universal love (Alexander, 2015). Timothy Leary, who was one of the chief advocates of psychedelic sex, proclaimed sexual union to be one of the main purposes of an LSD session (1966, p. 6). Indeed, he described the drug as the world’s most potent aphrodisiac (1967, p. 16).

The title of Marsha Alexander’s book, *The Sexual Paradise of LSD*, captures the ethos of the period. Her investigation of psychedelic sexual experimentation incorporates a discussion of the LSD orgies that were a topic of fascination at the time. Several of her interviewees also describe psychedelic sexual encounters as uniquely pleasurable, including one woman who experienced the most intense orgasm of her life during an LSD trip (2015). Stanislav Grof also identifies LSD as a sexual stimulant capable of occasioning the greatest erotic experience of an individual’s life. More specifically, he explains, it is during the termination period of a positive psychedelic experience that orgasmic pleasure is greatly enhanced (2021, p. 14). Leary, meanwhile, credits the enhanced sensitivity to touch experienced in the LSD drug-state as the cause of intensified sexual experience (1966, p. 4).

The Trip was released in the 1960s, a decade known for its “acid-sex cinema” and the use of LSD as an inhibition removing agent in various sexploitation films and cheap pornographic movies (Starks, 1981, pp. 155-156).⁸² Roger Corman, who shared the belief that LSD experiences are highly sexual, felt it important to depict psychedelic sex in his

⁸² While characters have sex during the *Easy Rider* and *SLC Punk!* LSD scenes, neither film establishes a meaningful connection between the drug-state and sexual pleasure.

film (Corman, 2016b). In its penultimate scene, Paul has sex with Glenn as the effects of the drug-state begin to wane. The sequence crosscuts rapidly between shots of the couple in bed together, representing objective reality, and subjectively saturated POV shots of Paul's inner visual experience. This frenetic editing style conveys a sense of Paul's sexual excitement, which he experiences during the termination period of the psychedelic drug-state. That his experience has a positive conclusion is indicated by his declaration of universal love in the film's final scene.

The psychedelic experience is characterised by a heightened sense of empathy (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 91). Drug-state empathy typically begins with a growing sense of looseness, unknitting, and relaxation, which triggers more intense states of liquification, fluidness, and of feeling oceanic (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 112). Empathic experiences may be triggered when the subject makes physical contact with other people or parts of the external environment (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 166). The act of touch often results in a blurring of the distinction between self and other (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 109), which makes it impossible for the individual to distinguish between their physical body and its surroundings (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 112). While empathy is more commonly experienced with objects and music than it is with other people (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 113), it has been experienced by some subjects during sexual intercourse (Alexander, 2015).

In *Taking Woodstock* (Lee, 2009), Elliot's appearance is rendered semi-transparent by the application of a visual trailing effect, which blurs the distinction between his body and its surroundings (figure 5.7). That this visual aesthetic represents drug-state empathy is indicated by the content of the screenplay and its correspondence to the film sequence. In the former, Schamus describes the onset of Elliot's LSD experience in characteristically empathic terms. That is, the drug-state commences with a loosening of his physical being. Significantly, Elliot says, "What...what is that?" just before this experience of bodily dissolution begins (Schamus and Lee, 2009, pp. 104-105). In the film, Elliot says these

words immediately prior to the distortion of his body with visual trailing. The connection between the screenplay and the film sequence it describes suggests that this effect represents Elliot's experience of empathy. That he subsequently loses awareness of his arms emphasises the scene's representation of the bodily dissolution that typifies empathic experience.

In his memoir, Elliot Tiber describes a sexual experience in empathic terms. The encounter begins with a description of his female companion's "silky hands" dancing sexually across his body as he feels the boundary between his physical being and the music he can hear begin to dissolve (Tiber and Monte, 2007, p. 193). He subsequently recounts a three-way sexual encounter, during which he found himself inexplicably able to enter the bodies of both man and woman simultaneously (Tiber and Monte, 2007, p. 194). While this sexual activity is not explicitly depicted in the film adaptation, it is strongly implied. Throughout the first part of the campervan scene, VW Girl and VW Guy frequently caress Elliot's body. The second half, meanwhile, is characterised by a marked rise in kinetic energy and an increase in the amount of physical contact between the three characters. The scene's sexual connotations are heightened at its end when Elliot's t-shirt is removed and, in the subsequent shot, VW Girl emerges semi-naked from the campervan.

In the second part of the campervan scene, the movement of all three characters is distorted by visual trailing (figure 5.8). The transition is also marked by a change in the music track from Love's "Red Telephone" (1967) to "Mind Flowers" by Ultimate Spinach (1968). Further, while the first half of the scene incorporates both speech and music, there is a complete absence of dialogue from the second part. The blurring of boundaries between the characters' bodies is suggested by a combination of their physical proximity to one another and the visual trailing applied to their movement. The use of obtuse camera angles, meanwhile, makes it difficult to identify which limb belongs to which character. Further, the transition to a single sound element suggests the characters are enveloped by the psychedelic rock of Ultimate Spinach, which is comprised of wah-wah guitar and

distorted, doubled vocals. Indeed, the aural aesthetic of the song emphasises the scene's depiction of empathic dissolution.



Figure 5.7-5.8: *Taking Woodstock* (Lee, 2009)

Synaesthesia

One of the experiences most impressive to the subject is synaesthesia – the response by one of the senses to a stimulus ordinarily responded to by another of the senses.

- Robert Masters and Jean Houston (2000, p. 178)

Examples of synaesthetic experience include the seeing or smelling of sounds, the tasting of colours (Sinke *et al.*, 2012, p. 1420; Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 178) and, indicative of its more complex multisensory form, the simultaneous tasting and hearing of colours (Cytowic, 1994, p. 129). Contrary to popular belief, however, the psychedelic drug-state is not synonymous with synaesthesia (Cytowic, 1994, p. 128). The most common form of this phenomenon experienced by psychedelic subjects is auditory-visual, which is the visual perception of sounds (Sinke *et al.*, 2012, p. 1422). The psychedelic synaesthetic experience, which is phenomenologically distinct from that experienced by natural synesthetes (Sinke *et al.*, 2012, p. 1431), may transform sounds, including music, into either complex or primitive visuals perceived with eyes closed on an “inner screen” (Sinke *et al.*, 2012, p. 1424).

Filmmakers working in the 1950s and 1960s attempted to create heightened synesthetic moments in their work (Wiseman, 2005, p. 181). Films made during this period, which occasionally resembled the artworks made by an earlier generation of abstract painters, took advantage of the time element inherent in film to combine sound and music in complete synaesthetic experiences (Strick, 2005, p. 19). Kerry Brougher

identifies the 1940 Disney film, *Fantasia* (Algar, Armstrong, Beebe Jr, Ferguson, Hand, Handley, Hee, Jackson, Luske, Roberts, Satterfield, Sharpsteen, 1940), as a mainstream cinematic work that recreates synaesthesia in its animated portrayal of visual sounds made by musical instruments (2005, p. 175). Among contemporary media, Hartogsohn highlights the synaesthetic quality inherent in several examples of both psychedelic and music video genres (2018).

Film and television representations of synaesthesia demand the same degree of meticulous analysis as psychedelic experience. However, like the psychedelic drug-state, synaesthesia is often misunderstood by screen studies scholars. In her discussion of *The Trip*, Anna Powell describes a stream of black jagged shapes that pour from Paul's mouth as a synaesthetic "visual equivalent" of his silent scream (2007, p. 69). This constitutes a misidentification of synaesthesia, which is, as Cytowic observes, an "additive experience" that does not involve the replacement of one sensory response by another (1994, p. 92). In another study of the same film, Weinel identifies the projection of "abstract ripple patterns" onto human bodies during an eidetic image sequence as being "suggestive of synaesthesia" (2018, p. 123). However, as these visuals are not triggered by a second sensory input, the visuals cannot be construed as a synaesthetic response.

In an analysis of *Altered States* (Russell, 1980), Powell mischaracterises the phenomenology of synaesthesia by identifying the cause of the blurred distinction between subject and object as "synaesthetic distortions" (2007, p. 59). The phenomenon she describes is more akin to the drug-state empathy discussed in the previous section than it is synaesthesia. Further, Powell's reference to Antonin Artaud's account of his drug-state transformation into an effervescent wave that emitted an incessant and multidirectional crackling as synaesthesia is also indicative of a misinterpretation of this unique sensory phenomenon (2007, p. 59). Finally, her assertion that the film's protagonist "feels sounds

and hears visions in a synaesthetic mix” during a psychedelic experience could not be corroborated through further analysis of the scene she refers to (2007, p. 59).⁸³

Contrary to Benshoff’s claim, it should not be difficult for filmmakers to duplicate the effects of synaesthesia.⁸⁴ Nonetheless, synaesthesia is conspicuous by its absence from the film and television representations of characters’ LSD experiences. Indeed, the only example of drug-state synaesthesia that could be identified in this thesis is depicted in *Enter the Void* (Noé, 2009). Interestingly, Weinel acknowledges that residual visual effects and “sonic textures” persist after Oscar’s DMT experience is interrupted by a telephone call. However, despite the focus of his chapter, which is titled “Synaesthetic Overdrive”, he does not refer to the film’s aesthetic representation of synaesthesia (2018, p. 126). The psychedelic sequence features a digitally rendered subjectively saturated POV shot of Oscar’s inner visual perception which is, as Weinel accurately observes, interrupted by the ringing telephone. However, he fails to describe the flashing white light that pulses in tandem with its sound. It is this effect, generated by synchresis, that depicts his experience of auditory-visual synaesthesia.

Emotional and Cognitive Effects

A tendency for thoughts to vanish suddenly was the commonest effect.
- E.W. Anderson and K Rawnsley (1954, p. 42).

The drug-state acceleration of mental processes enables the subject to think a greater number of thoughts during a given period of clock-measured time than is usual (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 165). The subject’s mind may become crowded with thoughts and the brain’s capacity to contemplate multiple ideas simultaneously is sometimes reduced. It is not uncommon for thoughts to emerge and suddenly vanish, either

⁸³ The effects described by Powell manifest immediately after the protagonist imbibes a potion concocted by a Mexican tribe in a mountain cave.

⁸⁴ Benshoff’s assertion that directors have found it difficult to duplicate synaesthesia on screen ignores the history of synaesthetic filmmaking referred to in this chapter. Benshoff, H. M. (2001) ‘The short-lived life of the Hollywood LSD film.(lysergic acid diethylamide)’, *Velvet Light Trap*, (47).(Benshoff, 2001, p. 33).

slipping away quickly or flashing in and out of consciousness (Anderson and Rawnsley, 1954, pp. 42-43). Further, a single thought may branch out into a complex network of related sub-thoughts (Cohen, 1964, p. 66). Those subjects who lose control of their thoughts, meanwhile, also report a tendency to ruminate (Anderson and Rawnsley, 1954, pp. 42-43).

In *The Bad Batch*, Arlen's thoughts are conveyed by her acoustically distorted mental voice. In the early stages of her LSD experience, she dwells on Honey's disappearance and is bombarded by variations of the same thought concerning the girl's whereabouts and well-being, which flash in and out of her consciousness. The increased speed of her mental processes, meanwhile, is suggested by the rapid manifestation of these thoughts, which audibly overlap one another. After departing the rave, the drastic shift in focus from one idea to another suggests she is unable to consider more than one idea at a time. Indeed, once she takes the decision to leave Comfort, she forgets about Honey until after the LSD experience ends.

Four stages of memory suppression may be triggered during the psychedelic experience. The first, partial short-term memory suppression, is characterised by increased levels of distraction and an inability to maintain focus that often results in thoughts and dialogue being forgotten. On the second level, short-term memory is completely suppressed so that details of the present situation, and the events leading up to it, cannot be recalled. This typically produces confusion, disorientation, thought loops, and an inability to follow conversations. Symptoms of stage three, the partial suppression of long-term memory, include the complete failure of short-term memory function, and the inability to remember basic autobiographical information, the identity of friends and family, or cultural norms. This level of memory suppression is also accompanied by the sense that everything is being experienced for the first time. Finally, the complete suppression of long-term memory is characterised by ego dissolution (Josie *et al.*).

In *Mad Men* (S5 E6), Roger's inability to recall Sandy's warning to not look in the mirror is symptomatic of short-term memory suppression. Roger, who has already observed his reflection, asks Sandy why he did not deliver this instruction sooner. Sandy responds by telling him that he did, which suggests Roger's memory of this recent conversation is inhibited by the psychedelic drug-state. Sam's erratic behaviour in *Aquarius* (S1 E10), meanwhile, is characteristic of partial long-term memory suppression. After wandering into oncoming traffic with his eyes closed, Sam realises he is in danger, but is alarmed at his inability to remember how to open his eyes. Subsequently, he displays signs of short-term memory suppression when he becomes distracted during a discussion with Joe and immediately forgets the topic of conversation. In a later scene, he also loses awareness of social and cultural norms when he makes an incoherent attempt to tell Grace that he loves her. Horrified by his behaviour, she ushers him off her property and, as she does so, he rips open his shirt. Finally, in the safety of Brian's home, he continues his unpredictable and out of character behaviour by repeatedly throwing himself onto the living room floor.

Drug-induced amnesia is defined as the inability to form new memories during the psychedelic experience (Josie *et al.*). The consumption of a sufficiently high dose of LSD may result in hours being lost to "almost complete amnesia" (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 13), or the memory of a session being punctuated by "blank spots" (Masters and Houston, 2000, pp. 161-162). Subjects have also been known to describe something during the psychedelic experience, which they subsequently forget, only to recall again when the memory is prompted by another person (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 117). One person speculated that their psychedelic amnesia was an unconscious act of psychological self-defence to protect them from the memory of a horrific and nightmarish drug-state experience (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 17).

Three television shows depict drug-induced amnesia as a form of psychological defence mechanism. Towards the end of their LSD experiences in *Mad Men* (S5 E6),

Roger and Jane take the mutual decision to end their marriage. The next morning, however, Jane is unable to recall their conversation until Roger reminds her of its details. Prior to his prompt, amnesia protects her memory of what was an otherwise “beautiful” experience. In *Aquarius* (S1 E10), Sam describes the memory of his LSD trip as a blur. Keen to avoid remembering the embarrassing details of his behaviour, he instinctively stops Brian from recalling the events of the previous night. Finally, following the culmination of his LSD trip in *You* (S2 E9), Joe discovers Delilah has been murdered. He contemplates whether drug-state amnesia is preventing him from remembering that he is the killer. However, in contrast to Jane and Sam, Joe is keen to recall the events of the previous night, even if means discovering he has committed murder.⁸⁵

Communication and Language

Another often strikingly unusual aspect of interpersonal relations in the psychedelic drug state is communication.

- Robert Masters and Jean Houston (2000, p. 100)

Psychedelics may increase the subject’s verbosity and enhance the eloquence of their speech (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 103). The heightened awareness of linguistic nuance, which is also characteristic of the drug-state, endows the individual with the ability to instantly understand wordplay. This enables them to instantly comprehend the myriad meanings of a simple statement or individual word (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 101). Interestingly, the guide need not partake in the psychedelic experience to share this phenomenon with the subject (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 146). To cite an example, one subject was able to deliver a lengthy monologue, the content of which was determined by wordplay, due to their increased sensitivity to language, puns, and words (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 196). Paradoxically, however, while the drug-state is typified by this

⁸⁵ It is subsequently revealed that Joe is not the murderer but, as he has killed people in the past, it is plausible that he has done so again. Consequently, his experience of amnesia is consistent with the idea that his mind is protecting him from unpleasant memories.

sense that communication is more profound and multileveled, it also produces a feeling that language is too limited and thus inadequate to describe its phenomenology (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 100).

In *The Trip*, Paul and John become simultaneously aware of the multiple meanings of the term living room. Initially, Paul employs the standard definition of this term to refer to the domestic living space of John's apartment. He immediately repeats himself and places emphasis on the word "living" to convey a sense of his perception that the room is alive. John instantly acknowledges the wordplay with a laughing smile that surprises Paul, for whom the pun holds profound meaning. Thus, while both characters acknowledge the play on words, their understanding of its significance differs considerably.

In *Acid Test*, Jenny's increased sensitivity to language is conveyed by a complex visual hallucination of passages of text, which consists of song lyrics and admonishments shouted at her by her father (figures 5.9-5.10). The visualisation of multiple passages of disparate text enables Jenny to interpret the meaning of the Giant Kitty song "America's Dad" (2016) as it pertains to her relationship with her father. Immediately after the hallucinatory text evaporates into the palm of her hand, she requests a pen and paper so that she can maintain a record of her epiphany. Indicative of her increased sensitivity to the nuances of language, she associates the word "pen" with two other writing implements, a "quill" and a "crayon", which she says in quick succession.



Figures 5.9-5.10: *Acid Test* (Waldo, 2017)

The psychedelic drug-state is characterised by an increased sensitivity to nonverbal cues such as gestures, changes of posture, altered facial expressions, and body language (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 100; Lundborg, 2012, p. 438). Psychedelic subjects have

also been known to engage in illusory forms of communication (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 104). That is, the misperception that a conversation has taken place, when in fact no words have been spoken, is not uncommon (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 100). Conversely, individuals also overestimate the level of detail conveyed during a verbal exchange such that they mistakenly believe a range of thoughts and feelings have been fully communicated to, and comprehended by, the listener (Masters and Houston, 2000, pp. 104-105)

In *The Trip*, Paul refuses to sit on a chair because he is convinced that it belongs to John. Paul's increased sensitivity to physical gesture triggers a misinterpretation of John's benign attempt to assuage his fear and paranoia as a threat. That is, John carries the chair towards Paul from a position that inadvertently signifies his physical dominance over him. This frightens Paul and exacerbates his growing sense of mistrust (figures 5.11-5.15). In *Acid Test*, Camelia arrives at the concert venue and immediately reprimands Jenny for her tardiness. However, her words repeat out of sequence before she finishes speaking. Significantly, viewed from Jenny's POV, Camelia's voice is audible while her mouth remains closed. This suggests that Jenny's interpretation of her mother's body language manifests as an auditory hallucination of her voice (figure 5.16).



Figures 5.11-5.15: *The Trip* (Corman, 1967)

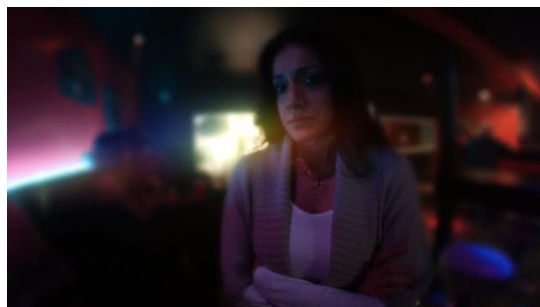


Figure 5.16: *Acid Test* (Waldo, 2017)

Illusory communication is inferred in *The Trip* when John responds to Paul's question, "Did you hear me?" by telling him that he has not spoken. In *Mad Men* (S5 E6), Roger's mental voice interrupts the flow of conversation between other characters as if he were partaking in their discussion:

Sandy: All absence is death if we let ourselves know it.
 Roger: *Weren't you the one who said we were supposed to think positive?*
 Jane: Yes. I feel like that when Roger goes to work.

Roger's reaction, which is characteristically glib, offers a direct response to the statement made by Sandy. Consequently, while it remains ambiguous as to whether Roger believes

he has spoken the words aloud, the interjection of his mental voice nonetheless conveys a sense of illusory communication.

The association between psychedelic experience and extrasensory perception (ESP) has existed for thousands of years (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 114). While it has proven impossible to determine whether LSD does enhance ESP (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 116), numerous subjects have reported drug-state experiences of telepathy and other extrasensory methods of communication (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 100). Indeed, in the 1960s, telepathy was considered a hallmark of the drug-state by regular psychedelic users (Lundborg, 2012, p. 438). Telepathy is a novel form of communication, which takes place on the subliminal level when customary methods fail (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 101). Telepathic experiences are also characteristic of drug-state empathy (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 109), which Masters and Houston also categorise as a form of psychedelic communication (2000, p. 100). This phenomenon enables “worlds of meaning” to be transmitted between individuals via the simple touch of their fingertips (Metzner and Leary, 1967, p. 16).

In *The Trip*, Paul attempts to communicate telepathically with a stranger, Flo (Barboura Morris), who he meets in a launderette. He signals his intent by moving his hands back and forth from his forehead in her direction while suggesting they “really try to contact one another” (figure 5.17). Flo responds by extending her hand to Paul, which he perceives as an opportunity to instigate telepathic communication through physical contact. However, as Corman observes, Flo is an ordinary working woman whose lifestyle is far removed from the hippie drug culture (Corman, 2016b). Consequently, she is a less than ideal partner for Paul’s sincere attempt at telepathic communication. Indeed, she brings his experiment to an end with a laugh and a sympathetic clasp of his hand before diverting their conversation to the prosaic but practical matter of her laundry.



Figure 5.17: *The Trip* (Corman, 1967)

Summary

This chapter has provided unique insight into the film and television representations of an array of nonvisual psychedelic sensory level phenomena. The first of its five sections analysed depictions of three categories of auditory experience, which are aural hallucinations, sound distortions, and acoustic spatial awareness. The shift in focus from the study of images to an interrogation of sound entailed the use of a different set of analytical tools and terminology to those employed in the previous chapter. For example, hallucinatory phenomena were identified as subjective nondiegetic sounds, while both acoustic distortions and distorted auditory spatial perception were defined as diegetic sounds attributed to an individual character's POA. It was also observed that acoustic phenomena are less extensively described in the psychedelic literature than their visual counterparts. Accordingly, their depiction in films and television shows were discovered to be less numerous.

Sound reverberations were identified in three films, *Skidoo*, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, and *The Bad Batch*, and one television show, *House* (S2 E12). It was interesting to note that, despite being produced in different decades, their aesthetic portrayals of this auditory distortion are remarkably consistent. The complex arrangement of multiple psychedelic phenomena in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, meanwhile, which combines sound reverberation with representations of acoustic spatial distortion, altered visual perception, and temporal fragmentation, is indicative of the myriad ways

psychedelic phenomena can be amalgamated in aesthetic depictions of the drug-state.⁸⁶ The findings of this analysis also highlight the importance of a meticulous approach to psychedelic aesthetics by building upon Weinel's study, which identifies filmic techniques, such as a reverb effect, without specifying the psychedelic phenomena they represent (Weinel, 2018, p. 125). This example, and the simultaneous depiction of isolated sounds with altered temporal perception in *Acid Test*, also emphasise the impossibility of identifying and defining a single psychedelic aesthetic.⁸⁷

Different filmic techniques are employed to depict acoustic spatial distortion in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* and *Mad Men* (S5 E6). While the significant distinctions between POA and POV were outlined in the introduction, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* uses a partially hallucinated POV shot to establish POA with Raoul's subjective auditory perspective. Further, the film's representation of acoustic spatial distortion is dependent not just upon the volume of sounds but the contrasting distance between Raoul and their sources, which is defined by the content of two subjectively inflected POV shots. In *Mad Men*, a synch point between a closeup of Roger's face and his auditory perception of the paradoxically loud but muffled noise of traffic indicates that he experiences the latter as if its source were much closer to him than it is. As these examples suggest, the analysis of some psychedelic aesthetics relies upon an interrogation of both sounds and images. They also exemplify the way filmmakers employ different audio-visual techniques to represent a single psychedelic phenomenon.

Synchresis is one of the most significant theoretical concepts applied to the analysis of psychedelic auditory perception in this chapter. In *Mad Men* (S5 E6), synchresis represents two distinct hallucinatory phenomena: in the first example, it depicts Roger's auditory hallucination of music emitted by a vodka bottle; in the second it portrays his

⁸⁶ The film's representation of fragmented time is analysed in chapter six.

⁸⁷ The temporal phenomenon depicted in *Acid Test* is analysed in chapter six.

auditory-visual hallucination of a cigarette collapsing like an accordion, which is accompanied by a distinctive honk. Further, synchresis recreates Oscar's DMT experience of auditory-visual synaesthesia in *Enter the Void*. It was noted in the analysis of synaesthetic experience that screen studies scholars have misidentified this phenomenon in multiple film representations of the psychedelic drug-state. These examples demonstrate the need for a meticulous approach to analysis, which enables the analyst to distinguish between the psychedelic phenomena depicted by a single filmic technique, and to accurately identify specific psychedelic aesthetics.

The second section of this chapter focused on novel forms of tactile experience and bodily sensations. That filmmakers typically ignore the drug-state experiences of smell and taste in their representations of the psychedelic experience suggests that they are more difficult to recreate than their visual and auditory counterparts.⁸⁸ Indeed, depictions of tactile perception in *The Trip* and *Mad Men* (S5 E6) are limited to the verbal descriptions and expressive performances delivered by actors, which convey a sense of the novelty of their experiences. While these examples are noteworthy, this thesis contests the notion posited by some scholars that that an actor's performance of touch can stimulate a similar haptic response among its spectators. Tactile perception is also rendered using digital techniques in *Aquarius* (S1 E10). Notably, the show's use of objective shots to represent these phenomena indicates that the character, Sam, experiences distortions to his visual and tactile perception simultaneously. This example demonstrates how the content of visual perception can be recreated for an audience, while the character's tactile experience is visually represented but not haptically experienced by the viewer.

The significance of context in defining the contribution of a cinematic device to the psychedelic aesthetic is evident in the use of an objective internal sound to represent the

⁸⁸ In *The Trip*, the first thing Paul does when he picks up an orange is smell it and, while his response suggests he finds its scent pleasing, the film's portrayal of the drug-state does not elaborate on his initial reaction or explore this phenomenon further.

heightened perception of bodily functions in *The Trip* and *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. In both films, the sound of the protagonist's heartbeat becomes audible during their drug-state experiences. However, as objective internal sounds are used in various films and television shows, its definition as a psychedelic aesthetic is reliant upon the use of drugs by a character within the narrative. Further, these examples demonstrate that sounds may be used to represent phenomena that are experienced by characters haptically.

In 1960s America, it was generally assumed that sexual activity is compatible with the psychedelic experience. Further, LSD was commonly used as an inhibition removing agent in the decade's acid-sex cinema, sexploitation films, and cheap pornography. It is within this context that *The Trip*, which is the only case study discussed in this thesis to meaningfully explore the relationship between psychedelics and sex, was produced and released. Significantly, the film's portrayal of Paul's sexual encounter with Glenn is consistent with the findings of psychedelic research. That is, rapid crosscutting between the sex scene, which takes place in objective reality, and subjectively saturated POV shots of Paul's inner visual experience, capture a sense of his enhanced sexual pleasure and excitement in the latter stages of the drug-state. Employed in this specific context, the editing style makes a unique contribution to the psychedelic aesthetic.

In the previous chapter, representations of visual trailing were identified in multiple case studies. However, as explained in this chapter, *Taking Woodstock* also uses visual trailing to represent the blurring of boundaries between a character's corporeal sense of self and their surroundings, which is characteristic of drug-state empathy. The film distinguishes between its depiction of these phenomena through its use of subjectively inflected POV shots, which share the contents of Elliot's visual perception, and the objective shots that represent bodily dissolution. Significantly, the identification of drug-state empathy also involved an intertextual analysis of both Elliot Tiber's memoir and the *Taking Woodstock* screenplay.

This chapter outlined the historical relationship between cinema and synaesthetic experience, and addressed misconceptions about the relationship between the psychedelic drug-state and synaesthesia. Notably, the audiovisuality of film and television lends itself to the representation of auditory-visual synaesthesia, which is the type most frequently experienced on psychedelics. In this context, it was surprising to note that none of the case studies that feature the use of LSD incorporate synaesthesia into their depictions of the drug-state. Indeed, it was only possible to identify synaesthesia in one film, *Enter the Void*, which is one of two case studies discussed in this thesis that features the use of a psychedelic other than LSD.

The mental voice is a subjective internal sound employed in multiple film and television representations of the psychedelic experience. However, its contribution to the psychedelic aesthetic is, like the previously discussed internal objective sounds, context dependent. That is, Roger's and Arlen's thoughts are only audible during their psychedelic experiences in *Mad Men* (S5 E6) and *The Bad Batch* respectively. In the latter, Arlen's mental voice is distorted to represent the cognitive effects of LSD, while in the former, it represents Roger's engagement in a form of illusory communication that is characteristic of the drug-state. These examples contrast with the use of Raoul's mental voice in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, which narrates the entire film and is not associated with the psychedelic experience.

6. Temporal Perception

As expected LSD-25 is apparently able to elicit a time disorder in a high proportion of patients.

- J.C. Kenna and G. Sedman (1964, p. 285)

Human beings possess an inherent ability to estimate time durations ranging between milliseconds and minutes with a reasonable degree of accuracy (Droit-Volet, 2013, p. 255). However, the “inner metronome clock” that regulates this innate sense of time may be disrupted during the psychedelic experience (Lundborg, 2012, p. 437). Indeed, drastic changes to the subject’s temporal orientation are characteristic of the sensory level (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 143). In this chapter, the numerous time-disorders associated with the drug-state are identified and interrogated. Analysis begins with an examination of the complex relationship between film and time, and the various theories of cinematic temporal perception. The duration of the psychedelic experience is subsequently examined as an aesthetic feature of the drug-state. This is followed by an investigation of the unique temporal properties of aesthetic and eidetic image sequences. The remainder of the chapter focuses on a further four categories of time-disorder, which are temporal discontinuity and fragmentation, temporal elasticity, temporal disorder, and temporal dilation and insularity.

Time and Film

Films and television shows consist of three temporal modes – story, plot, and screen time – which exist in complex relation to one another. For example, a story spanning several years may be comprised of a plot that unfolds over a few days, which is in turn depicted by two hours of screen time (Bordwell, 2019, p. 81). Thus, multiple scenes of varying length are used to narrate events of different durations (Chion, 2009, p. 409). Editing, meanwhile, is the primary tool used by filmmakers to manipulate time (Murch, 2001, p. 10). In contemporary cinema, the type of transition most commonly used to indicate the passage of time is the direct cut (Bordwell, 2019, p. 252). Filmmakers utilise

cuts to omit various lengths of time, from seconds, minutes and hours, to days, months, years, or even centuries (Bordwell, 2019, p. 251), to depict events of a duration greater than screen time would otherwise allow (Terrone, 2017, p. 329). Consequently, events taking place over a period of years may be conveyed by mere seconds of onscreen activity (Chion, 2009, p. 409).

The fictional time of events depicted between cuts, and the period of viewing time over which they are represented, are usually identical. This is referred to by Bourne and Caddick Bourne as the “norm of duration” (2016, p. 138). Further, there is temporal continuity when the length of a scene equates exactly to the amount of story time it represents (Bordwell, 2019, p. 251). Consequently, it is possible for a filmmaker to depict an event with a duration that equates exactly to a direct experience of it in the real-world (Terrone, 2017, p. 328). However, various cinematic techniques, including editing, allow filmmakers to manipulate time in their depictions of altered states of temporal perception. That is, the use of transitions other than straight cuts, such as dissolves, which visually knit shots together, and fades, which physically separate them, indicate to the viewer that a spatiotemporal narrative shift has occurred (Cutting, Brunick and DeLong, 2011, p. 152).

Dissolves are sometime used to signify a temporal ellipsis and, depending on their speed and frequency, to lengthen the passage of time (Verstraten, 2009, p. 85). Conversely, a dissolve may also indicate a time-lapse, or rapid temporal shift, that does not affect the action (Mitry, 1997, p. 65). Dissolves can also induce a sense of interior achronic flow by disconnecting motion from exterior objective space (Grodal, 2000, p. 151). Other editing techniques, such as jump cuts, nondiegetic inserts, and inconsistent match on actions, abandon traditional concepts of story altogether by forming temporal dislocations that create ambiguous connections between shots (Bordwell, 2004, p. 339). The passage of time within a shot can also be manipulated by various techniques, including slow-motion, which extends the screentime of an event beyond its actual duration to represent temporal dilation (Bourne and Caddick Bourne, 2016, p. 137).

Theorists claim that some of the techniques used to depict a character's distorted temporal perception encourage the audience to share a similar experience of the passage of time. Deleuzian scholars contend that the viewer's perception of time can be altered by the fragmentation of the cinematic time-image through the use of various filmic techniques, including editing, framing, lighting, and overlaying (Powell, 2007, p. 12). More specifically, the relationship between duration and spatial perception is such that, according to Grodal, a space in which no changes occur is experienced by the viewer as timeless (2000, p. 150). Grodal also asserts that processes with a paratelic structure, which are characterised by a reduced capacity to construct a future or goal, induce an experience of time passing as a dynamic "now" (2000, p. 148). Bourne and Caddick Bourne, meanwhile, suggest that by rendering an event in slow-motion, the filmmaker can encourage the viewer to imagine what it would be like to share the character's temporal experience (Bourne and Caddick Bourne, 2016, p. 148).

Film and television are not, however, single track media, and the image that contains little or no motion is oriented in time by the temporal vectorisation produced by sound (Chion, 2009, p. 267). That is, even sounds that seem to exist outside of time indicate the direction in which time flows (Chion, 2009, p. 266). Further, it is the temporal precision of sound that enables several layers of audio to engage the viewer's attention at different speeds (Chion, 2009, p. 120). Music is particularly significant to the perception of time both as duration and structure. For example, the song accompanying a scene may engender an experience of time passing in an uninterrupted bloc (Chion, 2009, pp. 168-169). Music is also the mechanism by which film stops, expands, and contracts time; it has the capacity to condense a year, draw out a second, or linger over a season, before synch sounds are reintroduced to replant the narrative in real time (Chion, 2009, p. 264).

Trip Duration

The LSD effects ordinarily begin thirty minutes to an hour or so after the drug has been orally administered and then last from eight to ten hours.
- Robert Masters and Jean Houston (2000, p. 48)

The psychedelic experience forms part of the plot of the films and television shows analysed in this thesis. The onset period of between 20 minutes and an hour, and its eight-to-12-hour duration, are condensed into a much smaller period of screen time, which typically amounts to no more than a few minutes. Duration is an aesthetic feature of LSD trips in *Taking Woodstock* (Lee, 2009) and *You* (Netflix, 2018-). That is, both narratives incorporate distinct types of temporal markers that can be used to measure the length of characters' psychedelic experiences. In *Taking Woodstock*, the time of day can be approximated by the diegetic music of Woodstock performers (Lee, 2010), while in *You*, a countdown timer set by Joe on his mobile phone measures the time elapsed during his LSD experience (S2 E8).

In *Taking Woodstock*, Elliot meets VW Guy and VW Girl outside of their campervan as Bert Sommer's Woodstock performance draws to a close. This indicates that they take LSD at approximately 8pm.⁸⁹ The ensuing campervan scene ends with a fade, which is a type of transition traditionally used to indicate a leap forward in time (Cutting, Brunick and DeLong, 2011, pp. 151-152). Indeed, temporal progression is emphasised at the start of the next scene by the visibly darkened night sky. The time can be more specifically approximated by the music of Ravi Shankar, which indicates that the scene takes place between midnight and 1am (Lee, 2010). Given that four to five hours have elapsed since Elliot took LSD, and allowing for an onset time of up to 60 minutes, the duration of his experience up to this point can be estimated at between three and four hours. The scene culminates with a depiction of his peak experience, which fades to a shot

⁸⁹ For a list of performance times, see *Anon Time Schedule*. Woodstock Wiki. https://woodstock.fandom.com: Fandom, Inc. Available at: https://woodstock.fandom.com/wiki/Time_Schedule (Accessed: 12 December 2022).

of his return to the El Monaco. The music of Joan Baez, which is audible in the distance, indicates that the time is between 3 and 4am. Indeed, Elliot's behaviour is indicative of the early stages of the afterglow, which is consistent with the six to eight hours he has spent in the drug-state.

In *You* (S2 E8), Joe imprisons Delilah in a plexiglass cage using a timed locking device he sets to release after 16 hours (figure 6.1). The corresponding countdown timer he sets on his mobile phone underpins the remainder of the episode's race-against-time narrative structure. However, his plan to flee the country before the timer reaches zero is interrupted by Forty, who informs Joe approximately halfway through the episode's 49-minute runtime that he has spiked his seltzer water with LSD. Subsequently, Forty emphasises the importance of time by writing "8:52" on Joe's arm, which is the time he unwittingly imbibed the psychedelic drug (figure 6.2). In the next scene, Joe contemplates the likely duration of his impending LSD experience with reference to the drug's *Wikipedia* entry. Taking into consideration the variability of onset times, he determines that the drug-state will endure for between nine and 16 hours, which is consistent with both the psychedelic literature and the drug's *Wikipedia* page.⁹⁰

The duration of Joe's LSD experience can be measured by the timer, which appears frequently throughout the episode. Immediately prior to the onset of the drug-state, 11 hours and 24 minutes remain (figure 6.3). Towards the end of the episode, Joe wakes up in the hotel suite and consults both his arm and the countdown timer, which now reads 1 hour and 20 minutes, and inaccurately asserts that he has spent 11 hours in the drug-state (figure 6.4). That is, measured by the timer, Joe's experience has endured for a maximum of 10 hours. Nonetheless, despite this minor error, his contention that most of the LSD should be

⁹⁰ The *Wikipedia* entry for LSD identifies an onset time of 30-90 minutes. It also refers to a drug-state duration of 8-12 hours and 6-14 hours. *Lysergic acid diethylamide*. <https://en.wikipedia.org/>: *Wikipedia*. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lysergic_acid_diethylamide (Accessed: 13 November 2020).

out of his system is largely consistent with the information provided by the source of his online research.



Figures 6.1-6.4: *You* (S2 E8)

The Temporal Dimension of Aesthetic and Eidetic Images

Psychedelic subjects may feel that an image sequence has lasted “forever,” for “years,” or for “many hours,” when in fact the sequence has been clocked as lasting only a few minutes or even a few seconds.

- Robert Masters and Jean Houston (2000, p. 164)

The subject’s spatiotemporal perception of eidetic and aesthetic image sequences, which resemble the imaginary realm of dreams, is distinct from their experience of the real-world (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 160). The temporal dimension of these images is determined by the magnitude of experience they convey. That is, the perception of time is altered in accordance with the duration of the unfolding events. This creates a disjuncture between clock-measured time and the individual’s subjective temporal experience. Consequently, a five-minute image sequence may seem to the subject to unfold over hours, days, or even years, in a manner that resembles the temporal dimension of dreams (Masters and Houston, 2000, pp. 164-165).

Editing techniques are employed in films and television shows to create temporal expansions, which stretch the duration of short narrative events over extended periods of

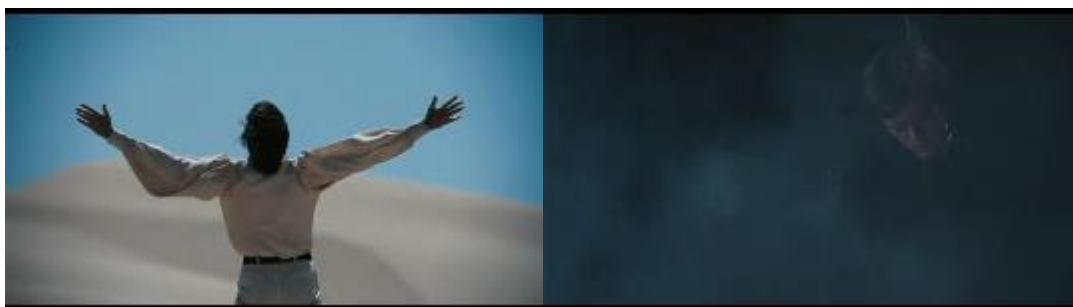
screen time (Bordwell, 2019, p. 81; Bourne and Caddick Bourne, 2016, p. 138). In *The Trip*, Paul experiences a brief aesthetic image sequence that occupies approximately one minute of screen time, but which represents less than a single second of story duration. This sequence of subjectively saturated POV shots, which depicts his inner visual experience, is framed by an identical shot of a car turning a corner and driving towards him. This temporal expansion represents Paul's subjective experience of one minute unfolding in less than a second of clock-measured time.

The interaction between shots generated by cutting is likened by Walter Murch to the abrupt intersection of images experienced in dreams (2001, p. 58). The associational form of editing, meanwhile, places emphasis on its graphic and rhythmic dimensions (Bordwell, 2019, pp. 252-253), and is characterised by a poetic style of shot arrangement that often defies logic to convey emotion and ideas, and to invite interpretation (Bordwell, 2019, p. 380). The correspondence between poetry and associational editing is particularly pertinent to the audio-visual depiction of altered states of temporal perception. That is, lyrical cinema is typified by an absence of temporal linearity that generates timeless or many-dimensional time-experiences (Grodal, 2000, p. 148).

In *The Trip* (Corman, 1967), the composition of an eidetic image sequence experience by Paul is characteristic of multidimensional and nonlinear temporal perception. The scene is composed using an associational form of editing, which places Paul, who appears as protagonist of his own inner vision, in a variety of disparate locations. The first part of the sequence is marked by crosscutting between two scenes, one of which is set in the enclosed space of a gothic mansion, while the other unfolds in the open space of a desert. The different versions of Paul that appear in the two locations are distinguished from one another by the very different costumes he wears in each.

The arrangement of shots implies that Paul experiences these ostensibly unrelated events simultaneously, which in turn suggests that they are temporally connected to one another. The strongest manifestation of this association between the two spatiotemporal

realms is evident at the conclusion of the first half of the sequence. In the desert, Paul mimics the crucifixion immediately prior to finding his own corpse hanging by a noose around the neck in the mansion (figures 6.5-6.6). The connection between the events is emphasised by a cut back to the desert where he falls to the ground with a cry of anguish. This suggests that Paul experiences his encounter with death in both realms simultaneously.



Figures 6.5-6.6: *The Trip* (Corman, 1967)

The second half of the scene crosscuts between events occurring in five different locations. The linear aspect of time is almost completely absent from this part of the sequence, which is characterised by a more complex arrangement of shots. That is, aside from the enactment of funeral rites, there is almost no sense of temporal progression either between or within shots. Further, while the preparation of Paul's corpse initially takes place in one location, two distinct parallel timelines emerge: in one version of events, his body is taken to a beach by a group of people dressed in black uniforms, one of whom represents death; in the second temporal strand, Paul is wrapped in yellow, a mask placed over his face, and his body set on fire. These distinct but connected parallel timelines evoke a multidimensional experience of time.

The intensification of this associational form of editing, which is evident in the second part of the scene, is characterised by a timeless quality that emerges in the absence of temporal linearity. The temporal relationship between shots of Paul in the three other locations, which include a domestic space, a mountainous terrain, and the desert, is almost impossible to discern. This is emphasised by the arrangement of shots, which lack any

sense of spatiotemporal logic. The end of the sequence also highlights its nonlinear temporality with the reintroduction of the shot of Paul hanging by a noose around his neck.

Discontinuous and Fragmented Time

[I]n some cases there was a change in the speed at which time is experienced, in others there was loss of continuity of time, in others a 'fragmentation' of time.

- J.C. Kenna and G. Sedman (1964, p. 285)

The psychedelic drug-state is characterised by the fragmented and discontinuous passage of time (Kenna and Sedman, 1964, p. 285). Experienced visually, the subject's perception of movement is reduced to a series of discrete snapshots or freeze-frames (Blom, Nanuashvili and Waters, 2021). Similarly, the movement associated with "serial optical phenomena" may dissolve into a sequence of static, momentarily visible images (Heimann, 1994, p. 62). In its most extreme form, people and objects seem to teleport instantaneously from one place to another (Heimann, 1994, p. 60; Lundborg, 2012, p. 21). However, the fragmentation of temporal perception does not always manifest visually. For example, one subject defined the experience by an inability to position herself within time (Kenna and Sedman, 1964, p. 285).

Jump cuts violate screen conventions of temporal continuity by creating the illusion that frames have been removed from a single shot. This is achieved by the cutting together of two shots of the same subject that differ only slightly in angle and composition (Bordwell, 2019, pp. 255-256). Two jump cuts depict the discontinuity of Jenny's perception of time in *Acid Test* (Waldo, 2017). In the concert venue, Drea attempts to stimulate Jenny's visual perception by moving a pair of sunglasses around in front of her eyes. Jump cuts between subjectively inflected POV shots render the discontinuity of Jenny's temporal perception by omitting stages of movement from within the frame. This is evident in the jump cut between figures 6.7 and 6.8, which abruptly changes the position of Drea and the sunglasses within the frame. It is also marked by a drastic shift from red to blue lighting. The second cut, between figures 6.9 and 6.10, repeats the process but without

the accompanying change of lighting. In a subsequent scene, two further jump cuts between objective shots depict Jenny's nonvisual perception of temporal discontinuity. The cuts, which follow one another in quick succession, abruptly change her position within the frame. This indicates that her capacity to physically situate herself within time has been diminished (figures 6.11-6.12).



Figures 6.7-6.12: *Acid Test* (Waldo, 2017)

In *You* (S2 E8), Joe's perception of temporal discontinuity is represented by a subversion of the conventions of continuity editing. Joe's decision to follow a hallucinatory vision of himself as a child is implied by his movement towards the camera (figures 6.13-6.14). The next shot of Joe rounding a corner from the right creates the impression that the transition between figures 6.14 and 6.15 consists of a measurable temporal ellipse that omits the small amount of time it would take Joe to reach the position previously occupied by Little Joe. The shot arrangement emphasises the similarities between outgoing and incoming shots to obfuscate the change in *mise-en-scène*. However,

Joe almost immediately acknowledges the difference in his surroundings, which makes apparent that these two spatially proximate locations are physically disconnected from one another. Consequently, this sequence of shots enables the audience to share Joe's confusion, which is triggered by an experience of temporal discontinuity.



Figures 6.13-6.15: *You* (S2 E8)

Joe's second experience of temporal discontinuity is depicted by a violation of the general rule that sounds other than music rarely traverse the boundary between onscreen and nondiegetic (Chion, 2009, p. 260). Following an emotionally charged role play session with Forty, Joe leaves the hotel suite to gather supplies and, as he exits the room, slams its door shut behind him. This diegetic sound, which has a clearly defined onscreen source, bridges the cut to the next shot. However, the spatiotemporal continuity this implies is undermined by the transition to a closeup of Joe's face in a location that is not, as the sound suggests, the hotel corridor situated outside of the room. It becomes apparent that the disoriented Joe is in the hotel suite bathroom but is unable to recall how he arrived there. Significantly, in the absence of an onscreen source, the door slam must be redefined as subjective nondiegetic. That is, after the cut, it becomes an aural memory or auditory hallucination perceived by Joe. This is emphasised by the closeup of Joe's face, which enhances the suggestion that he continues to "hear" the slam. Paradoxically, Joe's

perception of temporal discontinuity is rendered by the illusion of continuity created by the sound's uninterrupted flow across the onscreen-nondiegetic border.

Step-printing involves the duplication of film frames to produce a stuttering, jerky form of slow-motion, which can also be applied to a sequence that is played back at normal speed. In *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (Gilliam, 1998), Raoul's fragmented perception of time is depicted by either step-printing or another technique that recreates this stuttering effect.⁹¹ In the hotel lobby, Raoul observes Dr Gonzo arguing with a group of people at one of the check-in desks. The visual content of these subjectively inflected POV shots is altered by an adjustment to the frame rate, which renders Gonzo's aggressive gesticulations as a series of sharp juddering movements. Subsequently, Raoul's approach to a second check-in desk is represented by a subjectively inflected POV shot, the forward motion of which is punctuated by a staccato stutter.⁹² *The Trip* renders the corporeal fragmentation of Paul's temporal perception using step-printing, or a similar technique, to the movement of his body as he wanders around Los Angeles. This disrupts the fluid movement of his body within the frame to represent a kinaesthetic perception of fragmented time.⁹³

⁹¹ Temporal discontinuity is also depicted in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. However, the phenomenon occurs during a marijuana induced flashback to an LSD trip taken some years earlier. Consequently, as this sequence does not represent his direct experience of the drug-state, it is not analysed in this thesis.

⁹² Weinel defines the "reduced frame-rate" of this sequence as depiction of "cognitive impairment" rather than temporal distortion. Weinel, J. (2018) 'Synaesthetic Overdrive'. New York: New York: Oxford University Press.

⁹³ Benschhoff also identifies this sequence as a depiction of Paul's temporal perception. He defines its "alternating use of slow motion or freeze frame photography with rapid montage sequences" as a representation of the slowing down of time as the mind is simultaneously flooded with ideas and impressions. However, while the editing technique described correlates with this psychedelic phenomenon, it is not employed in this sequence. Indeed, no examples of this form of editing exist in any of the other film and television representations of the LSD experience analysed in this thesis. Benschhoff, H. M. (2001) 'The short-lived life of the Hollywood LSD film.(lysergic acid diethylamide)', *Velvet Light Trap*, (47).

Temporal Elasticity

[T]he temporal dimension that is routinely maintained with an inner metronome-clock takes on substantial changes, where time becomes elastic or ceases to pass altogether.

- Patrick Lundborg (2012, p. 437)

Temporal elasticity is characterised by a perception of time passing in alternating short and long phases, the durations of which may be either compressed or stretched (Kenna and Sedman, 1964, pp. 284-285). Consequently, the briefest of moments may elapse over a period of hours, while lengthier events may seem to pass in “almost no time at all” (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 9). In film and television, it is music that infuses a sequence with a temporal flexibility that elastically expands, contracts, and even stops time (Chion, 2009, p. 264). That is, as music is less contained by the barriers that commonly restrict the definition of sounds (Chion, 1994, p. 81), it more readily crosses the onscreen-nondiegetic border to operate as type of “spatiotemporal switchpoint” (Chion, 2009, p. 260).

The time elided by cuts is typically obfuscated by the narrative logic of continuity editing (Grodal, 2000, p. 142). In a sequence composed of numerous shots, the bridging of cuts by music enhances the sense of temporal continuity (Chion, 2009, p. 168). The spectator is thus no more or less likely to notice the omission of either a substantial or short period of time (Grodal, 2000, p. 142). Indeed, while a sequence with a scene–ellipsis–scene structure is “more” elliptical than its scene–episodic sequence–scene counterpart, the audience may feel as if the opposite is true as the temporal stretch is made salient by the episodic sequence (Grodal, 2000, p. 142).

In the previous chapter, subjective diegetic music heard from Roger’s POA in the guides’ apartment in the *Mad Men* (AMC, 2007-2015) episode “Far Away Places” (S5 E6) was analysed for its representation of the psychedelic practice of listening to two different pieces of music simultaneously. One of the two songs, “I Should Not Be Seeing You” by Connie Conway (1954), bridges a cut from the apartment scene to an episodic sequence set in a taxi. In the absence of its onscreen source, the music must be redefined as a subjective

nondiegetic sound that is heard by Roger as either an auditory hallucination or aural memory. This is emphasised by the subtle distortion of the music at the point of the cut between the apartment scene and taxi sequence. The song remains audible throughout the taxi journey and bridges a second cut to the next scene where Roger and Jane appear together at home in their bathtub.

Temporal continuity is paradoxically implied by the bridging of cuts between radically discontinuous spaces with music. However, in contrast to the door slam in *You* (S2 E8), the music heard by Roger is a complex sound, which remains audible for a prolonged period of time. Indeed, unlike Joe, Roger does not appear disoriented by the sudden change of his location and continues to experience the music as if it had an onscreen source in the car. Significantly, as the taxi sequence serves no narrative function, the transition between the apartment and his home could have been made with a single elliptical cut.⁹⁴

Roger's elasticised temporal perception is rendered by the scene–episodic sequence–scene structure, which gives salience to the stretching of time, and the bridging of cuts with music. That is, the composition of the sequence suggests that Roger experiences the passage of time in alternating short and long phases. The elliptical cuts imply that Roger experiences events, such as the journey from apartment to taxi, as occurring instantaneously. The taxi journey, by contrast, gives salience to the duration of the couple's journey home, which indicates that Roger's perception of time becomes stretched. That this does not represent a discontinuous experience of time is paradoxically suggested by the continuity of the music track.

⁹⁴ Roger's hallucination of the face of his friend and business associate, Bert Cooper (Robert Morse), on a five-dollar bill is the only other incident of note to take place during the taxi sequence. However, as this phenomenon is not location specific, it could have been incorporated into either of the other two psychedelic settings.

Temporal Disorder

[T]he subject may “turn around in time” a series of events so that events A-B-C-D will exist in the memory as having occurred in the order D-C-B-A.
- Robert Masters and Jean Houston (2000, p. 165)

The perception of time passing out of sequence is related to processes of memory (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 165; Heimann, 1994, p. 60; Kenna and Sedman, 1964, p. 283). The subject may remember a series of events, A-B-C-D, as having taken place in the order D-C-B-A (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 165). Indeed, memories may lack any semblance of chronology, appearing instead as a set of incoherently ordered individual images (Heimann, 1994, p. 60). The subject may recall events as they unfold during the psychedelic experience as distinct phenomena that exist separately in time so that they are not preceded or succeeded by other incidents. This perception of time is characterised by an absence from experience of the temporal relation between memories, which exist in isolation from one another as discretely perceived entities (Kenna and Sedman, 1964, p. 283).

In its classical form, film narration makes the protagonist's background and goals explicit as they progress through time and space from event A to B to C, and so on. However, events may be presented nonchronologically, so that event B is presented as a flashback after event C has occurred. Some classical films also begin with a concluding event, E, that is depicted prior to those which preceded it (Verstraten, 2009, p. 3). However, in the late 1960s, the conventions of classical film narration were challenged by purveyors of New Hollywood cinema, who often obscured the goals and motivations of their characters (Verstraten, 2009, p. 4). Nonetheless, as early classic of the period *Easy Rider* (Hopper, 1969) demonstrates, these films often incorporate standard conventions of, for example, continuity editing, alongside other more innovative techniques. This exemplifies a tendency among Hollywood filmmakers to appropriate stylistic features from other forms of cinema without completely abandoning the classical form of film narration (King, 2002, p. 44).

The absence of narrative logic from the *Easy Rider* LSD scene evokes independent, avant-garde, underground, and European art cinema (Verstraten, 2009, pp. 3-4). Its director, Dennis Hopper, composed the scene using what he describes as a set of “very radical” editing techniques (2016b). The sequence is defined by Weinel as a “non-linear montage” that depicts the drug-state dissolution of temporal perception (2018, p. 124). Fisher, who describes its cutting style as frantic, also observes the absence of temporal progression from its sequence of shots (Fisher, 2019, p. 225).⁹⁵ The scene thus conforms to what Carol Vernallis refers to as an inset narrative because it disrupts the conventions of classical Hollywood narrative filmmaking and possesses its own unique temporality (Vernallis, 2013, pp. 42-44).

The shot reverse-shot structures that establish identification with the vision of specific characters throughout *Easy Rider* are undermined during the LSD scene (Fisher, 2019, p. 225). While the film captures the outward behaviour of characters during the psychedelic experience, it does so without depicting their individual hallucinations, and drug induced affects are registered in disjunctive, shifting relation to their perceptions (Powell, 2007, p. 72). That is, rather than provide the audience with “decisive secondary identification” with a specific character, the boundaries between characters dissolve so that the camera can be said to assume a “quasi-disembodied consciousness” (Fisher, 2019, pp. 225-226). Further, the hallucinatory constants registered by the camera’s “consciousness” (Powell, 2007, p. 72) must be construed as “subjective inserts” in the absence of other diegetic sources (Fisher, 2019, p. 223). This indicates that the film’s depiction of the drug-state is ambiguously attributed to the subjective experience of all four characters, either successively, simultaneously, or both.

⁹⁵ According to Anna Powell, cinematic techniques simulate the “time-distorting properties” of LSD to make the scene feel longer than its five-minute runtime. However, Powell does not specify what these techniques are or how they transform the viewer’s temporal perception. Further, as her assertion pertains not to the representation of characters’ experience, but to that of the spectator, it sits outside the scope of this thesis. Powell, A. (2007) *Deleuze, Altered States and Film*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press.

The LSD scene consists of a substantial number of shots that are not arranged chronologically. Its depiction of temporal disorder is illustrated via an analysis of a small sample of six shots, which depict three distinct but related events. In the first event, A, Mary removes her clothes while stood in the confined space between two mausoleums (figure 6.16). In event B, she appears naked lying among tombs in a different part of the cemetery (figure 6.17). Event C, meanwhile, is comprised of a single shot of a fully clothed Mary carrying an umbrella. Notably, in this shot, the coat she takes off during event A is no longer in her possession (figure 6.18). The shots that depict these events are arranged out of sequence in the order C-A-B-A-B-A.⁹⁶



Figures 6.16-6.18: *Easy Rider* (Hopper, 1969)

The two separate sound events that accompany the first shots of visual events A and B enhance the complexity of the scene's temporal structure. Two voices are audible as Mary removes her coat, one belonging to a woman reading scripture, the other to Wyatt, both of which bridge the cut to the next shot, event B, of Mary lying naked in the rain. The voices represent two further narrative events, D (the woman's voice) and E (Wyatt's voice), which are not temporally aligned with one another or with either of the images. The

⁹⁶ This sample omits reference to other shots that punctuate this sequence, but which depict other, unrelated events. The scene is comprised of such a high volume of shots that to discuss it in its entirety would require vast swathes of description that would not enhance the results of this sample-based analysis.

disjuncture between the sounds, and between the sounds and the images, represents the perception of time passing out of sequence in the more complex form $\frac{A-B}{DE}$. That is, each shot consists of three simultaneously experienced temporal events, two of which also bridge the transition between visual events. This example demonstrates the scene's complicated arrangement of sound and image, which is heightened by the rapid cutting between shots.

SLC Punk! (Merendino, 1998) employs similar editing style to that used in *Easy Rider* to depict Stevo's disordered perception of time. The LSD scene consists of five narrative events, four of which are discussed in this analysis of its out of sequence temporal structure. The first event, A, takes place in the park where Stevo takes LSD with Sandy; in event B, the couple park their van at the base of a wooded hillside; event C consists of Stevo wandering around the forest alone; and, in event D, he discovers Sandy sitting on a park bench next to a columnar stone structure. The shots depicting these events unfold out of sequence in the order A-B-A-C-A-C-A-C-D.

The influence of *Easy Rider* is also tangible in the film's yet more complex arrangement of sound and image. The transitions between the first shots depicting events A and B, and from B back to A, are both bridged by sound. In each instance, sound emitted from the incoming shot is audible prior to the cut between images in the order $\frac{A-B-A}{B-A}$.⁹⁷ Subsequently, the sound from event A continues uninterrupted as shots cut back and forth between events A and C in the sequence $\frac{A-C-A-C-A}{A}$. In both examples, the misalignment between sound and image enhances the film's portrayal of Stevo's disordered temporal perception.

In *You*, Joe's perception of time passing out of sequence is more explicitly related to processes of memory. The narrative events that comprise his LSD experience unfold in

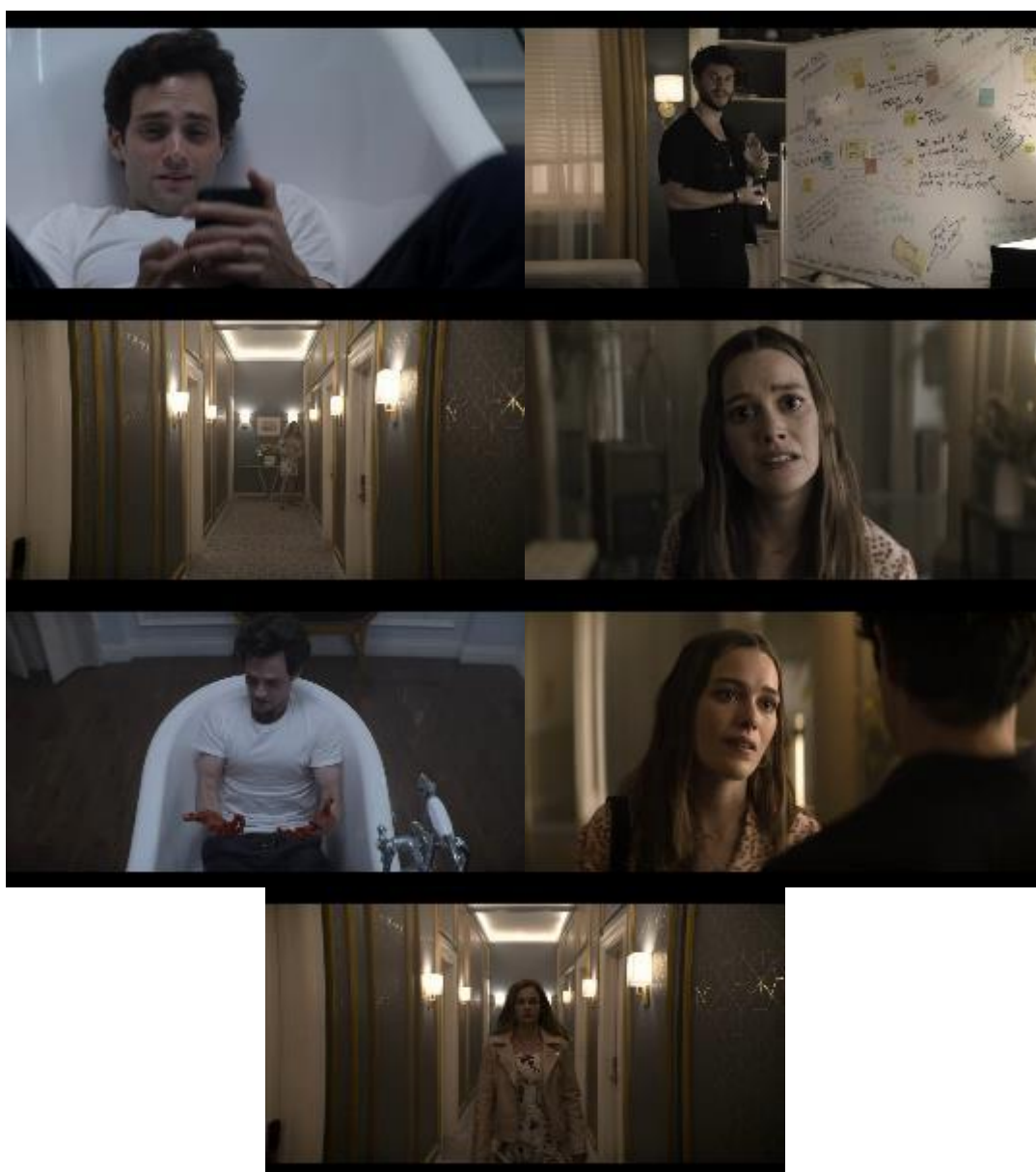
⁹⁷ The same format used in analysis of *Easy Rider* is employed to describe the relationship between sound and image in this sequence. That is, visual events are referred to above the line, sounds below.

chronological order in “Fear and Loathing in Beverly Hills” (S2 E8). However, in the subsequent episode, “P.I. Joe” (S2 E9), he recalls four drug-state incidents out of sequence. In the first of these events, A, Joe encounters Love in a hotel corridor (figures 6.19-6.20). This is followed soon after by event B, during which he perceives Dimitri as Candace (figures 6.21-6.22). Event C occurs later in the episode, when he enters the hotel suite living room and finds Forty working on a whiteboard (figure 6.23). Finally, in event D, he answers a video call from Love while lying in the bath, where he subsequently hallucinates blood on his hands (figures 6.24-6.25).



Figures 6.19-6.25: *You* (S2 E8)

Joe recalls fragments of these events in “P.I. Joe” in the order D-C-B-A-D-A-B (figures 6.26-6.32). However, the order in which these flashbacks appear is punctuated by shots depicting the narrative present. For example, the first shot in the sequence, which portrays event D, cuts back to a short sequence set in the present. The flashbacks to the next three events follow one another successively in the order C-B-A (figures 6.27-6.29). Joe’s disordered temporal perception of the LSD experience can thus be more accurately summarised as occurring in the order D-/-C-B-A-/-D-/-A-B.⁹⁸



Figures 6.26-6.32: *You* (S2 E9)

⁹⁸ “/” refers to a depiction of the narrative present.

Temporal Dilation and Temporal Insularity

The commonest experience was a sense of temporal insularity in which only the present was real, past and future being exceedingly remote.
- E.W. Anderson and K. Rawnsley (1954, p. 47)

The related states of suspended timelessness and temporal insularity are characterised by the collapse of past and future into the present moment. This is experienced as a perception of time that is concentrated on “right now” (Harris and Griffiths, 2019). This form of temporal experience is typified by the slowing down of time, which may decelerate to such a degree that its passage feels like an eternity or seems to cease altogether (Kenna and Sedman, 1964, p. 283). The separation of each second from the next by what feels like infinity transforms the subject’s visual perception of the environment into a series of snapshots (Cohen, 1964, p. 177). Similar changes to auditory perception have also been reported, including the disintegration of melodic structures into single tones (Heimann, 1994, p. 62).

The filmed space in which no changes take place is, Grodal asserts, experienced by the viewer as timeless. In its most extreme form, he explains, freeze-frames eliminate visual activity from within a shot to generate a sense of timelessness (2000, p. 150). In *Acid Test*, Jenny’s experience of temporal insularity is audio-visually rendered by the suspension of movement within a subjectively inflected POV shot of the band, Giant Kitty, whose music simultaneously disintegrates into atonal reverb.⁹⁹ The concurrent suspension of sound and image indicates that this shot represents a distortion of temporal perception rather than visual and auditory phenomena. This is emphasised by the Jenny’s concomitant experience of undulating visual perception, discussed in chapter four, which emphasises the distinction between temporal and visual phenomena.

Slow-motion is employed by filmmakers to emphasise the spectacle or dramatic content of a cinematic sequence or shot (Bordwell, 2019, p. 167). It is also used to indicate

⁹⁹ While one band member, who appears to the right of the screen, does continue to move, this seems to be an aberration that accidentally disrupts the shot’s depiction of temporal insularity.

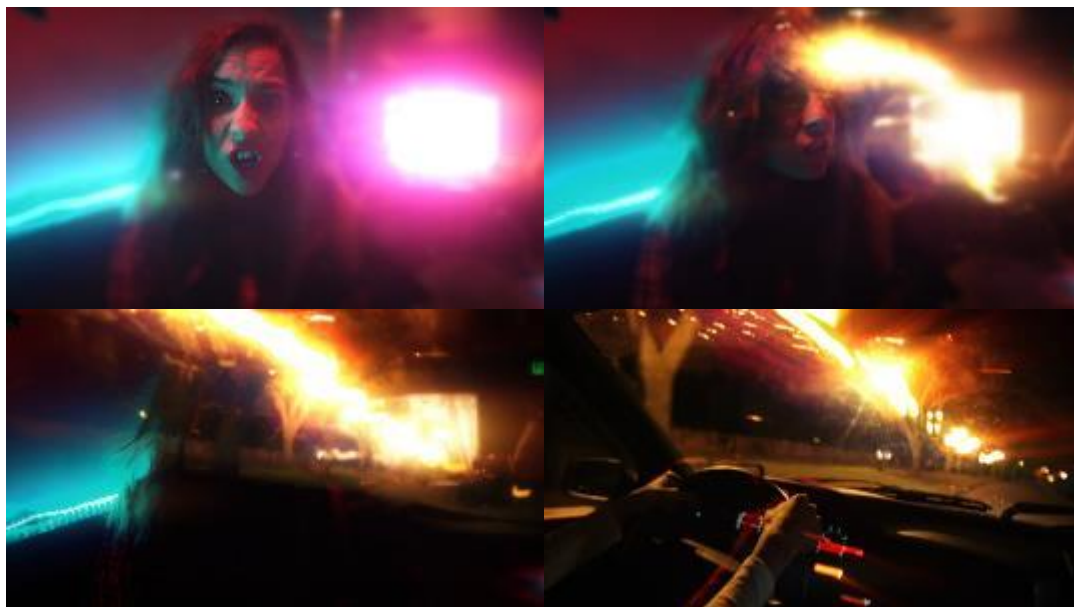
that a scene represents a character's subjective experience of a dream or fantasy (Grodal, 2000, p. 136; Bordwell, 2019, p. 167). Further, slow-motion may also portray specific subjectively experienced phenomena such as the distorted perception of time (Bourne and Caddick Bourne, 2016, p. 148). Ramping, which is a technique used to adjust the speed of an image mid-shot, may also be employed to accentuate a moment of drama or action (Bordwell, 2019, p. 167). It is also possible to suspend time by slowing the external rhythm of the transition between shots using a "held dissolve" (Frierson, 2018, p. 295).

In *Acid Test*, the concert venue scene concludes with a depiction of temporal insularity. The sequence begins with the ramping of a subjectively inflected POV shot, which slows Drea's movement within the frame to represent the dilation of Jenny's temporal perception. This is accompanied by a flash of white light visible behind Drea and a shift from the subjective diegetic sound of Giant Kitty's Riot Grrrl music to the subjective nondiegetic sound of a hallucinated "whooshing" noise. These phenomena accompany the transition to the next scene, which is marked by a held dissolve, the audio-visual composition of which suggests an experience of temporal insularity.

Throughout the transition, a stream of golden light snakes towards Jenny as music of a very different genre to the punk rock played by Giant Kitty becomes audible (figures 6.33-6.34). The light and music are both revealed to have diegetic sources in the subsequent scene, which are the streetlights lining the side of a road and Camelia's car radio respectively (figures 6.35-6.36). The use of a held dissolve to mark the transition between spatiotemporally disparate scenes obfuscates the tensed relationship between incoming and outgoing shots as they are subjectively perceived by Jenny.¹⁰⁰ The simultaneous presence of phenomena pertaining to both scenes in a single shot negates the possibility of defining either as existing in the past or future as they relate to one another.

¹⁰⁰ This analysis focuses on the cinematic depiction of a character's subjective perception of time. Consequently, the scholarly debate over whether a series of events depicted by a fiction can be said to exist in tensed relation to one another does not materially impact its findings. Bourne, C. and Caddick Bourne, E. (2016) *Time in fiction*. Oxford University Press.

That this renders the collapse of Jenny’s perception of past and future into a dynamically shifting present moment is emphasised by the camera’s static position as it assumes her POV throughout the transition. The hallucinatory whoosh, meanwhile, suggests Jenny is temporally insulated within the present moment as she moves from one location to another.



Figures 6.33-6.36: *Acid Test* (Waldo, 2017)

The perception of time characterised by the collapse of past and future into the present moment is also connected to the psychedelic deconstruction of the subject’s belief in temporal causality. The experience of time passing “in this moment” undermines the notion that a past event, A, caused B to happen in the present, which will trigger a future occurrence, C (Wolfe, 1968, p. 142). Consequently, in the absence of a homogenous objective time against which the subjective perception of time can be related, the subject experiences the passage of time in individual changing periods (Heimann, 1994, p. 64). In film and television, meanwhile, the telic experience of time is forward-directed and outcome-centric. This contrasts with its paratelic form, which is characterised by a reduced capacity to structure a future and goal and an experience of time’s passage in a dynamic now (Grodal, 2000, p. 148).

In the early stages of her LSD trip in *The Bad Batch* (Amirpour, 2016), Arlen wanders around Comfort searching for a missing girl, Honey. This forward-directed, goal

oriented telic experience of time is lost, however, when she leaves Comfort and apparently forgets about Honey's existence. Her paratelic perception of the flow of experience as a dynamic now is captured by a montage sequence set in the desert. Arlen becomes fixated on the content of her experience, rather than a specific outcome, as she appears in a variety of disparate locations. The tone and hue of the night sky changes inconsistently between shots, the atemporal arrangement of which makes it impossible to determine the nature of their tensed relationship to one another. This represents a perception of time experienced by Arlen in a series of individual disconnected moments, which is characteristic of temporal insularity.

Summary

This chapter was divided into seven sections, the first of which outlined the complex relationship between film and time. The remainder of the chapter employed various theories of time in the analysis of film and television representations of psychedelic temporal perception. While editing was identified as the primary tool used by filmmakers to manipulate time, techniques such as slow-motion, step-printing, and time-lapse, were also interrogated for their capacity to distort the passage of time within a single shot. Further, sound was also acknowledged as an aesthetic feature of the representations of some types of psychedelic temporal perception.

The first section focused on duration as an aesthetic feature of the LSD experience. It analysed the use of diegetic music in *Taking Woodstock* and a countdown timer in *You* (S2 E8), both of which enabled duration to be estimated at various stages of characters' psychedelic experiences. However, it was also noted that the primary function of these filmic devices is not psychedelic: in *Taking Woodstock*, the intertextual temporal markers generated by diegetic music are a by-product of the filmmakers' desire to accurately reflect the timing of artists' performances at Woodstock (Lee, 2010); the incorporation of a countdown timer in *You*, meanwhile, is designed to increase the tension of the episode's

race-against-time narrative. Nonetheless, the emphasis placed on both temporality and the psychedelic drug-state in these case studies emphasises the distinction between plot time and screen time. That is, they foreground that the psychedelic experience is a plot element with a much lengthier duration than the screen time it occupies.

In the remainder of the chapter, five categories of psychedelic temporal perception were outlined and interrogated, the first of which addressed the unique temporal dimension of eidetic images. It focused on two examples in *The Trip*, which are attributed to Paul's inner visual perception by subjectively saturated POV shots. Indeed, the distinction between subjectively inflected and subjectively saturated POV shots is identified as a significant factor in defining the temporality of image sequences. In the first example, a temporal expansion created by cuts to and from an aesthetic image sequence was analysed, while in the second, an associational form of editing was interrogated for its depiction of a multidimensional time experience. In both instances, the contribution of these editing techniques to the psychedelic aesthetic is dependent upon the attribution of the respective image sequences to a character's subjective experience of the psychedelic drug-state.

In section four, depictions of the fragmented and discontinuous passage of time were identified in four case studies, two of which use editing techniques to disrupt temporal continuity. In *Acid Test*, the distinction between Jenny's visual and corporeal perception of time was described with reference to the use of jump cuts that disrupt the temporal flow of subjectively inflected POV shots and objective shots respectively. The bridging of cuts with a sound other than music in *You* (S2 E8), which violates standard conventions of continuity editing to depict Joe's experience of temporal discontinuity, was identified as a unique aesthetic feature of the second of the show's two representations of this phenomenon. The use of music to bridge the cuts of a scene-episodic sequence-scene ellipsis in *Mad Men* (S5 E6), meanwhile, were noted for their contribution to its aesthetic portrayal of temporal elasticity. These examples demonstrate how the same phenomenon can be portrayed using different editing techniques, and how similar cinematic devices

may represent various psychedelic phenomena. This further highlights the importance of applying a meticulous approach to analysis, which enables psychedelic aesthetics to be accurately interpreted.

The use of step-printing, or a step-printing style effect, was identified in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* and *The Trip*. This cinematic device transforms the temporal aesthetic of individual shots to represent the fragmentation of characters' perception of time. The two films represent this phenomenon slightly differently: *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* applies step-printing to subjectively inflected POV shots, which portray Raoul's visual experience of fragmented time, while in *The Trip*, objective shots of Paul are step-printed to represent the corporeal fragmentation of his temporal perception. *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* also combines its representation of this phenomenon with an auditory distortion of spatial perception. This is indicative of one of the myriad ways psychedelic phenomena can be combined in an aesthetic depiction of the drug-state.

Three examples of temporal disorder were identified in the sixth section. The ambiguous attribution of the psychedelic drug-state to a group of characters in *Easy Rider* is a unique aspect of its representation of the psychedelic drug-state. The LSD scene is comprised of a complex arrangement of sound and image that represents a collective experience of temporal disorder. Indicative of the cinematic intertextuality of psychedelic aesthetics, *SLC Punk!* employs a similar editing technique to represent Stevo's experience of time passing out of sequence. The implicit intertextual encounter between these two films is distinct from the explicit intertextual connection formed between the titles of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* and the *You* episode "Fear and Loathing in Beverly Hills" (S2 E8).

The use of flashbacks to represent Joe's perception of temporal disorder as a function of memory in *You* (S2 E9) is distinct from the editing techniques used in *SLC Punk!* and *Easy Rider*. This emphasises that a single psychedelic phenomenon may be represented using various filmic techniques, while also demonstrating the importance of

context in defining a cinematic device as psychedelic. That is, flashbacks are employed in a plethora of film and television narratives that are not associated with drug use, and their contribution to the psychedelic aesthetic is thus reliant upon the attribution of the drug-state to a character's subjective experience. The significance of a meticulous approach to the analysis of psychedelic aesthetics is further highlighted by the identification of flashbacks in the representation of eidetic images, which are analysed in the next chapter.

The focus of the final section of this chapter was temporal insularity, which is represented by the simultaneous suspension of sound and image in *Acid Test*. The depiction of this phenomenon is accompanied by a representation of undulating visual perception, which was analysed in chapter four. The incorporation of the latter suggests that the suspension of movement within the frame, and the accompanying dissolution of music into an atonal drone, represent an altered experience of time rather than auditory and visual phenomena. The film also combines various audio-visual effects, including slow-motion, a held dissolve between scenes, and transitions between different types of sound, to represent temporal insularity. This complex arrangement of sounds and images indicates the capacity for films and television shows to employ several cinematic techniques in the transition between scenes to aesthetically depict a single psychedelic phenomenon.

7. The Higher Realms of the Psychedelic Experience

Sensory experiencing may, for example, lead the subject to meaningful consideration of his place in the world; and this, in its turn, may be the means of his “descent” to a “deeper” drug-state level.

- Robert Masters and Jean Houston (2000, p. 144)

The primary function of sensory level experience is to decondition the mind and liberate the psyche. This stimulates the subject's transition to the higher realms of the drug-state, which catalyse processes of personal change and self-realisation (Masters and Houston, 2000, pp. 144-152). The first two post-sensory level realms, the recollective-analytic stage and symbolic level, may be reached if a sufficient psychedelic dose is taken. However, while most subjects experience a clearly perceived peak, it does not always trigger ego-loss. This is significant because the transcendental state is only accessible to those subjects who experience depersonalisation (Lundborg, 2012, p. 166).¹⁰¹

The subject may accrue valuable personal insights from the recollective-analytic stage of the psychedelic experience. Further, increased levels of self-understanding stimulate positive revisions to thought processes, behaviour, and self-perception. The symbolic level of the drug-state catalyses transformative experiences characterised by a higher degree of self-understanding (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 147). The intensely emotional climate of the transcendental level, meanwhile, instigates the most profound experiences of self-transformation, which are typified by long-term effects of positive integration and the eradication of ineffectual and damaging behaviours (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 148).

The first of this chapter's four sections addresses the highly introspective recollective-analytic stage, which is typically experienced several hours after the onset of the drug-state (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 144). The second part focuses on the symbolic level, which was reached by approximately 40% of Masters and Houston's

¹⁰¹ The psychiatric term for ego-loss is depersonalisation. Lundborg, P. (2012) *Psychedelia: An Ancient Culture, A Modern Way of Life*. Stockholm: Lysergia.

subjects (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 147). The rationale for examining peak experience, ego-loss, and the transcendental level together is outlined in the introduction to section three. It is unsurprising to note that the highest realm of the drug-state is the least frequently depicted in films and television as it is rarely experienced by psychedelic subjects.¹⁰² The fourth and final section focuses on two post-trip phases identified by Majić et al as the psychedelic afterglow and the longer term residual effects respectively (2015, p. 243).¹⁰³

Recollective-Analytic Stage

Possibly several hours into his session, and usually after he has spent some time in the sensory realm with its altered perceptions, the subject will pass on to a stage of his experience in which the content is predominantly introspective and especially recollective-analytic.

- Robert Masters and Jean Houston (2000, p. 144)

The recollective-analytic stage is dominated by the recollection and analysis of memories (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 186). The emerging ideational materials are usually illustrated and clarified by accompanying eidetic memory images (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 144). These images, which are typically seen with eyes closed, may also be perceived with eyes open on certain types of surface, such as gazing crystals and movie screens (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 156). They are frequently populated by various people, places, and events from the subject's life-history (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 156). The images stimulate encounters with the past that enable the subject to reassess their life goals and scrutinise personal problems, including difficult relationships (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 144). It is via the attainment of self-knowledge and personal insight that

¹⁰² Only 11 of Masters and Houston's 206 subjects reached the transcendental level. Masters, R. and Houston, J. (2000) *The Varieties of Psychedelic Experience*. Rochester, Vermont: Park Street Press.

¹⁰³ The term LSD flashback, which is also referred to as an acid flashback, describes the recurrence of psychedelic phenomena after the effects of the drug have subsided. The true flashback possesses a drug-state quality comprised of geometric patterns, undulating visual perception, and a sense of depersonalisation and derealisation. However, as the phenomenon was not identifiable in any of the case studies analysed, it has not been examined in this thesis. Shick, J. F. E. and Smith, D. E. (1970) 'Analysis of the LSD Flashback', *Journal of psychedelic drugs*, 3(1), pp. 13-19.

the subject is able to resolve many of their personal issues (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 84).

In *Skidoo* (Preminger, 1968), Tony perceives a recollective-analytic stage eidetic image sequence while observing his reflection in a sink filled with water. Fred, who assumes the role of guide throughout the trip, encourages Tony to find himself in the water, which stimulates the manifestation of a series of eidetic images. The sequence begins with a dissolve to a partially hallucinated POV shot of his reflection (figure 7.1). This is followed by a second dissolve that marks the transition to a subjectively saturated POV shot of his inner visual perception. It was noted in chapter four that the vivid colours that characterise aesthetic and eidetic images is absent from film and television representations of the drug-state. In lieu of this visual aesthetic, the psychedelic quality of this sequence is enhanced by a fluid, translucent wave of continuously changing colours that borders each shot (figures 7.1-7.2). Characteristic of the recollective-analytic stage, Tony encounters various friends, family members, and business associates (figure 7.2). His perception of these images stimulates a contemplation of personal relationships, which enables him to determine the identity of his daughter's biological father.



Figures 7.1-7.2: *Skidoo* (Preminger, 1968)

Towards the end of *The Big Cube* (Davison, 1969), Johnny takes up residence with an unnamed woman in a rundown basement apartment. In the film's penultimate scene, Johnny throws a blonde wig at his girlfriend as she flees to the safety of a staircase on the other side of the room. Subsequently, Johnny recalls various romantic encounters and intimate trysts with women in a series of eidetic images. Subjectively saturated POV shots are solarised with colour to represent the vibrant aesthetic of CEV experience and to

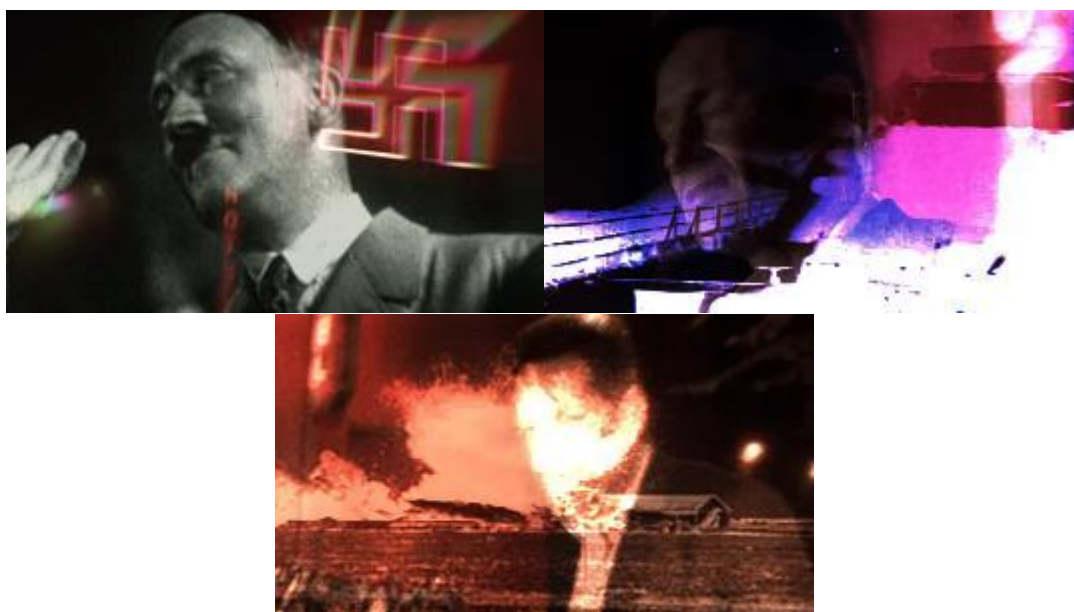
distinguish them from other shots depicting objective reality. This recollective-analytic experience encourages him to reflect on the connection between his past behaviour and his present situation.

The eidetic image sequence begins with a flashback to his first sexual encounter with former wife Lisa. This is immediately followed by his recollection of Lisa's angry response to him flirting with another woman, Bibi (Pamela Rodgers), on their wedding day (figures 7.3-7.4). Subsequently, Johnny appears in a series of identically composed eidetic images, in which he first kisses Lisa, then Bibi, and finally his current partner (figures 7.5-7.7). Significantly, his girlfriend appears to be wearing the blonde wig, which implies that he has been using it to make her look like Lisa. The implication that Johnny's romantic feelings for his ex-wife are undiminished is emphasised by closeups of his pained reaction to this sequence of images.



Figures 7.3-7.7: *The Big Cube* (Davison, 1969)

In the *Aquarius* (NBC, 2015-2016) episode “It’s Alright Ma (I’m Only Bleeding)” (S1 E10), eidetic images are represented by superimposed shots, which function somewhat like dissolves to indicate the transition to a character’s subjective experience. That is, the superimposition of images of World War II over closeups of Sam Hodiak’s face indicate that they are a product of his inner visual perception.¹⁰⁴ This sequence is triggered by Charles Manson, who verbally conjures the eidetic images after Sam reveals that he served in the war. The sequence begins with an aesthetic image of Adolf Hitler, which Sam finds amusing (figure 7.8). His subsequent recollection of specific combat situations triggers a sombre reflection on the past, which marks the transition to the recollective-analytic level of the drug-state (figures 7.9-7.10). However, Manson’s nefarious perversion of the role of trip guide prevents Sam from gaining insight from the experience.

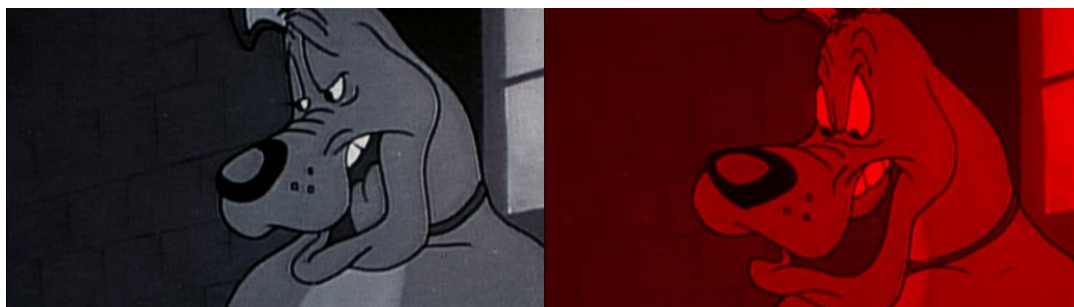


Figures 7.8-7.10: *Aquarius* (S1 E10)

LSD eliminates the psychological barriers that ordinarily prevent the subject from recalling repressed memories (Cohen, 1964, p. 189). Further, the subject may perceive these unblocked memories as cartoon eidetic images (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 29). In *Conspiracy Theory* (Donner, 1997), Dr Jonas injects Jerry Fletcher with LSD and interrogates him using various torture techniques. As he does so, he conceals his identify

¹⁰⁴ There is a strong visual resemblance between the point at which a dissolve knits two shots together and the superimposition of one image over another.

from Jerry, whose memory of him is stimulated by his voice. Initially, Jerry recalls a repressed memory of Dr Jonas as a docile cartoon dog (figure 7.11). However, as his memories continue to resurface, he vaguely remembers the threat posed by Dr Jonas. This is visually conveyed by a transformation of the dog's countenance, which assumes a menacing appearance, and the saturation of the image with red (figure 7.12).



Figures 7.11-7.12: *Conspiracy Theory* (Donner, 1997)

In *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (Chbosky, 2012), Charlie's psychedelic experience is punctuated by a series of intrusive eidetic memory images, which recall a traumatic childhood incident. Indeed, while these flashbacks appear throughout the film, it is during the LSD experience that he first remembers his aunt Helen's death in a car accident with a significant degree of clarity. This experience is characteristic of the drug-state emergence into consciousness of previously repressed memories. However, as he takes LSD without a guide in a recreational set and setting, he lacks the requisite framework to accurately interpret the meaning of these images. Significantly, the flashbacks increase in frequency and intensity throughout the remainder of the film, which suggests the psychedelic experience triggers a longer-term process of self-realisation and understanding. That is, at the end of the film, Charlie becomes aware that he was not responsible for his aunt Helen's death and that he was abused by her as a child.

The subject may relive past events of personal significance on the recollective-analytic level of the psychedelic experience (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 144). The relived events appear as vivid memory images, which are typically accompanied by concomitant tactile experiences (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 191) and various ideational and emotional phenomena (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 200). The subject may also

“relive” memories which, while plausible, are not authentic (Grof, 2021, p. 75). Indeed, it is possible for the subject to re-enact heroic motifs via an identification with historical or mythological figures which, evidently, do not form part of their own life experience (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 225).

The psychedelic experience is occasionally dominated by various forms of sexual imagery (Grof, 2021, p. 14), which consist of orgies and other types of erotic activity (Grof, 2021, p. 143). In the 1960s, researchers hypothesised that the recollection of memories stimulated by the drug-state would enable the subject to identify the root cause of their sexual problems (Ling and Buckman, 1964, pp. 232-233). Consequently, LSD was identified as potential treatment for various sexual disorders, including sexual repression (Alexander, 2015), impotence, and frigidity (Leary, 1966). For example, a female subject discovered the cause of her frigidity after reliving her earliest sexual encounters, which demonstrated to her why she associated sex with fear and violence (Ling and Buckman, 1964, p. 238).

In *The Trip* (Corman, 1967), an extensive sexually oriented eidetic image sequence is preceded by Paul’s cryptic announcement that he is still with Sally. Roger Corman included this incongruous remark to represent the type of “psychological reactions” that LSD often stimulates (2016b). The incongruity of the comment suggests that a repressed or unconscious idea has suddenly emerged into Paul’s conscious awareness. In the context of this scene, it also has significant implications for the erotic image sequence that follows. That is, it suggests that Paul relives the ensuing three-way sexual encounter, which involves himself, Sally, and Glenn, as if it were a genuine memory.

The visual aesthetic of this eidetic image sequence, which was generated by projected patterns of coloured light, is unique among the film’s depiction of CEV experiences (figure 7.13). Special effects designer, Bob Beck, enhanced the scene’s psychedelic quality with an “abstract” texture that he created with various lightshow technologies, including liquid light projectors, strobe lights, and devices that enabled the

camera operator to change colour gels mid-shot (Carson, 2016a). The patterns of swirling coloured light also enabled Corman to obscure the actors' nudity and to clearly distinguish the scene from those representing objective reality (Corman, 2016b). Significantly, the projected light also represents the vivid colour aesthetic of eidetic images.¹⁰⁵

The scene's aesthetic also conveys Paul's growing sense of sexual excitement. The frenetic editing style infuses the scene with a sense of kinetic energy that is matched by the writhing bodies of the lovemaking trio. Simultaneously, projected lights flash and strobe with increasing intensity as the scene progresses. Rapid cuts place Paul in bed with Sally and Glenn interchangeably, while moans of sexual pleasure grow in volume and frequency. The final shot of the sequence dissolves as it fades to black and the action transitions back to objective reality.¹⁰⁶ In John's apartment, Paul indicates that he has attained a degree of self-knowledge about his relationship with Sally and, relatedly, his attitudes toward sex and love. Initially, after struggling to articulate his thoughts and feelings, he acknowledges that it would be easier for him to love someone if he was more open to sex.



Figure 7.13: *The Trip* (Corman, 1967)

In the *Mad Men* (AMC, 2007-2015) episode “Far Away Places” (S5 E6), Roger relives the events of the 1919 World Series, an infamous baseball game that he did not

¹⁰⁵ Powell likens the visual aesthetic of this scene to Klüver's form constants. However, her description of the scene's depiction of “acid-fuelled sex” as being “literally sensational” includes the observation that the closeups of feet and toes render arousal tactile. This suggests she misidentifies the sequence as a representation of objective reality rather than a depiction of Paul's inner visual perception. Powell, A. (2007) *Deleuze, Altered States and Film*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press.

¹⁰⁶ The fade was traditionally used in Hollywood productions to signify temporal ellipses and, in some instances, to provide the audience with “breathing space” at the end of a highly dramatic scene. However, as it had largely fallen out of favour by the 1960s, its use in *The Trip* is somewhat unusual. However, as fades are not used consistently throughout the film, its contribution to the psychedelic aesthetic cannot be considered to be significant. Cutting, J. E., Brunick, K. L. and DeLong, J. E. (2011) 'The Changing Poetics of the Dissolve in Hollywood Film', *Empirical studies of the arts*, 29(2), pp. 149-169.

attend in real life. The show's creator, Matthew Weiner, based his depiction of this experience on the content of a trip report recounted to him by an unnamed individual (Hornbacher, 2012). In "At the Codfish Ball" (S5 E7), Roger explains to ex-wife Mona (Talia Balsam) that he relived the game as one of the players rather than as a spectator. However, the show does not visually represent the content of these eidetic images, which are depicted by ambient sounds, including crowd noise and on-field action, and Roger's verbal descriptions.

The subject who sifts, orders, and analyses the content of their recollective-analytic level experience is more likely to recognise and resolve their issues (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 144). In "At the Codfish Ball" (S5 E7), Roger draws an analogy between the rigged "game" of his own life and the match-fixing that took place in the 1919 World Series.¹⁰⁷ His analysis of the LSD experience prompts the realisation that none of his possessions truly belong to him because he was born with significant privileges. This example thus demonstrates how eidetic images illustrate and clarify specific ideational materials that arise during the psychedelic experience.

Subjects who experience age regression "go back in time" to vividly re-experience significant events from their past that have either been forgotten or repressed. In contrast to revivification experiences, which are characterised by a total immersion in past events and a complete sense of disconnection from present time, the subject who experiences age regression does not lose contact with the present. Revivification is, nonetheless, significant to the subject's current situation. Consequently, the recollection and analysis of memories during a psychedelic session may trigger important insights that have the potential to assuage feelings of guilt, improve self-esteem, and stimulate personal growth. It is for this

¹⁰⁷ The result of the 1919 World Series was rigged by a group of players in exchange for money. Anon *1919 World Series*. mlb.com: MLB Advanced Media. Available at: http://mlb.mlb.com/mlb/history/postseason/mlb_ws_recaps.jsp?feature=1919 (Accessed: 04 February 2022)..

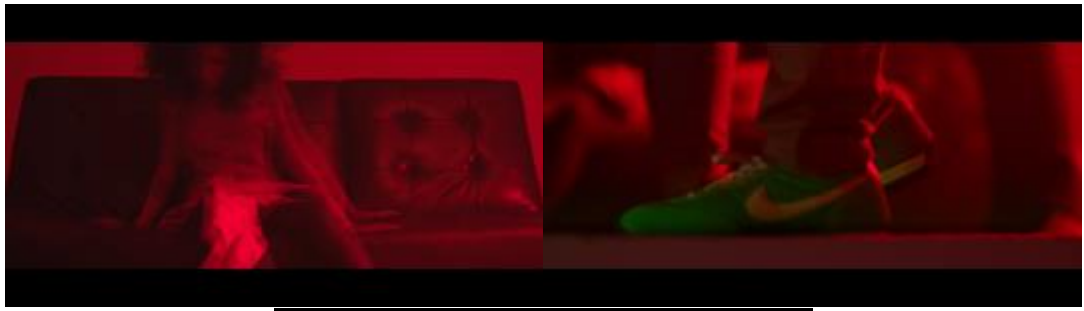
reason that the recollective-analytic stage of the experience is the phase of the drug-state that is most familiar to psychotherapists (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 185).

In *Mad to Be Normal* (Mullan, 2017), radical psychiatrist R.D. Laing describes the effects of LSD in recollective-analytic terms. In his role as psychedelic trip guide, he establishes the trust of his patient, Sydney, by explaining to him that psychedelics have the capacity to unblock memories and generate a sense of inner peace. His reference to the importance of using LSD in a controlled environment also invokes the principles of set and setting. Laing's introduction to the drug is purposefully designed to catalyse an experience of age regression. Indeed, the film's representation of the drug-state is dominated by Sydney's experience of this phenomenon. The onset of Sydney's experience of age regression is marked by his declaration that he is seven years old. This is immediately followed by a series of flashbacks to a traumatic childhood event. The scene crosscuts between the eidetic images, which reveal Sydney's memory of his father murdering his mother before committing suicide, and the present day. The pattern of editing enables Robert Mullan to capture Sydney's reaction to the events depicted. It also implies that he maintains a connection to the present while he experiences the past. The scene ends with Sydney in a much calmer state, which indicates that he has, as prophesied by Laing, attained a semblance of inner peace.

The transition from colour to black and white images is one of the conventional techniques used by filmmakers to distinguish flashbacks from shots that portray present day reality (Turim, 1989, p. 16). This technique is used in *Mad to Be Normal* to highlight the distinction between objective reality and the subjectively saturated POV shots that represent Sydney's memories. The rationale for using this cinematic convention, rather than the vivid colours associated with psychedelic eidetic images, has not been explained by the filmmakers. However, it is logical to assume that a muted colour palette was deemed to be a more appropriate aesthetic for the distressing scenes depicted.

The recollective-analytic stage of the drug-state is commonly associated with a form of psychedelic “instant psychotherapy” (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 187). It is LSD, meanwhile, that is the most inherently “psychoanalytic” of the psychedelics (Lundborg, 2012, p. 456). The therapeutic effects of LSD are inherent in one subject’s account of a drug-state encounter with her dead husband which, she explains, enabled her to overcome her grief. Throughout this experience, the subject maintained an awareness that her deceased husband’s appearance was illusory. Nonetheless, as she found his presence to be tangible and his manner of speech to be consistent with her memory of him, she accepted his instruction to abandon her grief. In turn, this stimulated a process of personal transformation (Masters and Houston, 2000, pp. 91-92).

In the previous chapter, it was noted that slow-motion can evoke a sense of subjectively perceived reality and various types of conscious states, including dreamlike and illusory forms of awareness (Grodal, 2000, p. 136). In *Trip* (Oliver, 2017), slow-motion marks the transition from shots depicting objective reality to a representation of Penny’s inner visual perception (figure 7.14). The uniform colour of these red filtered images is only disrupted by the appearance of a pair of bright green shoes (figure 7.15), which are clearly demarcated as the object of Penny’s attention. Subsequently, she follows the person wearing these shoes down a corridor and into a room where she encounters her deceased brother Ayo. The presence of her brother in a domestic space that is decorated with photographs of the siblings defines this experience as an eidetic image sequence represented by subjectively saturated POV shots (figure 7.16). During this scene, Ayo encourages Penny to release him from her memories. In the subsequent eidetic memory sequence, the siblings appear together at the beach while his disembodied voice instructs her to return home. The scene concludes with Ayo being engulfed by the bright white light of the sun, which implies that Penny has begun the process of overcoming her grief.



Figures 7.14-7.16: *Trip* (Oliver, 2017)

The heightened awareness of linguistic nuance enables the subject to quickly derive meaning from conversations, which may catalyse the attainment of personal insight and stimulate significant changes of perspective (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 146). Further, people who typically engage in small talk often find themselves able to speak with a greater degree of eloquence and intelligence about a broader range of topics (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 104). Indeed, drug-state experiences are characterised by an increased interest in matters of a philosophical nature (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 154). The latter is signified in *Mad Men* (S5 E6) when Jane responds to Roger’s prosaic question about the time with a philosophical reflection on the nature of time itself:

Roger: What time is it?

Jane: How could a few numbers contain all of time?

Jane’s response is indicative of an out of character interest in a metaphysical concept, which is triggered by her enhanced awareness of the meaning of words.

Roger and Jane subsequently engage in a discussion that is comprised of what John Slattery refers to “as a series of non-sequiturs” (Hornbacher, 2012):

Roger: Now I know why your friends are so smart.

Jane: Catherine is not my friend. She’s my doctor.

Roger: I knew that, but I didn’t know it.

Jane: Sometimes I think she knows me better than you do.

Roger: Do I want to know?

Jane: Probably not.
Roger: Because it's over?
Jane: She's just waiting for me to say it.
Roger: And what does she think of me?
Jane: She thinks I'm waiting for you to say it.

As Matthew Weiner observes, the actors convey a sense that the characters are communicating meaningfully with one another despite the unusual nature of the dialogue (Hornbacher, 2012). Their exchange bears the hallmarks of a “loaded” psychedelic conversation, which is marked by the interpretation of words and phrases in a way that is not immediately obvious (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 100). Further, the couple mutually agree to terminate their marriage, which signifies the change of perspective that is characteristic of this type of psychedelic conversation.

The Symbolic Level

On the symbolic level of the psychedelic experience profound self-understanding and a high degree of self-transformation may reward the subject who is properly prepared.
- Robert Masters and Jean Houston (2000, p. 147)

The symbolic level is a “post-psychological” realm that the subject typically experiences for between four and five hours (Lundborg, 2012, p. 381). This phase of the drug-state offers the individual an opportunity to further examine insights gained during the recollective-analytic stage (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 147). The experience is dominated by historical, legendary, mythical, ritualistic, and archetypal eidetic images (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 147), which typically feature figures and themes from legend and fairy tale, archetypal entities, and other timeless symbols (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 214). Further, aspects of the symbolic level may also be experienced on the verbal-ideational plane (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 214).

The subject's total immersion in symbolic level experience is characterised by their identification with the persona of a legendary figure (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 147). Similarly, the individual may be endowed with the wisdom and intelligence associated with a specific archetypal character (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 223). The enactment of

rituals, particularly rites of passage, is another distinctive feature of the symbolic realm (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 220). Indeed, these rituals, initiation rites, and legends often appear to be structured to the specific needs of the subject. Consequently, their participation in these activities stimulates the accrual of profound levels of self-understanding, which trigger processes of personal transformation (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 147).

Themes of birth and death are common to both the symbolic level and Grof's perinatal matrices. The subject's symbolic level experience of initiation rites is typically accompanied by the simultaneous appearance of birth and death symbols (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 220). Further, perinatal experiences are characterised by the realisation that birth and death are remarkably similar phenomena (Grof, 2021, p. 105). The perinatal domain is also dominated by a confrontation with death that is so realistic it can lead the subject to believe they are in the process of dying (Bache and Laszlo, 2019, p. 56). These highly emotional experiences are accompanied by philosophical, spiritual, and physiological phenomena, which are symbolically mediated by images of death and decay, coffins, cemeteries, hearses and funeral corteges (Grof, 2021, p. 106).

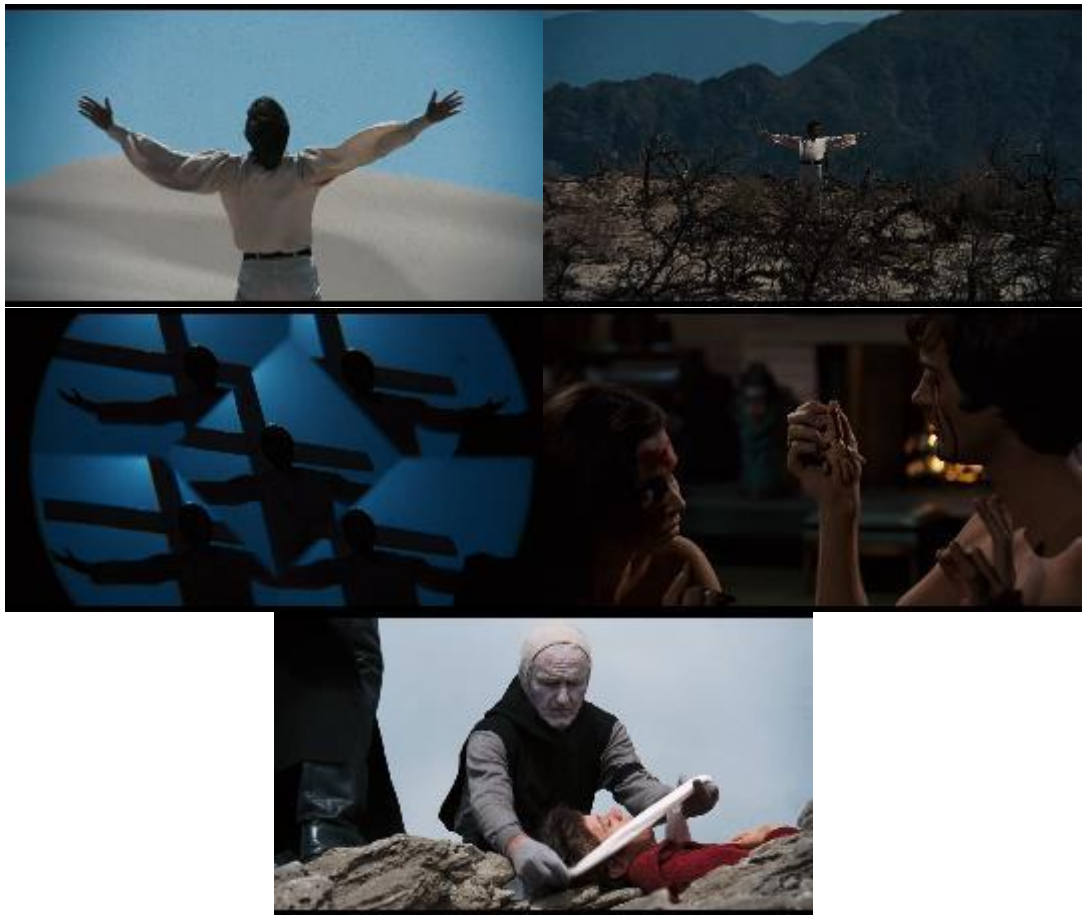
Perinatal experiences of birth and death are often framed by symbolism associated with Christ's crucifixion and resurrection (Grof, 2021, p. 157). Indeed, the perinatal roots of Christianity are evident in the religion's emphasis on death and agony, the perils of the new born child, and themes of maternal care and protection (Grof, 2021, p. 158). The symbolic reliving of mythological motifs is also characterised by the subject's identification with religious figures such as Christ (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 225). These experiences are often accompanied by a ritual re-enactment of significant events from the spiritual being's life (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 147).

In *The Trip*, Paul's identification with Christ is implied by his mimicry of the crucifixion on three occasions during a symbolic level eidetic image sequence (figures 7.17-7.19). The scene's lyrical style of editing, the temporal dimension of which was

analysed in the previous chapter, connects Paul's confrontation with death in the mansion to his symbolic crucifixion in the desert. The scene crosscuts between these two disparate locations to frame Paul's discovery of his corpse in the mansion with shots of him mimicking the crucifixion in the desert. The pattern of cutting suggests that while Paul is not physically crucified, his re-enactment of Christ's execution is connected to his psychedelic death trip. That is, upon finding the corpse, Paul falls to the ground in the desert with a cry of anguish that is indicative of pain and suffering associated with dying. His identification with Christ is emphasised by a subsequent shot, in which he appears weeping blood while holding a child's amputated hand (figure 7.20). This image evokes the perils of the new-born child and the statues of Christ found bleeding from the eyes.¹⁰⁸

This sequence concludes with Paul's burial, entombment, and cremation in what Lana Cook describes as "a medieval funeral feast and burial pyre" which, she concludes, emblemises "the familiar trope of the death trip" (2014, p. 227). The funeral rites that dominate this part of the scene, and the appearance of death in human form, are characteristic of perinatal and symbolic level experiences respectively (figure 7.21). Paul's reaction to this symbolic level experience is revealed in the subsequent scene, which returns the action to the objective reality of John's apartment. In accordance with perinatal experience, he is convinced that his "death trip" is real and that he is in the process of dying.

¹⁰⁸ For further information on this phenomenon, see Anon *Bleeding Statues*. Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology. www.encyclopedia.com: Encyclopedia.com. Available at: <https://www.encyclopedia.com/science/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/bleeding-statues> (Accessed: 09 February 2022).



Figures 7.17-7.21: *The Trip* (Corman, 1967)

The psychedelic connotations of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* are well established (Lundborg, 2012, p. 409).¹⁰⁹ The Disney animated film adaptation of Carroll's fairy tale (Geronimi, Jackson, Luske, 1951), which was originally released in 1951, also resonated strongly with psychedelic drug users in the 1960s (Lundborg, 2012, p. 389). Further, the marketing campaign for its 1974 re-release was aimed at a drug using head audience (Benshoff, 2001, p. 32). The story also inspired the lyrics for the iconic 1967 Jefferson Airplane psychedelic song, "White Rabbit" (1967), which singer Grace Slick wrote after taking LSD (Hughes, 2019). The story became so ingrained in psychedelic culture due to the similarities between aspects of the drug-state and the world Alice enters when she embarks on her journey down the rabbit hole (Masters and Houston, 2000, pp. 70-71).

¹⁰⁹ The characters and themes discussed in this section feature in Carroll, L. (1997) *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and, Through the Looking-Glass*. London: Puffin.

Music is a significant component of set and setting that has capacity to determine the form and content of CEV experiences (Lundborg, 2012, p. 314). In *The Love-Ins* (Dreifuss, 1967), the lyrics of a song stimulate Patricia's identification with the eponymous protagonist of *Alice in Wonderland*. Initially, partially hallucinated POV shots reveal Patricia's perception of the external environment, which is altered in accordance with the song lyrics. First, the singer of the band transforms into a "big white rabbit", and then two revellers become "the Mad Hatter" and "Her Majesty the Queen" respectively (figures 7.22-7.23). The transition to her inner visual perception is marked by the bridging of a cut with superimposed psychedelic light, which functions like a dissolve to suggest the incoming shot represents her interior conscious experience (figure 7.24). In the ensuing symbolic level eidetic image sequence, she appears dressed as Alice while surrounded by characters from the story (figure 7.25). Her total immersion in this symbolic level sequence is indicated by her declaration that she is "really Alice" and her enactment of the content of eidetic images in the real-world environment (figures 7.26-7.27).

Patricia continues to identify as Alice on the verbal-ideational plane after Larry rescues her from the dancefloor and takes her home. That she remains immersed in the experience is indicated by her continued insistence that she be addressed only as Alice. Further, she verbally acknowledges an experience of age regression when she describes herself as a little girl. She also relates content of this symbolic experience to her own life when she informs Larry, who she perceives as her father, that he does not enjoy sex with her mother. However, in the absence of a guide, and without the application of the principles of set and setting, Patricia lacks the framework to explore the meaning of these emergent themes.



Figures 7.22-7.27: *The Love-Ins* (Dreifuss, 1967)

The forest is an allegorical eidetic image setting of various and complex meanings, which is synonymous with symbolic level experiences (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 229). The presence of threatening creatures in the forest is a sign that the subject has become estranged from their own nature. The disappearance of these monstrous entities is usually accompanied by a restoration of the subject's individuality and a growing sense of "oneness" with nature. Further, the transformation of the forest into a beautiful and inviting space in which the subject feels at ease is characteristic of the symbolic journey from dark to light. This marks their progression towards redemptive enlightenment, which is also attended by a sense of cathartic liberation from destructive ideas. If the forest manifests as a place of fairy tale enchantment, meanwhile, it suggests to the subject that they must abandon the immature aspects of their personality (Masters and Houston, 2000, pp. 235-237).

The symbolic level forest has origins in European myth and, more specifically, Celtic culture. It is populated by various characters, including princes, maidens, and executioners, and numerous mythical creatures, including talking animals, enchanted frogs, dragons (Masters and Houston, 2000, pp. 229-230), dwarves, goblins, and ogres (Masters and Houston, 2000, pp. 236-237). In Celtic myths, dwarves are often referred to as either trolls or “short people” (Monaghan, 2014, p. 142). Further, while witches are not mentioned in Masters and Houston’s description of the forest, these “older women” are a feature of Celtic mythology (Monaghan, 2014, p. 473). The witch is commonly associated with a cauldron, which is sometimes referred to as a sacred object (Monaghan, 2014, p. 79). Witches use the cauldron to brew potions of rebirth (Monaghan, 2014, p. 400), abundance (Monaghan, 2014, p. 141), wisdom (Monaghan, 2014, p. 226) and poisonous substances (Freeman, 1995, p. 694). Notably, psychedelics have also been defined as both “wisdom drugs” (Stevens, 1987, p. 146) and madness inducing agents (Lee and Shlain, 2001, p. 20).

In *The Trip*, Paul encounters a witch and her dwarf assistant in a symbolic level eidetic image sequence set in the forest (figure 7.28). Paul’s consumption of a bowlful of the potion served from the witch’s cauldron is intercut with a shot of him taking LSD that appeared earlier in the film (figures 7.29-7.31). The editing of this sequence indicates that he associates his use of the drug with the witch’s brew. This is significant as the incident marks a drastic shift in the tone of his experience, which initially suggests that interprets both potion and LSD as poison. That is, this sequence is immediately followed by Paul’s death trip experience. However, as his drug-state experience is also characteristic of a journey towards enlightenment, there is a suggestion that both substances are subsequently reinterpreted as wisdom inducing agents.



Figures 7.28-7.31: *The Trip* (Corman, 1967)

In a second eidetic image sequence set in the forest, Paul encounters Glenn, who appears dressed in a headscarf made of leaves, and a loose, ankle-length dress of various shades of green (figures 7.32-7.33). In the context of the forest setting, her costume implies an intimate relationship with nature. This indicates that she represents the earth-mother Goddess of the Celtic religion, Danu, who is also associated with fertility and wisdom.¹¹⁰ The appearance of a deity who embodies the connection between sexuality and nature is significant to the symbolic level insight Paul gains about sex and love. The loosening of his sexual inhibitions is also implied by intercut shots of him and Glenn walking naked together through fields of long grass and yellow flowers (figure 7.34). Moreover, superimposed images of Sally and Glenn in the throes of sexual pleasure also emphasise the scene's symbolic suggestion of sexual liberation (figure 7.35).

¹¹⁰ For further information on Danu, see Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopædia. 'Danu'. Britannica.com: Encyclopædia Britannica, inc. Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Danu> (Accessed: 12 May 2022).



Figures 7.31-7.35: *The Trip* (Corman, 1967)

The aesthetic of eidetic images sometimes resembles film scenes that combine live action footage with cartoon animation. That is, the subject envisions “real people” in front of artificial backdrops or, conversely, comic-strip figures appear within “real” environments. These versions of the forest are typically populated by frolicking Bambi-like fawns, Hansel and Gretel style cottages, liquorice trees, bushes coated with multicoloured icing, and dwarves and goblins. They are also perceived as a fairy tale location of childlike enchantment, which offers the subject either the instant gratification of infantile wishes, or provides insight into immaturity that catalyses personal growth (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 237).

In *Tenacious D in the Pick of Destiny* (Lynch, 2006), JB envisions himself as the son of a mythical creature, Sasquatch, during a symbolic level eidetic image sequence set in a cartoon animated enchanted forest (figures 7.36-7.38). His immersion in the experience is signified by the correspondence between the content of eidetic images and his actions in the real-world. However, his enactment of a “dip in the strawberry river” is more perilous in the real-world than it is the symbolic realm of the enchanted forest (figures 7.38-7.39). The contrast between infantile pleasure and the danger he encounters in objective reality offers JB an opportunity to transcend his immaturity and develop his

character. However, as he takes the psychedelic mushrooms unwittingly and without a guide, he fails to acknowledge the symbolic significance of this experience. and is unable to derive insight from it.



Figures 7.36-7.39: *Tenacious D in The Pick of Destiny* (Lynch, 2006)

The subject may gain therapeutic insight by looking in the mirror during the psychedelic experience (Masters and Houston, 2000, pp. 81-82). The attainment of self-knowledge, which catalyses the resolution of personal issues, is often stimulated by the individual's altered perception of their self-image (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 84). Further, distorted perception sometimes imposes symbols upon the external environment, which triggers the transformative symbolic dramas associated with the higher levels of the drug-state (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 155). Indeed, the subject's interpretation of symbols that were previously not recognised as such, enables them to develop new directional frames of reference (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 223).

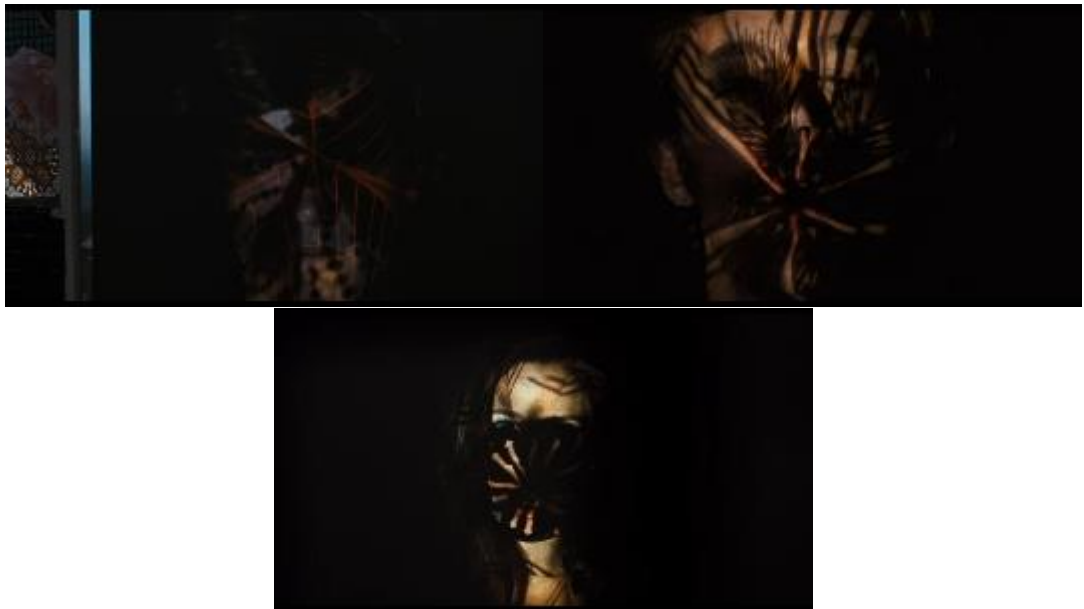
In kundalini yoga, the chakras are defined as seven energy centres that form individual loci of consciousness at different locations on the spine (Jones and Ryan, 2006, p. 102). The individual who does not possess an intellectual understanding of kundalini yoga may nonetheless experience the activation of the chakras during a psychedelic experience (Grof, 2021, p. 226). The *ajña* chakra, which is commonly referred to as the

third eye chakra, is located in the forehead (Ozaniec, 1999, p. 54). More specifically, as this chakra serves as a centre of control, its function is attributed to the “master” pituitary gland (Ozaniec, 1999, p. 57).¹¹¹ The *ajñā* chakra is thus associated with the mind, brain, and eyes (Ozaniec, 1999, p. 55), and the transcendence of the limitations of deductive thought by functions of immediate and direct insight (Ozaniec, 1999, p. xii). The *vishuddi* chakra, which is located in the throat, thyroid, and mouth, governs the activity of the mouth, tongue, and neck (Dientsman, 2019). While it is most obviously connected to the functions of speech and communication (Ozaniec, 1999, p. 43), it also represents personal creativity (Ozaniec, 1999, p. 74).

In *The Trip*, the activation of Paul’s *ajñā* and *vishuddi* chakras is represented by the symbolic transformation of his mirror image. In the first of a series of subjectively inflected POV shots, the activation of the *ajñā* chakra is signified by a stream of patterned light that emerges from a point between his eyes (figure 7.40). This is followed by the activation of the *vishuddi* chakra, which is represented by the flow of similar shapes from his mouth (figure 7.41). Subsequently, he hallucinates a vision of Sally in place of his mirror image and, significantly, the morass of black shapes also pours from her mouth (figure 7.42).¹¹² This sequence of shots implies that the opening of the *ajñā* chakra enables Paul to gain direct insight into the cause of the breakdown of his marriage. The activation of the *vishuddi* chakra in tandem with a hallucination of Sally, meanwhile, reveals to Paul that his marriage failed due to an inability to communicate meaningfully with Sally.

¹¹¹ In discussion of *The Trip*, Anna Powell misidentifies the pineal gland as the location of the *ajñā* chakra. Powell, A. (2007) *Deleuze, Altered States and Film*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press.

¹¹² Powell describes the “cobweb mesh” that covers Sally’s face as being “typical of LSD vision” but without an explanation of what this phenomenon represents. *Ibid.*



Figures 7.40-7.42: *The Trip* (Corman, 1967)

Most people find at least some aspect of their drug-state distorted reflection either unpleasant, terrifying, or revolting (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 83). Indeed, the warning to not look in the mirror is a common trope, which is frequently repeated by psychedelic users.¹¹³ The subject's anxieties, beliefs, and desires are often reflected by their mirror image in a variety of interesting ways. For example, it is not uncommon for a guilt-ridden religious person to perceive themselves as the devil or for an individual who fears ageing to observe their reflection grow progressively older. The latter was experienced by one subject who later realised this hallucinatory phenomenon resembled a scene from a film she had seen as a child and which had made a powerful impression upon her (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 82).

In *Mad Men* (S5 E6), Roger's fear of ageing is triggered by an advertisement for hair dye he reads in a copy of *Life* magazine. The advert, which includes a photograph of a man whose hair colour is half black and half grey, instructs the reader to cover first one side of the image and then the other to demonstrate the product's anti-ageing effects (1966, pp. 6-7) (figure 7.43). Immediately after following these instructions, Roger looks at himself in the mirror and sees his reflection transformed in correspondence with the

¹¹³ The section of a *Have a Good Trip* (Cary, 2020) titled "The More You Trip: Don't Look in the Mirror" is indicative of this common trope.

photograph (figure 7.44). Sandy recognises the potentially deleterious effects of looking in the mirror and cautions Roger not to do so. However, as the transformation of Roger’s mirror-image attests, the warning is delivered too late.



Figures 7.43-7.44: *Mad Men* (S5 E6)

The human skull is a universal symbol of death that is typically associated with mortality, dying, and the afterlife (Kearl, 2015). The drug-state confrontation with death, which is generally defined as a “bad trip” experience, is often accompanied by feelings of anxiety and fear (Cook, 2014, p. 227). In the penultimate scene of *The Big Cube*, Johnny perceives himself in the mirror as he appeared earlier in the film (figure 7.45). The death of this former version of himself is symbolised by the replacement of this image with a giant skull (figure 7.46). However, rather than contemplate the meaning of these images, and potentially gain insight from them, Johnny shatters the mirror by throwing an object at it (figure 7.47).



Figures 7.45-7.47: *The Big Cube* (Davison, 1969)

The findings of LSD research indicate that creativity and problem-solving abilities are enhanced during symbolic level psychedelic experiences (Lundborg, 2012, p. 381). In the *You* (Netflix 2018-) episode “Fear and Loathing in Beverly Hills” (S2 E8), Forty uses LSD as a tool of creative enhancement to overcome a bout of writer’s block. Throughout the psychedelic experience, he uses a whiteboard to develop ideas for a screenplay adaptation of Beck’s memoir (figure 7.48). The creative process begins with the roleplay session mentioned in chapter four which, Forty later explains to Joe, provided him with much needed insight into Beck’s character. The content of the whiteboard, which is now filled with chaotically arranged ideas, signifies his progress towards the completion of the script (figure 7.49). In the final LSD sequence, Joe finds Forty sitting in front of the whiteboard, which is covered with post-it notes neatly arranged in a three-act structure. Joe’s recognition of Forty’s creative genius is represented by his visual perception of a golden aura that appears to emanate from his head (figure 7.50). Further, his mental voice also explicitly attributes Forty’s newfound creative brilliance to the LSD drug-state state.



Figures 7.48-7.50: *You* (S2 E8)

Peak Experience, Ego-loss, and the Transcendental Level

The experience of ego-loss and a nondualist mindstream is profoundly radical and, even as a temporary state, frequently life-altering for the subject.
- Patrick Lundborg (2012, p. 381)

According to Patrick Lundborg, the highest realm of the psychedelic drug-state, which is referred to variously as the transcendental, integral, and cosmic-mystical level, is only accessible if ego-loss is triggered by peak experience. However, while a clearly defined peak experience is a feature of most psychedelic trips, ego-loss occurs less frequently. Indeed, some people are incapable of reaching the transcendental state, regardless of either the size of the psychedelic dose taken or the extent of their personal preparation. In distinguishing between the three aspects of the highest reaches of the drug-state, Lundborg critiques Masters and Houston for conflating the transcendental level with peak experience (2012, p. 166). To further complicate matters, another scholar, Abraham Maslow, identifies ego-loss as an element of the peak experience itself (2014, p. 80).¹¹⁴

Lundborg observes that the egoless mind-stream is characterised by a non-dualistic, non-composite perception of the world in its totality (2012, p. 369). It follows that, in his definition, the post-peak transcendental state is comprised of non-dualistic energy fields (2012, p. 166). However, as he also refers to the non-dualistic energy of peak experience, he contradicts the distinction he draws between pre- and post-ego-loss psychedelic states (2012, p. 136). Further, by Lundborg's own admission, accounts of non-dualistic experience are typically vague and abstract (2012, p. 383). Consequently, it is difficult to dispute the implied phenomenological similarity between peak experience, ego-loss, and the transcendental realm. Indeed, as it is beyond the scope of this thesis to engage in a phenomenological study of the psychedelic experience itself, it is appropriate to analyse

¹¹⁴ While Maslow does not refer explicitly to psychedelics, Lundborg identifies his research as being relevant to an analysis of the drug-state. Lundborg, P. (2012) *Psychedelia: An Ancient Culture, A Modern Way of Life*. Stockholm: Lysergia.

peak experience, ego-loss, and the transcendental level together in a single section of this chapter.

While the phenomenology of psychedelic peak experience may be difficult to describe, it is nonetheless comprised of a specific and definable pattern (Lundborg, 2012, p. 136). Reports of peak phenomena typically include references to a blinding white light, the perception of pure energy (Lundborg, 2012, p. 447), and the appearance of “dancing suns” (Lundborg, 2012, p. 485). The egoless transcendental state, meanwhile, is characterised by a perception of the world in its totality that is marked by an absence from perception of the distinctions between self and other. This experience resembles what Lundborg refers to as “the highest vision states of ancient mystics and saints” (2012, p. 369).

Ego-loss is characterised by the spectacular visual manifestation of a “Clear Light” (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 260), which is also associated with mystical states (Leary, Metzner and Alpert, 2008, p. 24). The ego-loss event stimulates an intense experience of ecstasy and a growing awareness that the body is simultaneously surrounded by, and comprised of, an electrically charged field of energy (Leary, Metzner and Alpert, 2008, p. 28). The subject may also be absorbed by “a torrent of preternatural light” that is accompanied by the appearance of a radiant white fire and a state of ultimate ecstasy (Masters and Houston, 2000, pp. 307-308).

The “pseudo nirvana” of peak experience is characterised by enhanced clarity of thought and the attainment of insight (Lundborg, 2012, p. 381). The experience is typically accompanied by a range of overwhelmingly positive emotions, including profound joy, tranquillity (Lundborg, 2012, p. 136), euphoria, bliss (Lundborg, 2012, p. 503), unadulterated happiness, and a strong sense of fulfilment (Maslow, 2014, p. 75). The subject is also often overwhelmed by a paradoxically pleasant feeling of fear, and a sense of wonder, awe, reverence, and humility, which encourages surrender to the experience (Maslow, 2014, p. 88). This is accompanied by the gradual diminishment of anxiety,

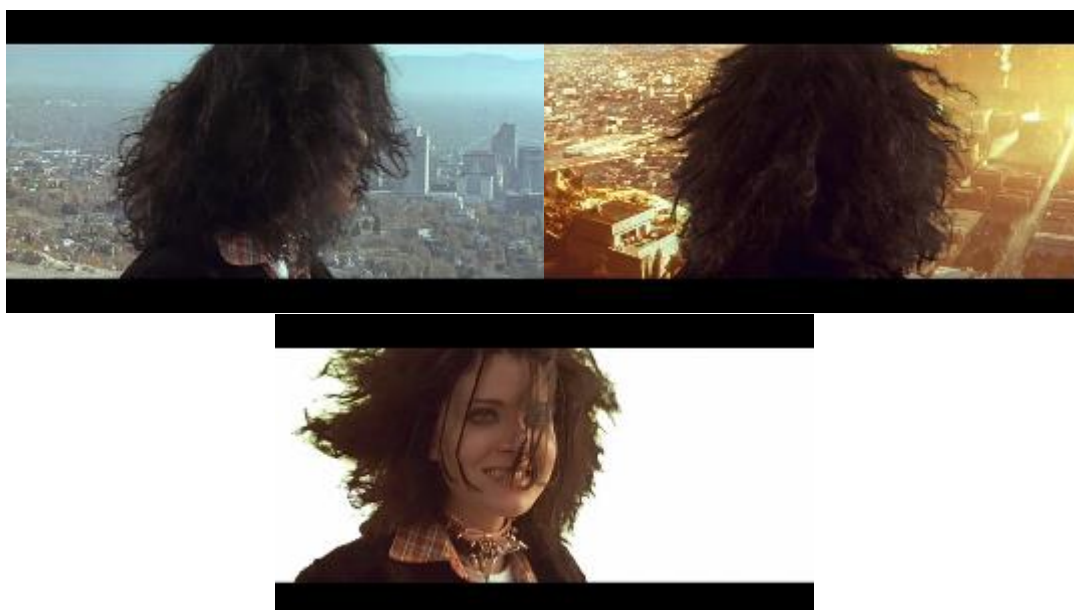
inhibition, defence, and control, which are eventually relinquished completely (Maslow, 2014, p. 95). The subject typically experiences a sweet and desirable form of pain that triggers both laughter and tears, as well as an unusual fixation upon death. Indeed, scholars have noted broad similarities between peak phenomena and end of life experience (Maslow, 2014, pp. 88-89).

Ego-loss is a profoundly emotional (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 302) and often life changing experience (Lundborg, 2012, p. 381). Its most remarkable aspect is the dissolution of self-identity (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 310), which catalyses the subject's transition from egocentric to object focused awareness and is marked by the fusion of their identity with the object of their visual perception (Maslow, 2014, p. 80). This extinguishes the individual's ability to classify the attributes of a perceived entity, regardless of whether it is animate or inanimate, organic or artificial (Maslow, 2014, p. 94). Consequently, the subject is endowed with the capacity to perceive the nature of reality with greater clarity (Maslow, 2014, p. 82).

Peak experience is characterised by a perception of unity, which is epitomised by an ability to perceive the world in its entirety while attention is focused on one small aspect of it. This phenomenon is often accompanied by a perception of the planet as a single, unified, living entity (Maslow, 2014, p. 89). Similarly, experiences of complete fascination and total absorption enable the subject to perceive the entire universe within the object of perception (Maslow, 2014, p. 76). It is also not uncommon for the individual to become aware of the complex relationship between their sense of self and the cosmos. Further, they may feel as if the entire universe is contained within their being (Maslow, 2014, p. 93).

The *SLC Punk!* (Merendino, 1998) LSD scene concludes with a metaphorical representation of peak experience. The peak phenomena of radiant white fire and pure energy are symbolically depicted by an explosion that destroys Salt Lake City. Shot from Stevo's POV, the bright white light produced by the blast surrounds Sandy and saturates his field of vision. This suggests that both he and Sandy are absorbed by its light (figures

7.51-7.53). Peak experience is also signified by their physical position high on a hillside overlooking the city. Further, Sandy's observation that there is beauty in "the end", and her general fixation on death, are also characteristic of the psychedelic peak.



Figures 7.51-7.53: *SLC Punk!* (Merendino, 1998)

In *Taking Woodstock* (Lee, 2009), Elliot's attention becomes completely absorbed by the Woodstock stage which, as Schamus and Lee note, he perceives as the "centre of the universe" (Lee, 2010). Viewed from his POV, the huge crowd of festival attendees begins to undulate as particles of light and an effervescent white glow emanate from the stage (figure 7.54). Subsequently, as the throng of festivalgoers transforms into a liquid wave, a stream of purple emerges from the stage and coils into an electrical bulb that explodes with a bright white burst of energy, which engulfs the screen (figures 7.55-7.57). Elliot's perception of the crowd as a liquified mass represents an experience of the world as a single, unified, living entity. The saturation of the shot with white light, meanwhile, signifies his continuity with the energy of peak experience as his ego begins to dissolve.



Figures 7.54-7.57: *Taking Woodstock* (Lee, 2009)

In *Taking Woodstock*, the scene crosscuts between POV and objective shots to capture the profound and complex emotional responses triggered by peak experience. As Elliot and VW Girl laugh and cry simultaneously, their smiles convey a sense of being overwhelmed by euphoric bliss and profound joy (figure 7.58). Their bodies also seem to move involuntarily as if charged with ecstatic energy. Subsequently, the wonder, awe, reverence, and humility experienced by Elliot is captured by a closeup of his tear-streaked face (figure 7.59). In *You* (S2 E8), meanwhile, Forty informs Joe that is he peaking while lying on the floor of their hotel suite. The overwhelming nature of his experience, and its profound emotional impact, are conveyed by his wide-eyed, awestruck expression, enthralled tone of voice, and inability to lift himself from the floor (figure 7.60). Further, Joe's uncontrollable sobbing during this sequence indicates that he experiences the peak at approximately the same time as Forty.



Figures 7.58-7.59: *Taking Woodstock* (Lee, 2009)



Figure 7.60: *You* (S2 E8)

The subject who imbibes an unusually high dose of psychedelics before completing a thorough process of “inner cleansing” is liable to appear before a “Cosmic Court” that passes judgment on their character and life. Lundborg defines this archetypal realm with reference to the judgement stage of Emmanuel Swedenborg’s belief system, which is characterised by a ruthless form of self-examination akin to that experienced on the recollective-analytic level of the drug-state. However, Lundborg also compares the Swedenborgian Book of Lives to a “significant Book” that is sometimes delivered by spiritual messengers at the peak of a psychedelic experience. Further, he explicitly states that the subject who enters the Cosmic Court does so during the peak of their psychedelic journey. To further complicate matters, his observation that the Court is comprised of “dualistic symbol language of light and darkness, angels and demons, heaven and hell, Christ and Lucifer” (Lundborg, 2012, pp. 146-147), evokes the symbolic level of the drug-state. These contradictory descriptions make it difficult to discern exactly which level of the experience the Cosmic Court appears on.

In *The Trip*, Paul takes 250 micrograms of LSD, which is defined a large dose for a maiden psychedelic experience. Further, Paul’s insecurities, self-doubt, and propensity to lie, all indicate he has not yet completed a process of inner cleansing. These factors combine to stimulate Paul’s entry to the Cosmic Court immediately before he reaches the peak of his psychedelic journey. The scene begins with a shot of him sat in an electric chair wearing a blindfold, which is removed by a character that resembles Max, but whose appearance is rendered other by his unusual clothing and slightly distorted voice. Indeed, this version of Max represents the part of Paul’s psyche that conducts the ruthless self-

analysis that is characteristic of the Cosmic Court experience. Max's role as chief interrogator is emphasised by his costume, which is akin to formal attire worn by British barristers (figure 7.61).¹¹⁵

The presence of a leatherbound book, which Max removes from Paul's lap, evokes both the Swedenborgian Book of Lives and the "significant Book" associated with peak experience. Further, Paul's inability to recognise his "human name", Max, or the various symbols and pictures that adorn the courtroom walls, suggests an experience of ego-loss. Significantly, the sharp burst of orange that rapidly transforms into bright white light as it expands to fill the frame also evokes peak experience (figure 7.62).¹¹⁶ In the subsequent scene, Paul alludes to ego-dissolution when he informs John that he is dead and that his body has disappeared. These phenomena establish the Cosmic Court as a peak experience phenomenon.

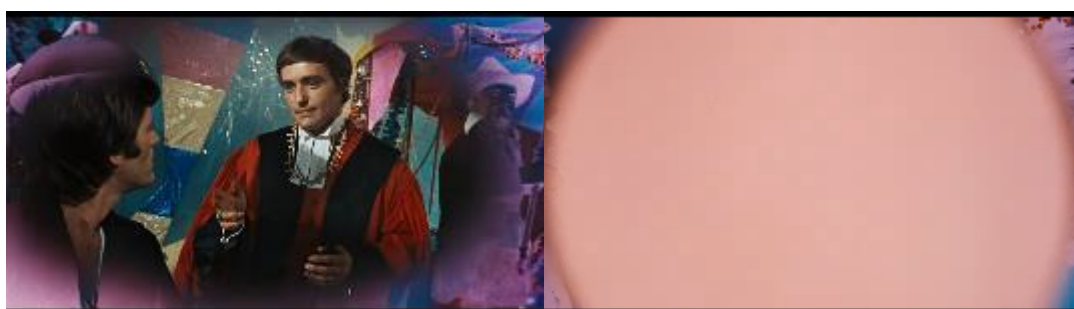


Figure 7.61-7.62: *The Trip* (Corman, 1967)

The *mise-en-scène* of the Cosmic Court consists of an incongruous blend of light and dark. The solarised oval border that inverts light and dark at the edge of the frame is a unique aspect of this eidetic image sequence, which heightens its "cosmic" aesthetic and distinguishes it from other CEV phenomena (figure 7.61). The gravity of the courtroom and Paul's situation is signified by Max's severe tone and the electric chair. However, this

¹¹⁵ For examples of the robes worn by British barristers, see Farish, K. (2018) *Courtroom Catwalk: The Middle Temple explores Legal Fashion*. kelseyfarish.com. Available at: <https://kelseyfarish.com/2018/09/30/courtroom-catwalk-the-middle-temple-explores-legal-fashion/> (Accessed: 19 December 2022).

¹¹⁶ Anna Powell identifies Paul's verbal description of a light that emerges from his body as the peak of his psychedelic trip. However, there is little to suggest that Paul merges with the light in the way Powell suggests. Powell, A. (2007) *Deleuze, Altered States and Film*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press..

contrasts with the incongruous presence of a carousel and the upbeat atmosphere generated by carnival music. Indeed, the electric chair itself is a riddle of symbolic paradoxes that simultaneously represent life and death. That is, while the chair is a symbol of punishment and execution, it is adorned with a flower that signifies flourishing life.

Max interrogates Paul while images from his life are projected onto a screen in front of him. He is judged for the dishonesty of his television commercials and his complete self-involvement. Significantly, the latter is deemed to be the cause of the breakdown of his marriage. Initially, Paul offers justifications for his behaviour as he denies the “charges” brought against him. Eventually, after each excuse has been witheringly dismissed by Max, Paul relents and accepts his guilt. The scene concludes with Max accepting Paul’s confession with a caution not to “wallow” in it. His warning is intended to remind Paul that self-transformation depends not only upon the acceptance of responsibility for his actions, but also a commitment to enact change.

Post-trip Stages

The psychedelic afterglow is the first of two post-trip stages discussed in this section. It begins immediately after the effects of LSD have subsided and may continue for between two and four weeks (Majić, Schmidt and Gallinat, 2015, p. 243). This phase, which is synonymous with the linguistic flair evident in afterglow trip reports (Lundborg, 2012, p. 450), is characterised by an increased willingness and desire to develop close personal relationships (Majić, Schmidt and Gallinat, 2015, p. 243). Further, the subject may develop a strong sense of clarity, which encourages them to act upon life-changing decisions (Pollan, 2018, p. 73).

The subject typically experiences increased energy levels, improved mood, and a simultaneous reduction of guilt, anxiety, and concerns about the past (Majić, Schmidt and Gallinat, 2015, p. 243). These positive emotional changes are conducive to the post-trip integration of the psychologically significant aspects of the psychedelic experience

(Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 210). Further, the afterglow of transcendental experiences is epitomised by a state of bliss, which stimulates a reflection upon the transformative elements of the drug-state (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 296). In the days following the psychedelic experience, the individual who feels transfigured by the drug-state may observe a “new being” emerge from the depths of their psyche (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. 228).

In the final scene of *The Trip*, Paul recalls an afterglow conversation with Glenn, which culminates with his declaration of love for her and for “everybody else.” These feelings indicate his desire to forge close personal relationships during an experience of euphoric bliss. The reorientation of Tony’s personal values in *Skidoo*, meanwhile, is signified by his refusal to assassinate Blue Chips in the aftermath of his LSD experience. Further, his sense of parental responsibility for Darlene is strengthened, despite his drug-state epiphany that he is not her biological father. Indeed, rather than relent to the mob’s threats to his liberty and her safety, he escapes prison to rescue her from God, who has taken her hostage.

In *Mad Men* (S5 E6), Roger’s afterglow experience is epitomised by increased clarity of thought and a willingness to enact life-changing decisions. The morning after the LSD experience, Roger acts upon his and Jane’s decision to terminate their marriage. In an uncharacteristic display of selflessness, he informs Jane that he is going to check into a hotel so that she is not displaced. He also speaks with a tone of gentle honesty, which emphasises the suggestion that his character has been transformed by the psychedelic experience. His increased energy levels and enhanced mood, meanwhile, are indicative of the conditions required for him to integrate the most significant aspects of his drug-state experience. In the *You* episode “P.I. Joe” (S2 E9), Joe experiences a series of flashbacks to his childhood, during which he recalls murdering his abusive father. As Joe reflects upon the events that transformed him into a serial killer, he accepts responsibility for his crimes

and foregoes an opportunity to escape punishment. This marks a change in his character that is characteristic of the afterglow integration of the psychedelic experience.

In the immediate aftermath of his psychedelic experience in *Taking Woodstock*, Elliot returns to the El Monaco motel in a state of bliss. Prior to taking LSD, he is plagued by a guilt-ridden sense of obligation to his parents, which begins to subside during the afterglow period. In the immediate aftermath of the drug-state, he emphatically rejects his mother's complacent suggestion that he will continue to work at the motel, which indicates a more self-assured persona has emerged from the depths of his psyche. Indeed, the transformation of his character is emphasised towards the end of the film when he acts upon his decision to leave the motel. That he also becomes more relaxed and carefree is indicated by his participation in mud sliding with a group of festivalgoers.

The residual effects of the drug-state are characterised by an attainment of therapeutically valuable changes to both mindset and personality traits. This second post-trip phase is typically experienced for a lengthier period than the afterglow (Majić, Schmidt and Gallinat, 2015, p. 243). However, Masters and Houston question the veracity of many self-reported transformative experiences. They contend that subjects who claim to have become more loving, outgoing, and altruistic, are often self-delusional (2000, p. 123). The authors attribute this self-deception to a form of narcissistic solipsism, which is marked by an increase in self-love rather than the sense of universal love for others that several subjects claim to experience. In numerous cases, Masters and Houston were unable to find evidence of the behavioural changes that would support self-reported claims of positive transformation. In an indicative example, one subject claimed that she would henceforth lavish love, charity, and tolerance upon other people. However, six months later, Masters and Houston were unable to identify any outward change to her behaviour (2000, pp. 126-127).

In *Mad Men*, Roger is initially convinced that he has been transformed by his LSD experience. Indeed, the afterglow period is marked by an uncharacteristic display of

introspection and self-awareness, which is indicative of personal transformation (S5 E7). However, he later admits to Don that his “enlightenment” has “worn off” (S5 E12). Nonetheless, Roger continues to use LSD throughout the remainder of the show’s seven seasons and, two years following his maiden trip, he mentions that he has taken the drug a total of five times (S6 E10).¹¹⁷ The residual effects of Roger’s ongoing use of LSD are indicated by his assumption of an alternative lifestyle, which evokes the communal hedonism and sexual liberation of Haight-Ashbury (S7 E1). In one scene, Roger appears with his new girlfriend, Sherry (Rachel DiPillo), in a hotel suite filled with naked people, whose presence alludes to a loosening of sexual mores.

There are, however, limits to the extent of Roger’s personal transformation. For example, his new perspectives on love, sex, and communal living, do not extend to his daughter’s decision to move to a rural commune. Margaret (Elizabeth Rice) mistakenly believes that her father will be open minded about her choice of lifestyle and exposes his hypocrisy when he demands that she return home with him (S7 E4). This encounter suggests Roger has not been substantially changed by the LSD experience. It also implies that his assumption of an alternative lifestyle could be purely circumstantial. Nonetheless, it is significant that *Mad Men* engages with the potential longer-term effects of the psychedelic experience across multiple episodes and seasons.

Summary

This chapter has analysed film and television representations of the higher realms of the psychedelic experience and the two post-trip stages. Analysis was divided into four parts, the first three of which were organised and labelled in accordance with Lundborg’s trip schematic (figure 1.1). The two post-trip stages, meanwhile, were discussed in correspondence with the graphic produced by Majić, Schmidt and Gallinat (figure 1.2).

¹¹⁷ While Roger refers to his LSD use at various points during seasons five, six, and seven, the drug-state itself is only depicted in “Far Away Places” (S5 E6).

The form and content of film and television representations of psychedelic phenomena were interrogated to determine which level of the drug-state they pertain to. Recollective-analytic stage and symbolic level psychedelic experiences typically manifest as eidetic images perceived with eyes closed. Occasionally, however, the subject perceives these images with eyes open while looking at certain types of surfaces. Significantly, in film and television representations of the drug-state, the symbolic level is more diversely portrayed as an aspect of both CEV and OEV perception.

Various filmic techniques are used to mark the transition to the depiction of a character's inner visual perception. That is, while eidetic images are usually perceived with eyes closed, films and television shows rarely precede their depictions of CEV experience with a shot of the character closing their eyes. In *Trip*, the transition from objective reality to Penny's inner visual perception is marked by slow-motion. In *The Love-Ins* and *Aquarius* (S1 E10), meanwhile, two types of superimposed imagery were found to function like dissolves, which demarcate the transition to a representation of the character's interior conscious experience. In the former, the bridging of a cut with psychedelic light marks the transition to Patricia's inner visual perception, while in the latter the eidetic images are superimposed over closeups of Sam. In *Skidoo*, Tony perceives eidetic images with eyes open while gazing into a sink filled with water. The transition to a subjectively saturated POV shot of his inner visual perception is also marked by a dissolve. However, it is more common for film and television representations of the drug-state to employ straight cuts between objective reality and a character's inner visual perception.

Films and television shows do not recreate the bright vivid colours that characterise eidetic images. They do, however, employ various techniques to represent this visual aesthetic. In chapter four, it was observed that lightshow technologies were used to depict primitive abstract visuals in *The Trip*. Notably, the filmmakers employed the same devices to enhance the psychedelic quality of a recollective-analytic eidetic image sequence. That is, Paul's psychedelic fantasy of a three-way sexual encounter involving himself, Glenn,

and Sally, is distorted by patterns of coloured light that are projected onto their naked bodies. In two other 1960s films, *Skidoo* and *The Big Cube*, the aesthetic of eidetic images is altered by a fluid colourful border and solarisation techniques respectively. The 2017 film, *Mad to Be Normal*, uses a common cinematic convention to distinguish between shots depicting the narrative present and flashbacks. It was noted in analysis that the filmmakers may have elected to use a muted colour palette, rather than the vivid colours associated with eidetic images, to ensure its aesthetic matched the sombre tone of the scene.

In *Mad Men* (S5 E6), the camera denies the viewer access to the content of Roger's visual perception when he relives the events of the 1919 World Series. Consequently, it is impossible to discern whether he perceives these eidetic images in a suitable surface located offscreen. The show's representation of this recollective-analytic stage experience is notable for its novel use of verbal description and ambient sounds. In the subsequent episode, Roger describes the meaning of this experience to Mona, which provides vital intertextual context for audience members who are unfamiliar with the details of this infamous sporting event. Indeed, it was via an interrogation of his post-trip analysis that this sequence was identified as a recollective-analytic stage experience. Further, this phenomenon, and Paul's vision of a three-way sexual encounter in *The Trip*, also represent the reliving of events that are not authentic memories.

The guide figures centrally in several of the case studies discussed in this chapter. In *Mad to Be Normal*, the radical psychiatrist R.D. Laing assumes the role of a traditional therapeutic guide for Sydney's psychedelic experience. Before administering LSD to his patient, Laing determines the set and setting of the drug-state, which creates the conditions for Sydney's ensuing age regression experience. Similarly, in *Skidoo*, the psychedelic guru, Fred, encourages Tony to find himself by looking into the sink filled with water, which stimulates his introspective reflection on family relationships. In *Aquarius* (S1 E10) and *Conspiracy Theory*, meanwhile, the role of the guide is perverted by characters whose

actions highlight the ease with which this position of authority can be abused. In both examples, the nefarious guide plays a significant role in triggering the subject's memories, which manifest as recollective-analytic level eidetic images. However, contrary to the guide's standard role, both Charles Manson and Dr Jonas prevent their subjects from deriving insight from their drug-state experiences.

Flashbacks are used to represent various phenomena in the case studies analysed in this thesis. Further, as flashbacks are commonly used in film and television narratives that do not feature the use of drugs, they cannot be defined as an inherent feature of the psychedelic aesthetic. In *The Big Cube*, most of the flashbacks experienced by Johnny are interior analepses.¹¹⁸ The solarisation of the flashbacks demarcates them as eidetic images, which are subjectively experienced by Johnny. In *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, meanwhile, flashbacks experienced by Charlie during the psychedelic experience are aesthetically identical to those he experiences at other points throughout the film. In the context of the drug-state, these exterior analepses represent the manifestation of repressed memories, which are triggered by his use of LSD.¹¹⁹

It was surprising to note that the prominent cultural connection between cartoons and psychedelic visuals is largely absent from film and television depictions of the drug-state. Indeed, the cartoon aesthetic features in just two films, *Conspiracy Theory* and *Tenacious D in the Pick of Destiny*, both of which incorporate it into their representations of CEV experience. However, of these two films, only *Conspiracy Theory* features the use of LSD, and its use of cartoon imagery to depict a recollective-analytic stage experience is notable for its extreme brevity. The *Tenacious D in the Pick of Destiny* psilocybin scene, meanwhile, offers a more extensive representation of cartoon images combined with live action footage, which is specific to the symbolic level of the psychedelic experience.

¹¹⁸ Interior analepses reintroduce images that appeared at earlier point in the film's narrative. Turim, M. C. (1989) *Flashbacks in Film: Memory & History*. London: Routledge.

¹¹⁹ Exterior analepses revisit a time that precedes the events depicted by the film. Ibid.

The recollective-analytic stage is more frequently represented in films and television shows than its symbolic level counterpart. This stage of the experience is, as its name suggests, primarily concerned with the recall and analysis of relevant materials. Consequently, its depiction is predicated upon the use of psychedelics by a character that functions as a human analogue. In accordance with the smaller number of subjects who reached the symbolic level in Masters and Houston's study, this stage of the psychedelic experience is depicted in a smaller number of films and television shows. Significantly, in contrast to the recollective-analytic stage, symbolic level phenomena can be depicted without being attributed to a character's subjective experience. That is, the aesthetic of an entire film or television show could be defined as psychedelic with reference to the symbolic level. For example, an analysis of the associational form of editing identified in *The Trip* could be more broadly applied to lyrical films that do not refer explicitly to drugs.

The analysis of symbolic level experience involved an intertextual examination of various non-psychedelic motifs and concepts. For example, the identification of Paul's chakra experience in *The Trip* was predicated upon an investigation of kundalini yoga. This sequence is also notable as it is an example of the depiction of a symbolic level phenomenon experienced with eyes open. Further, the film's depiction of the forest, which is frequently encountered during symbolic level experiences, required an intertextual interpretation of various aspects of Celtic mythology. Finally, in *The Love-Ins*, analysis of Patricia's identification with the eponymous protagonist of *Alice in Wonderland* addressed the relationship between Lewis Carroll's story, its Disney adaptation, references to it in music, and its prominent role in 1960s psychedelic culture.

Peak experience, ego-loss, and the transcendental level are less frequently depicted in films and television shows than any other phase of the psychedelic experience. Nonetheless, it was necessary to provide a lengthy introduction to the highest realms of the drug-state, which are notable for their complexity and the challenges they pose to the limits of verbal and imagistic representation. Representations of peak phenomena were identified

in three films and one television show. It was noted that the metaphorical representation of peak experience identified in *SLC Punk!* contrasts with its digital recreation in *Taking Woodstock*. Further, the profound emotional component of the peak state is conveyed by actors through their expressive performances in *You* (S2 E8) and *Taking Woodstock*.

The Cosmic Court was identified as an aspect of peak experience via an analysis of its representation in *The Trip*. This example demonstrates how psychedelic research can benefit from the interrogation of film and television depictions of the drug-state. The examination of this sequence also included a discussion of dosage and the subject's preparation for the experience, both of which relate to set and setting. The film's depiction of the Cosmic Court is rendered aesthetically unique by the incorporation of an oval solarised border that inverts light and dark at the edge of the frame. The surreal and paradoxical content of the scene also distinguishes it from other film and television representations of eidetic image sequences.

In the final section, the psychedelic afterglow and residual effects of the drug-state were analysed. The identification of two distinct post-trip phases distinguishes this thesis from Brystal Karber's study of the transformative effects of psychedelics, which focuses on the longer-term effects of the drug-state without defining its specific stages. Analysis revealed that the afterglow effects of the drug-state are primarily represented by verbal description. In *You* (S2 E9), Joe's mental voice also expresses thoughts and feelings that pertain to his transformation by the LSD experience. It is difficult to draw broad conclusions about the residual effects of the drug-state as the longer-term effects of LSD are only acknowledged in one case study. Further, it is open to interpretation whether changes to Roger's personality and behaviour in *Mad Men* (S5 E6) can be directly attributed to his drug-state experience. Nonetheless, this example demonstrates the potential for television shows to make use of the medium's long-running format to engage with the residual effects of the psychedelic experience. Finally, while the higher realms of the psychedelic experience are typically connected to the transformative effects of LSD,

Mad to Be Normal and *The Love-Ins* do not engage with either of the post-trip stages despite their depictions of the recollective-analytic stage and symbolic level respectively.

8. Conclusion

This thesis has employed a neoformalist-intertextual analytical framework to identify and analyse the representations of specific psychedelic phenomena in 23 films and television shows. It is the first screen studies analysis of its scale to focus exclusively on psychedelic aesthetics. The originality of its scope is matched by the novelty of its approach, which focuses on depictions of the psychedelic drug-state attributed to the subjective experience of characters. It is hoped that this unique and original contribution to film and television studies scholarship will supplement a broader understanding of psychedelic experience, and prove useful to scholars, recreational film viewers, filmmakers, and psychedelic researchers alike. It was necessary to focus analysis on the representation of LSD experiences due to the phenomenological distinctions between the drug-states produced by different psychedelics. However, to ensure the thesis was as comprehensive in its coverage of aesthetics as possible, generic psychedelic phenomena were also identified in film representations of DMT and psilocybin experiences.

In the introduction, distinctions were drawn between the different types of psychedelics and the unique phenomenology of the experiences they produce. This informed the rationale for focusing almost exclusively on depictions of the LSD drug-state. The ensuing summary of the history between media and psychedelics provided context for the overall scope and structure of this thesis and for the literature review conducted in chapter two. The review of existing academic scholarship exposed a significant gap in the literature, which has been successfully addressed by this study. In contrast to other scholarly works, which are either interdisciplinary or discuss psychedelics as part of broader focus on various altered states of consciousness, this thesis is dedicated solely to an interrogation of film and television representations of the psychedelic drug-state. It was also noted that screen studies scholars typically define the psychedelic experience in vague terms or apply theoretical approaches ill-suited to the analysis of its unique form and content. The identification of these issues influenced the decision to employ a

neoformalist-intertextual analytical framework in this thesis, which underpinned its meticulous interrogation of aesthetics.

In the third chapter, the psychedelic concept of set and setting was applied to the 23 case studies analysed in this study. Initially, only those films and television shows that incorporate the use of LSD by characters in tandem with a concomitant depiction of the drug-state were selected for analysis. However, synaesthesia and a sequence combining live action footage with cartoon animation were also analysed in films that feature the use of DMT and psilocybin respectively. Focus on characters' subjective experiences of the psychedelic drug-state enabled set and setting to be incorporated into analysis. That is, in each case study, a human analogue imbibes a psychedelic, and the representation of their drug-state experience is, to varying degrees, defined by their personality, mood, and level of preparedness, and the physical spaces in which it unfolds. Further, the social and cultural contexts of the historical periods of production and narrative setting were also found to be significant to film and television depictions of the drug-state.

The third chapter also identified the influences upon each filmmaker's creative vision for the psychedelic experience. It was observed that several directors used psychedelics with the explicit intention of drawing inspiration for their cinematic depictions of the drug-state. Several filmmakers also refer to their research and, in some instances, the influence of specific works of literature on their representations of the psychedelic experience. Examples of the intertextual connection between case studies were also identified, and the tools and techniques used to recreate drug-state phenomena were acknowledged where possible. Data was derived from several sources, including academic studies, interviews with filmmakers, and supplementary material on DVD and Blu-ray discs. However, this process was hampered by the availability of data, which varied considerably between each case study. Thus, while the completion of this study was not prohibited, a broader dataset would have enriched some of its findings. Indeed, the scope

for potential future research in this area is outlined in a subsequent section of this conclusion.

The structure and organisation of chapters four to seven was informed by the stages of the psychedelic experience, which are illustrated by Lundborg's schematic (figure 1.1). This is an original aspect of this thesis, which eschewed a case study led approach to ensure the maximum number and variety of psychedelic aesthetics were analysed. This contrasts with most screen studies analysis, which generally overlooks the complexity and diversity of aesthetics by focusing almost exclusively on altered states of visual perception. It is the first work of film and television studies scholarship to distinguish between the phenomenology of the different stages of the psychedelic experience. Consequently, not only do chapters four, five, and six offer the most extensive analysis of sensory level phenomena produced in the context of screen studies, the focus on the higher realms of the drug-state in chapter seven is also a highly original aspect of its approach.

Chapter four focused on the main representational mode of the psychedelic experience, which is visual perception. As this is the aspect of the drug-state that is most diversely depicted by films and television shows, it is the primary focus of most existing screen studies approaches. The chapter was divided into three sections, each of which examined a phenomenological aspect of the drug-state: the first section focused on CEV experiences; the second a variety of OEV phenomena; and the third and final section interrogated altered spatial perception. To do so, psychedelic phenomena were identified in films and television shows via an intertextual analysis of the literature. Further, the filmic techniques used to depict the drug-state were also cited where possible.

This analytical framework was employed throughout the remaining chapters, the focus of which deviated from visual perception to encompass other senses and, significantly, different trip stages. The fifth chapter examined depictions of a variety of sensory level phenomena across five sections, the first of which examined altered states of auditory perception. The novel tactile experiences and bodily feelings discussed in the

second section included an analysis of touch, heightened awareness of bodily processes, drug-state empathy, and enhanced sexual pleasure. However, as explained in this chapter, this thesis refutes the claim made by affect theorists that films and television shows can induce among audience members the altered sense of touch, smell, and taste they depict. Instead, this study argues that the audiovisuality of media enables it to recreate the essence of auditory and visual perception but not phenomena associated with the other senses. Indeed, it is notable that none of the case studies represent characters' experience of taste and smell.

The third section of chapter five interrogated the historically overplayed relationship between psychedelics and synaesthesia, and the numerous attempts made by video artists and filmmakers to recreate synaesthetic experience in their work. It was surprising to note that none of the films or television shows that depict the LSD experience include a representation of synaesthesia. The one example of drug-state auditory-visual synaesthetic experience analysed in this thesis was identified in the DMT trip depicted by *Enter the Void* (No , 2009). The remainder of chapter five was divided into two sections, neither of which focused on phenomena directly associated with the five human senses. The fourth addressed the emotional and cognitive effects of the drug-state, including the acceleration of mental processes and changes to memory function. The unique forms of communication and enhanced linguistic skills that were interrogated in section five, meanwhile, focused primarily on heightened awareness of linguistic nuances and psychedelic forms of ESP phenomena such as telepathic communication.

The third and final chapter dedicated to the sensory level of the psychedelic experience focused solely on various altered states of temporal perception. The chapter was divided into eight parts, the first of which outlined theories of both cinematic time and human temporal perception. In the subsequent section, trip duration was identified as an aesthetic in two case studies. This was followed by an analysis of the distinct temporal dimension of eidetic and aesthetic images. While the remaining four categories of altered

temporal perception were identified in the psychedelic literature, descriptions were often found to be brief and vague. Consequently, a thorough examination of the literature and various online trip reports was required to fully comprehend the psychedelic experiences of discontinuous and fragmented time, temporal elasticity, temporal disorder, and temporal dilation and insularity.

The seventh chapter interrogated film and television depictions of the higher realms of the psychedelic drug-state and two distinct post-trip phases of the experience. In comparison to the representations of sensory level phenomena, the higher realms of the drug-state are less frequently depicted in films and television shows. This chapter was divided into four sections, the first two of which examined the recollective-analytic stage and the symbolic level respectively. Subsequently, for reasons outlined in the chapter, the transcendental level, peak experience, and ego-loss were discussed together in one section as a single aspect of the drug-state. In the final section, the immediate after-effects of the experience, referred to as the afterglow, and the longer-term residual effects, were both examined. The decision to analyse post-trip phases in this chapter was informed by the intimate connection between transformative experiences and the higher realms of the drug-state.

This thesis has dismantled the notion that there is a single psychedelic aesthetic. In each chapter, a set of parameters for the depiction of the psychedelic experience were identified and outlined. These parameters are, however, open to negotiation. That is, various films and television shows represent the same phenomenon in different ways. This is partially the result of technological developments, which have enabled contemporary filmmakers to recreate psychedelic effects with increasingly sophisticated digital techniques. The aesthetic representation of a single psychedelic phenomenon may also differ between films and television shows depending on the filmmaker's creative vision and the technologies available to them at a given point in history. For example, Ang Lee employed digital technologies to recreate undulating colourful shapes in *Taking Woodstock*

(Lee, 2009) that were not available to Otto Preminger when he made *Skidoo* (Preminger, 1969) in the 1960s. It is unsurprising, then, that their aesthetic depictions of this phenomenon differ considerably.

The distinctions between film and television representations of phenomena associated with a single category of psychedelic experience are informed by the individual nature of the drug-state and the influence of set and setting. Further, as was noted in the chapter summaries, psychedelic aesthetics can be combined in an almost infinite number of ways to produce complex multisensory depictions of the drug-state. It is also significant that a single cinematic technique, such as the flashback, may be used to represent different types of phenomena. This emphasises the need for a detailed understanding of the psychedelic experience to accurately interpret which psychedelic phenomenon is represented within a specific narrative context.

The parameters established by this thesis could be applied to the psychedelic aesthetics of media that do not explicitly refer to drug use. In the subsequent section, an approach using the analytical model developed by this thesis to examine the aesthetics of head films, avant-garde cinema, music videos, and psychedelic videos, is outlined. It is worth noting, however, that several aesthetics identified in this thesis can only be defined as psychedelic by either the filmmaker, the narrative context of drug-use, or the inclusion of themes that are overtly and specifically psychedelic. To cite one example, the cinematic flashback can only be described as psychedelic within certain parameters. This is demonstrated by *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (Chbosky, 2012), which features flashbacks that portray both psychedelic eidetic images and conventional memories. Consequently, flashbacks only contribute to the psychedelic aesthetic within certain contexts.

This study does not claim to be definitive in its analysis of film and television representations of the psychedelic experience. Indeed, the impossibility of completing such a project was noted in the introduction. Nonetheless, there is scope to build upon the

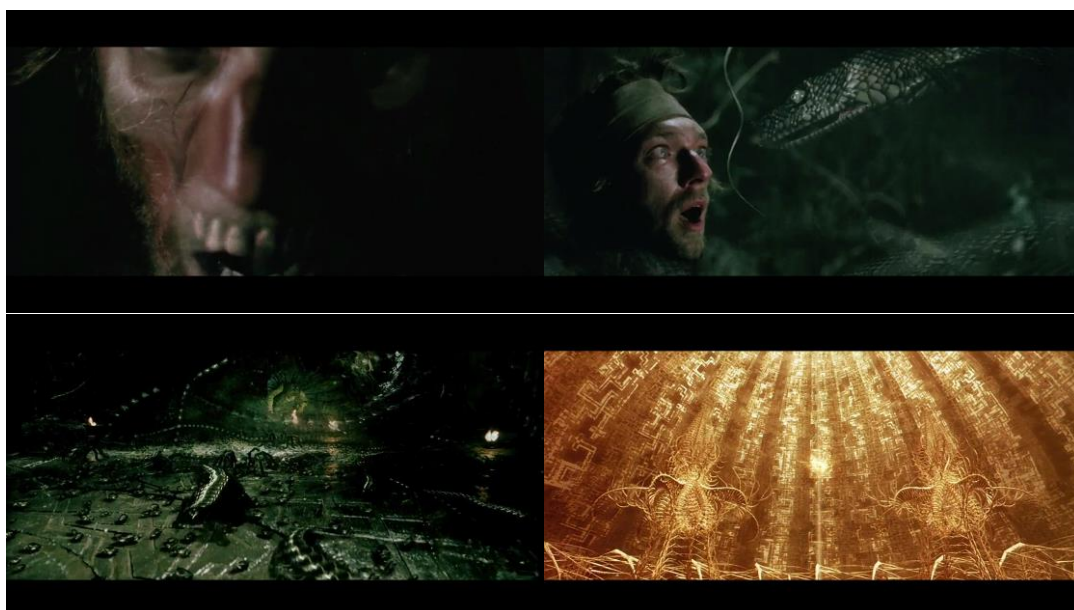
findings of this thesis, which has laid the foundations for a diverse array of potential future studies. In the following section, other potential film and television studies approaches to psychedelic aesthetics are outlined. In the third part, screen studies scholarship is positioned within the broader context of a burgeoning psychedelic humanities, which includes a vision for various types of interdisciplinary research.

Film and Television Studies: Areas of Future Research

The analytical framework developed by this thesis is applicable to the study of film and television representations of psilocybin, DMT, and ayahuasca experiences. The findings of future research would broaden knowledge and understanding of screened representations of the drug-state and provide insight into the distinct phenomenology of experiences produced by different psychedelics. There is also an opportunity to develop this approach for the study of other altered states of consciousness depicted in films and television shows. For example, the analytical model could be adapted to examine the specific form, structure, and content of marijuana and MDMA experiences, both of which are defined as psychedelics by some researchers.

The applicability of this analytical model to depictions of other psychedelics is demonstrated by the following brief analysis of *Renegade* (Kounen, 2004), which highlights some unique aspects of the ayahuasca experience. This small sample is intended to highlight the potential of a broader study which, if fully realised, would encompass a wider range of films, such as *Embrace of the Serpent* (Guerra, 2015). The ayahuasca drug-state is characterised by the appearance of specific hallucinatory phenomena, including a giant snake that acts as gatekeeper to the ayahuasca realm (Lundborg, 2012, p. 461). Further, the experience is marked by journeys to alien worlds populated by various entities, including snakes and insects. The subject may also experience a unique form of x-ray vision (Lundborg, 2012, p. 491). Each of these phenomena are experienced by Mike Blueberry (Vincent Cassel) in *Renegade*. In the first of two psychedelic scenes, he

perceives the bones of his hand and his skull, which become visible through translucent skin. He is also confronted by a giant snake (figures 8.1-8.2). In the second sequence, he encounters alien worlds populated by snakes and insects (figures 8.3-8.4).



Figures 8.1-8.4: *Renegade* (Kounen, 2004)

The analytical model developed by this thesis could also be used to interrogate the psychedelic aesthetics of head films, avant-garde cinema, music videos, and psychedelic videos. The findings of such a study would advance knowledge and understanding of audio-visual media and the specific psychedelic phenomena they depict. Indeed, the promise of such an approach is suggested by Park and Wohn's analysis of the specific psychedelic phenomena they identify in music videos (Park and Wohn, 2018). Similarly, the comparison Lundborg draws between the "Mushroom Voice" encountered by psilocybin users and the voice of the computer HAL in Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Kubrick, 1968) (2012, p. 185) is indicative of the potential findings of this proposed study.

There is scope to build upon the tentative findings made in chapter three concerning the relationship between the historical periods of film and television production and narrative settings. It was noted that the entire corpus of 1960s films are set at a time contemporaneous to the era in which they were made. Two of the three 1990s films,

meanwhile, were set in the past. The other, while set in the present, framed its depiction of LSD use in the context of an earlier historical period. It was also observed that the films and television shows produced since the turn of the millennium incorporate a more diverse array of historical settings. Indeed, the only television shows selected for analysis were released after the year 2000. These initial findings are, however, limited by the scope of this project and future research is required to gain further insight into these nascent trends. Such a study would necessarily encompass an investigation of the evolving media landscape and the development of digital technologies.

There is significant potential for reception and audience studies of film and television depictions of the psychedelic experience. Indeed, the spectator's awareness of an intertext is heavily reliant upon their prior knowledge of other texts and the world (Dunne, 2001, p. 8). Consequently, the analytical framework developed by this thesis could be reoriented to interrogate the intertextual encounters between the viewer and media text. Further, a study of audience responses to screened psychedelic aesthetics would provide insight into how the phenomena identified in this thesis are understood by nonexperts.

Carol Vernallis asserts that the exponential growth of intertextuality has blurred the boundaries between platforms and genres (2013, p. 14). Further, she contends that the ubiquity of media in the contemporary world has transformed both viewing practices and the way films feel (2013, p. 41). She also asserts that films are often viewed in fragments on online platforms (2013, p. 44). This type of viewing practice demonstrates one of the ways narrative forms of media can be defamiliarized by removing them from their familiar contexts. Thus, representations of the psychedelic experience analysed in this thesis could be removed from their original narrative contexts when viewed online. Future audience studies might incorporate analysis of contemporary viewing methods, which involve watching psychedelic sequences out of context, to discover how it impacts upon the interpretation of psychedelic aesthetics.

That the viewers of psychedelic films are interested in the accuracy with which psychedelic experiences are portrayed is evidenced by numerous online discussions.¹²⁰ Two studies cited frequently throughout this thesis, meanwhile, praise the *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (Gilliam, 1998) carpet crawling sequence for its realistic portrayal of psychedelic visual effects. However, as both audiences and scholars fail to define the parameters of realism in the context of their discussions of the drug-state, it is unclear exactly what they mean by it. Indeed, the definition of realism is contextually defined, as indicated by the evolution of critical responses to *The Big Cube* (Davison, 1969), which received praise for its portrayal of psychedelic effects in 1969 (Benshoff, 2001, p. 40), but has since been criticised for its “cheesy” and “horribly dated” visuals (Erickson, 2007). There are two potential approaches to a scholarly analysis of realism, one of which would involve an interrogation of an academic definition of the term as relational. The other, meanwhile, would consider audience understandings of realism via a reception study. Similarly, contemporary audiences could be interviewed to identify what they believe constitutes a realistic portrayal of the psychedelic drug-state. This would enable the scholar to identify how an understanding of realism has changed over time.

Mark Gallagher’s study of masculinity in psychedelic films highlights the significance of gender representation in the context of psychedelia. There is scope to build upon his research which, as was noted in chapter two, is limited by his dubious definition of the psychedelic film genre. There is also an opportunity to develop similar studies focused on the intersection of race and psychedelics in film and television narratives. It would be interesting to note, for example, whether a character’s race or gender impacts upon the form and content of the representation of their psychedelic experience. This research would also provide insight into historical trends concerning the diversity of

¹²⁰ The following message board discussion is indicative of online discourse about the accuracy of film and television representations of the psychedelic experience:
https://www.reddit.com/r/movies/comments/fvagsv/accurate_shroom_lsd_trips_in_film/.

characters who use psychedelics in films and television shows. Further, the analysis of psychedelic sexual pleasure undertaken in chapter five invites a study of the numerous sexploitation films and cheap pornographic movies that often define LSD as an inhibition removing agent. These studies, which would necessarily encompass the cultural contexts in which psychedelics were used in various historical periods, might also interrogate the relationship between a filmmaker's identity and their portrayal of race, gender, and sexuality in the context of psychedelic aesthetics.

The use of psychedelics by filmmakers as part of their creative process was described in chapter three. However, as was also noted, the scope of this analysis was limited by inconsistencies between the amount of available data pertaining to each case study. The initial findings made in chapter three would be enhanced by archival research and interviews with psychedelic filmmakers. The insights derived from such a study would also enable the scholar to emphasise the role of the filmmaker in the neoformalist analysis of psychedelic aesthetics. Further, it would provide the foundations for an examination of the impact of technological innovations on depictions of psychedelic phenomena. Finally, the results could be usefully employed in an interdisciplinary study of the effects of psychedelics on creativity and the creative process.

Both this thesis and Lana Cook's study cite documentaries as sources of information on psychedelics and psychedelia.¹²¹ However, there has yet to be a study of the various examples of nonfiction media that not only address psychedelics and their effects, but also represent various drug-state phenomena.¹²² The findings of such a project would have significant implications beyond the disciplinary bounds of screen studies. For example, historical studies of psychedelic research and culture would benefit from an

¹²¹ See references to *Magic Trip* (Ellwood and Gibney, 2011) in Cook's thesis. Cook, L. (2014) *Altered states: The American psychedelic aesthetic*. Doctor of Philosophy PhD thesis, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, Northeastern University, Boston, Mass.

¹²² Examples include *Gonzo* (Gibney, 2008), *Magic Trip* (Ellwood and Gibney, 2011), and *Have a Good Trip* (Cary, 2020).

analysis of documentaries that employ archival footage. It would also be useful to compare the use of psychedelics in documentaries with their use in the fictional narratives analysed in this thesis.

The Psychedelic Humanities and Interdisciplinary Research

In the preface to *The Varieties of Psychedelic Experience*, Robert Masters warns against the monopolisation of psychedelic research by psychiatrists. In doing so, he advocates for a multidisciplinary approach to the study of psychedelics, which incorporates a wide array of academic methods including those derived from the arts and humanities (Masters and Houston, 2000, p. vii). The potential for collaborative research involving the sciences and the humanities is, Nicolas Langlitz observes, highly significant (2019). Further, as Neşe Devenot contends, the nascent psychedelic humanities has a vital role to play in communicating ideas about the subjective experiences induced by psychedelics (2018). However, despite these welcome developments, the psychedelic renaissance has been mostly dominated by objective scientific research (Devenot, 2013, p. 184). Consequently, as the full potential of multidisciplinary research has yet to be realised, this section outlines some ideas for future study that lie beyond the scope of film and television studies as it is traditionally defined.

In the 1960s, Timothy Leary and colleagues designed an experiential typewriter to be used during the psychedelic experience to describe drug-state phenomena (Lundborg, 2012, p. 443). However, Leary and other psychedelic pioneers, most notably Terence McKenna, believed a visual language was ultimately needed to communicate the phenomenology of the psychedelic experience with an adequate degree of precision. In 1965, Leary envisioned the creation of vast libraries of images from which the most suitable could be selected to visually describe the psychedelic experience. In the modern world, which is dominated by handheld wireless communication devices, Leary's dream has effectively become a reality (Lundborg, 2012, p. 436). Indeed, mobile phones enable

film and television audiences to watch depictions of the psychedelic experience in a variety of contexts, and to communicate ideas about the drug-state with rapid efficiency.

Lundborg asserts that the growing potential of “true visual representation” will ultimately render verbal and written communication redundant (2012, p. 438). In this context, Devenot’s suggestion that poetic language should be used to communicate psychedelic science seems somewhat outdated (2018). However, as this thesis has demonstrated, most viewers are unlikely to possess sufficient knowledge of the psychedelic experience to fully comprehend audio-visual depictions of the drug-state. There is scope for the results of this thesis to be utilised by computer scientists tasked with developing a visual language that can be understood by people with varying degrees of psychedelic expertise. Indeed, for the nonexpert, visuals could be furnished with the type of poetic and literary interpretations suggested by Devenot (2018). Such a project would enrich the public’s understanding of the psychedelic drug-state and enable researchers working in distinct academic disciplines to better communicate ideas with one another.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, set and setting developed in tandem with the evolution of cultural mediations of the psychedelic experience, which not only shaped the public’s understanding of psychedelic aesthetics, but also defined the phenomenology of the drug-state itself (Hartogsohn, 2020, p. 219). The emergent psychedelic culture instructed individuals how to approach the psychedelic experience and what to expect from it (Hartogsohn, 2020, p. 146). *The Trip* (Corman, 1967), which Roger Corman compares to a cinematic trip guide (Corman, 2016b), is a prime example of these developments. However, while contemporary beliefs about psychedelics are heavily influenced by ideas developed during the 1950s and 1960s (Hartogsohn, 2020, p. 2), the set and setting of the psychedelic experience has been transformed in a contemporary culture that is media saturated and dominated by the proliferation of electronic devices.¹²³ These developments,

¹²³ In 2018, American adults spent more than “11 hours per day listening to, watching, reading or generally interacting with media”. *Time Flies: US Adults Now Spend Nearly Half a Day Interacting with Media*

which have attracted little in the way of academic attention, would benefit from an interdisciplinary approach led by social scientists in collaboration with screen studies scholars.

Neuroscientists have employed functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) machines to examine the effects of film viewing and psychedelics on brain activity in two separate projects (Meer *et al.*, 2020; Carhart-Harris *et al.*, 2012). There is scope to combine these independent strands of research into a single study designed to answer the questions posed by Benschhoff in the conclusion of his essay on the LSD film genre. This would involve scanning the subject's brain while they watch a film, during the psychedelic experience, and when both activities are combined. The film and television studies scholar, meanwhile, would be responsible for designing an appropriate audience study questionnaire to interrogate the phenomenological distinctions between these experiences. This multidisciplinary approach could be used to either validate or refute claims made by filmmakers and scholars about the capacity for psychedelic films to alter a viewer's consciousness.

The integral role played by music in shaping the immediate set and setting of psychedelic therapy sessions is well documented (Lhooq, 2021). However, while one recent study explored the use of virtual reality (VR) as a moderator of psychedelic experience (Sekula, Downey and Puspanathan, 2022), the potential benefits of integrating visual media into therapy sessions have been largely overlooked. There is scope to undertake a collaborative research project that investigates the modulating effects of audio-visual media in a therapeutic context. There is also an opportunity to conduct interdisciplinary research involving media studies scholars, computer scientists, and

(2018). nielsen.com: The Nielsen Company. Available at: <https://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/article/2018/time-flies-us-adults-now-spend-nearly-half-a-day-interacting-with-media/> (Accessed: 15 June 2020 2020).

psychotherapists, to further develop aesthetics for VR programmes and produce other audio-visual material designed to enhance the subject's psychedelic experience.

In the literature review, David Church's 2018 essay exploring the use of psychedelics as a novel methodological tool in film studies was outlined. In the study, Church acknowledges the limitations of his preliminary observations, which were constrained by prohibitive drug policies (2018). However, as the burgeoning field of psychedelic research suggests, it is now possible to work with these substances in controlled environments. This presents an opportunity to build upon Church's initial findings via a collaborative investigation of the phenomenology of drug-state film spectatorship. Psychedelic researchers would have a significant role to play in screening potential participants, defining drug administration protocols, experiment design, and ensuring the principles of set and setting are adhered to.

The opportunity to build upon an emerging scholarly interest in the recreational use of psychedelics is enhanced by the legalisation of psychedelics in a small number of locations around the world.¹²⁴ Rather than remove the film viewing experience from its recreational context, an audience study could be conducted in collaboration with ethnographers to gain insight into the ritualistic use of psychedelics in both home and movie theatre settings. This project has the potential to answer questions about the various set and settings in which media and psychedelics are simultaneously experienced. It would also provide insight into the demographics of psychedelic film viewers.

¹²⁴ For details of the research into the recreational use of psychedelics, see:
Hase, A., Erdmann, M., Limbach, V. and Hasler, G. (2022) 'Analysis of recreational psychedelic substance use experiences classified by substance', *Psychopharmacology*, 239(2), pp. 643-659.
St. Arnaud, K. O. and Sharpe, D. (2022) 'Contextual Parameters Associated with Positive and Negative Mental Health in Recreational Psychedelic Users', *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, pp. 1-10.

For a list of locations that have legalised psychedelics see Woolfe, S. (2022) *Where Are Psychedelics Legal Around the Globe? Here's Everything You Need To Know*. healingmaps.com: HealingMaps. Available at: https://healingmaps.com/where-are-psychedelics-legal/#Where_Are_Psychedelics_Legal_In_Other_Parts_Of_The_World (Accessed: 18 Aug 2022).

The psychedelic experience raises questions about authorship and creative process. For example, the sense of ownership Nin Anais felt towards her work was undermined during a drug-state encounter with a second version of herself (Plant, 1999, p. 140). Similarly, Michel Foucault posed the question, “What is an author?” (1979, p. 13) after undergoing a transformative LSD experience 1975 (Wade, 2019, p. 13). In the wake of his drug trip, Foucault began contemplating the ways in which an individual could transform their own life into a living work of art (Wade, 2019, p. 13). Ken and Kesey and the Merry Pranksters also experimented with this notion as they drove around America in their Day-Glo painted school bus; their “performance” resembled an ongoing theatrical production that was designed to provoke an emotional response from the public, which ranged from terror to wonder (Cook, 2014, p. 188). Their ethos was encapsulated by the bus itself, which Kesey later defined as his primary artistic work (Parker, 2014). Later in the 1960s, the hippies followed suit by transforming public spaces into arenas of creative expression (Silos, 2003, p. ix).

These examples suggest a strong correlation between the psychedelic experience and a form of artistic expression that transcends representation. Further, in the contemporary mediascape, this psychedelic expression of life as art has shifted from the real-world environment to digital spaces in which the previously separate roles of creator and audience merge together in arguably psychedelic ways. The relationship between psychedelics, creativity, and authorial ownership, as well as the deconstruction of the distinction between life and art, demands interrogation via the undertaking of a large-scale interdisciplinary study of the transformative effects of the drug-state.

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